

1869-05-01 Henry George: The Chinese in California

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The Chinese in California

Character of the Asiatic Immigration – The Problem of the Pacific Coast

Opposite to our Western front, on the other shore of the Pacific, is a people whose numbers are variously estimated at from four to five hundred millions — more than the population of Europe, America, Africa, and Oceanica combined. A people who possessed the mariner's compass, gunpowder, and the art of printing when our ancestors were yet barbarians, ere the walls of Rome had been traced or Greek civilization had begun to dawn.

Had it not been for the strange petrification, which, as though by the fiat of the Almighty, fell upon this people ages ago — had they made but a few steps forward in their utilization of the powers of nature, made of the junk a good sea boat, of gunpowder an effective instrument of destruction as well as a toy, universal history would have taken another direction, and America, if not the world, would today be Mongolian.

We have now gone by them far enough. In knowledge, power, and wealth, we surpass them more than two thousand years ago they surpassed the painted savages of the British Isles, yet they still retain their pre-eminence of numbers.

And now that the barriers that for ages have isolated these people from the rest of the world are being broken down, their mere numbers, if nothing else, make them a force of vast importance to the future of the rest of mankind. Four or five hundred millions of people are coming into the line of our attractions and repulsions, like some new Saturn taking up its place to circle round the sun.

Now that the race which started from the plains of Central Asia has completed in its march the circuit of the globe, China may wake from her sleep of ages, and learn from Western civilization; she may pass into the hands of intelligent conquerors, or be broken up into fragmentary provinces; but whether welded into a vast power, or to remain the political cypher she now is, the Chinese people, by the mere force of their numbers, must exercise an immense influence upon the rest of the world.

Look at the swarming that is possible from this vast human hive! Consider that if all humanity were marshaled, every third man in the line would wear the queue and the blouse of a Chinamen; that this half billion people could throw off annually six, ten, twenty millions of emigrants, and this not merely without feeling the loss, but without there being any loss, for over-population keeps reproduction down, and new Chinamen would spring into the vacancies created by those who left as air into a vacuum.

According to the count of the six great Chinese Companies — to one or the other of which all, or nearly all of the Chinese upon the Pacific Coast belong — there are some 65,000 Chinamen in California and adjacent States and Territories. Knowing the jealousy with which they are regarded, the Chinese are disposed to understate their numbers, and it is probable that the true

figures are nearer 100,000 than those given. Speaking roughly, they may be said to constitute at least one-fourth of the adult male population.

From San Diego to Sitka, and back into Montana, Idaho, Nevada, and Arizona, throughout the enormous stretch of country of which San Francisco is the commercial center, they are everywhere to be found. Every town and hamlet has its "Chinatown" — its poorest, meanest, and filthiest quarter, and wherever the restless prospectors open a new district, there, singly or in squads, appears the inevitable Chinaman.

OCCUPATIONS

Mining (that is, placer mining, for the Chinese have a superstitious fear of venturing into the bowels of the earth, which, with other causes, has hitherto kept them from engaging in deep mining), the washing of clothes, and kindred occupations, were the first branches of industry in which the Chinese engaged; but of late years there has been a great increase in the variety of their employments.

In the construction of the San Jose Railroad, in 1860, it was discovered that they were cheap and effective road builders; the Mission and Pioneer Woolen Mills found that they made first-class factory operatives, and now they are rapidly obtaining employment wherever patent manual labor, without any great amount of brain-work, is requisite. Large numbers are engaged as servants in families, hotels, &c., taking the places of girls in chamber work and cooking, in which they become very expert. A large proportion of the Chinese immigration consists of boys from 10 to 16 years of age who are immediately put out to service in families, where they soon pick up a knowledge of the language and of household duties. In fact, the Chinese are rapidly monopolizing employment in all the lighter branches of industry usually allotted to women, such as running sewing-machines, making paper bags and boxes, binding shoes, labeling and packing medicines, &c.

They are good gardeners, and their assiduous care produces the finest vegetables which enter the San Francisco and Sacramento markets. But with the exception of these little truck gardens, they as yet cultivate no land on their own account. Many of them are engaged in picking fruit and tending vineyards, but few in the heavier work of the farm, though individual cases here and there have demonstrated their capacity, and it is probably that before long the farmers of California will use their labor to a large extent.

But it would be easier to recount the industries in which Chinamen are not yet to some extent engaged than to mention those in which they are, and every day their employment is extending, as employers in one branch of production after another, discover that they can avail themselves of this cheap labor. They are not only grading railways and opening roads (work for which they are now altogether relied on) cutting wood, picking fruit, tending stock, wearing cloth, and running sewing-machines; but acting as firemen upon steamers, running stationary engines, painting carriages, upholstering furniture, making boots, shoes, clothing, cigars, tin and wooden-ware.

Stand say at Clay and Sansome-sts., San Francisco, about six in the afternoon, and you will see long lines of Chinamen coining from American workshops. Pass up Jackson, Pacific, or Dupont-sts., into their quarter, and you may see them at work on their own account. Beside the

stall where the Chinese butcher carves his varnished hog, or makes mincemeat of stewed fowl, with a cleaver such as was used by his fathers long before our Savior sent the Devil into the swine, you may see Chinamen running sewing machines, rolling cigars, or working up tin with the latest Yankee appliances. In front of the store window, in which great clumsy paper clogs and glistening anklets are displayed, and through which you may watch the bookkeeper casting up his accounts on an abacus, and entering them with a brush from right to left in his ledger, the Chinese cobbler sits half-soling and “heel-tapping” “Melican” boots: Underneath the Buddhist Temple a disciple of Confucius mends the time-pieces of the American Clock Company, and repairs Waltham watches. In the Mail Steamship Company’s offices a Chinese clerk will answer your inquiries in the best of English. And in one of the principal drugstores of Sacramento a Chinaman will put up a prescription for you; or if your taste runs that way, in a saloon near by, a Chinaman will concoct for you a mint-julep while wherever you go, in hotel or boarding house, it is more than provable that the chop-stick than the fork prepared the food you eat, let it be called by what high-sounding French phrase it may.

CAPACITY

The Chinese are willing, anxious, to learn anything that may prove of pecuniary value to them, and in spite of the difficulties which their total or partial ignorance of the language imposes, their patience and imitative faculty enable them to learn to work with increasing [?] facility and I would hesitate to say that there is any manual trade in which they cannot become efficient workers, in a reasonable time. Certainly, if there is such a trade, one would think it would be that of typesetting; yet the composing upon the English newspapers published in China is done with great swiftness, and tolerable correction, by natives who are ignorant of the meaning of any word they set up. And I know there is at least one man in San Francisco who contemplates the importation of a number of these printers under contract for a term of years. The great objection in his mind, and an insuperable objection, at present, is the feeling that this would arouse.

The great characteristics of the Chinese as laborers are patience and economy — the first makes them efficient laborers; the second cheap laborers. As a rule they have not the physical strength of Europeans, but their steadiness makes up for this. They take less earth at a spadeful than an Irishman; but in a day’s work take up more spadesfull. This patient steadiness peculiarly adapts the Chinese for tending machinery and for manufacturing. The tendency of modern production is to greater and greater subdivision of labor – to confine the operative to one part of the process, and to require of him close attention, patience, and manual dexterity, rather than knowledge, judgment and skill. It is in these qualities that the Chinese excel. The superintendents of the cotton and woolen mills on the Pacific prefer the Chinese to other operatives, and in the same terms the railroad people speak of their Chinese graders, saying they are steadier, work longer, require less watching, and do not get up strikes or go on drunks. And one of them is reported as boasting that he would yet have Chinamen building and running his locomotives.

CHEAPNESS OF CHINESE LABOR

But the great recommendation of Chinese labor is its cheapness. There are no people in the world who are such close economists as the Chinese. They will live, and live well, according to their notions, where an American or Englishman would starve. A little rice suffices them for food, a little piece of port cooked with it constitutes high living, and occasional chicken makes it

luxurious. Their clothes cost but a little and last for a long while. Go into a Chinese habitation and you will see that every inch of space is utilized. A room ten by twelve will bunk a dozen besides affording workshop, kitchen and dining room. Pass through their quarters in the towns, and you will see that nothing that can possibly be used is thrown away, unless it be human labor. Chinamen of course, as other people, like luxuries, and indulge in them as far as they can, but their standard of comfort is very much lower than that of our own people — very much lower than that of any European immigrants who come among us. This fact enables them to underbid all competitors in the labor market. Reduce wages to the starvation point for our mechanics, and the Chinaman will not merely be able to work for less, but to live better than at home, and to save money from his earnings. And thus in every case in which Chinese comes into fair competition with white labor, the whites must either retire from the field or come down to the Chinese standard of living. Let us take the history of one trade to show what must be the result in all for which Chinese labor is adapted and into which it is introduced: About 1859 or 1860 Chinamen first began to be employed in the manufacture of cigars, a branch of industry which then supported quite a number of white workmen in San Francisco. These, of course, took the alarm, formed unions, adopted resolutions, published appeals, and sympathetic cigar dealers hung out signs, “No Coolies employed here.” But it was no avail; the Chinamen quickly learned the trade, not as easy a one as the uninitiated might imagine, could work cheaper, and did work cheaper, and have completely driven out the whites. Large quantities of cigars are now made entirely by Chinamen. They commenced, of course, by working for Americans; but on learning the business, many of them set up for themselves, the Chinese employer having the same advantage as the Chinese workman, in being able to get along with a smaller profit; and on Jackson, Dupont and Pacific_sts. are many large Chinese manufactories of cigars; while in many fetid dens underground and out of sight the patient Chinaman rolls the fragrant Havanas or cheap “five-centers” which are to regale the nostrils of the ‘Melicans who despise him. This is the history of other trades in California, and from present appearances will shortly be the history of many more.

HOSTILITY TO THE CHINESE – UNEQUAL TAXATION

That the Chinese population of our Pacific Coast is not now much larger, is due to the feeling that has existed against them. This feeling has been very strong, but at the present time is weakening, or rather is being counteracted. The early Chinese immigrants did not come into competition with any class or settled interest, great or small. As washermen, cooks, and servants, they supplied the female labor, did not displace it, for there was comparatively none in the country to displace. Nor in the diggings did they struggle with the white miners for the rich claims, for such a struggle would have had only one result, but followed them as the jackal follows the lion, contented with diggings which the whites did not consider remunerative or had abandoned, but from which their economy and industry enabled them to extort large returns. After a placer mining district has been utterly exhausted and abandoned by whites, it will, for a long time, be worked by Chinamen, and with apparently satisfactory results, though, for obvious reasons, they endeavor to conceal their earnings as much as possible.

But though the Chinamen were thus contented with the white man’s leavings, their presence from the first developed a strong adverse feeling, which found expression not only in legal enactments, but in many acts of oppression, violence, injustice, and imposition. A “Foreign Miners’ License Law” was early passed, which compelled Chinamen engaged in mining to pay a monthly tax of

\$4 a head. Ostensibly the law applies to all foreign miners; but no one ever dreams of collecting it of any one but Chinamen. But it must be said, in justice to the white miners, that the sentiment which dictated this and kindred legislation, and which condoned, if it did not justify, the numerous extralegal exactions and outrages to which Chinamen have been subjected, was not merely a blind race hatred or a dog-in-the-manger feeling, provoked by seeing other people enjoy that which they could not use themselves. Their reasoning ran thus: "though we do not want the poorer diggings, which the Chinamen are working on, we should have a care for those of our own race who will follow us. The day will come when wages in California will sink to an Eastern level, and when white men – white men with families depending on them – will be glad to find and work these poor diggings; and for these men we should see that they are reserved, and not permit them to be despoiled by the long-tailed barbarians, who have no interest in the country, and whose earnings do not add to its wealth."

This mining tax, which is collected rigorously and often cruelly (and which, by the way, has resulted as much to the profit of the collectors as to that of the State), is, with the exception of a hospital tax, collected upon landing – the only special tax to which Chinamen are subjected; but all other taxes fall upon them with more severity than upon the whites, the Chinamen being the first that the tax collector "goes for," and the last he leaves in peace. This accounts for the partiality of the mountain countier for poll taxes for road purposes, etc. Of these the Chinaman pays the lion's share. The California Legislature of 1861-2 imposed a special police tax of \$5 per month upon all Chinamen but after being collected a few months the Supreme Court of California declared the act null and void, as being in conflict with a treaty stipulation. An effort was made to pass a similar law at the last session of the Oregon Legislature.

But taxation, comparatively heavy as it is on them, is the least burden which the Chinese have to bear. They are subject to all sorts of exactions and impositions beside. For rent, etc., they must always pay more than the whites. They are fair game for all sorts of rascals, from highway men and camp-robbers to those who go round with revolvers in their hands personating tax collectors. To rob these timid people, who, even in their own defense, will seldom fight, unless in overpowering numbers, is comparatively safe; nor, unless a white man happens to witness the operation, is there any danger of subsequent punishment, for in the courts of California the testimony of a Chinaman cannot be received against a white. A strong effort was made at the last session of the California Legislature to get through a law permitting Chinamen to testify against whites in cases of outrage upon them; but, though the bill passed the Senate, it failed in the Assembly, the real cause of the defeat being the anti-Chinese feeling, though the opposition was ostensibly based upon the ground that the Chinese have no regard for the sanctity of an oath, which indeed is the case, in any matter in which they are interested, they can bring up a cloud of witnesses on either or both sides.

But though the Chinese in many parts of the Pacific coast have been treated badly enough, a most exaggerated idea upon this subject prevails in the East. It is not true, as is sometimes asserted, that a Chinaman cannot walk the streets of a Pacific town without being insulted or assailed. One cannot walk half a block in these towns without meeting a Chinaman, and in any part of San Francisco, at any time, day or night, Chinamen (though boys occasionally shy stones at them) are much safer than are strangers in New-York.

As the competition of Chinese labor with white labor has become more general and threatening, the feeling against them has become correspondingly intense. But a counteracting feeling in their

favor has also been developed. While making enemies of the workmen with whom they come into competition, they have made friends of the employers, who found a profit in their labor, and as they have been massed in the employ of great corporations, and in the cities, they are more easily protected.

There is now more reason for an anti-Chinese feeling in California than at any time before; and that feeling, though less general, may be more intense, but it certainly is not as powerful as it has been, and it is doubtful if it could at present secure the prohibition of Chinese immigration, even were there no Constitutional obstacles in the way; though should such an issue come fairly before the people, the prohibitionists would have a clear majority. There are too many interests becoming involved in the employment of Chinese labor to make this feasible, unless by some sudden awakening to their danger the working classes should be led to such thorough union as should make numbers count for more than capital. From the Central Pacific Railroad and Pacific Mail Steamship Company, or the large manufacturing establishments, like the Mission Woolen Mills or San Francisco Rope Works, to the families of moderate incomes who employ a Chinese servant, or the journeymen harness maker, who takes his work home, and teaches four or five Chinamen to help him there, a very large and powerful class, rapidly becoming larger and more powerful, is directly interested in maintaining their right to avail themselves of Chinese labor; and this class is further re-enforced by those who will prospectively profit by the cheapening of wages, and those whom political sentiment has led to an acceptance in all its fullness of the doctrine of the equality of races. And further still the prejudices of race and religion are, strange as it may seem, to a certain extent themselves enlisted in "John's" defense, and there are not a few staunch supporters of Chinese immigration and employment who base, or at least defend, their views by the assertion that "a Chinaman is as good as an Irishman," with the implication that he is a good deal better.

THE WAGES QUESTION

It is obvious that Chinese competition must reduce wages, and it would seem just as obvious that, to the extent which it does this, its introduction is to the interest of capital and opposed to the interests of labor. But the advocates, upon the Pacific Coast, of the free introduction of these people, hold that this is not so, and, insisting upon the literal acceptance of the half truth that "the interests of labor and capital are identical," argue that a reduction of wages by this means will be a real benefit to the community at large, by attracting capital and stimulating production, while it will do no harm to the working classes, as the lessening of the cost of production will so reduce prices that the laborer will be able to purchase with his lower wages as much as before.

According to them, the saving effected by the use of low-priced Chinese labor is precisely the same as that effected by the use of machinery; and as the introduction of machinery has resulted in increased comfort and employment for all classes, so, they argue, will the introduction of Chinese labor result. For, say they, the occupation of the lower branches of industry by the Chinese will open opportunities for the displaced whites in the higher, giving them employment as foremen, superintendents, clerks, etc., when they lose it as journeymen mechanics.

This, I believe, is a fair statement of the opinions held by a large and powerful class, and inasmuch as they are the opinions of such a class, are put forward by the most influential portion of the press, and advocated by many who claim the position of public teachers, they are worth an

examination in detail. And as in examining them we touch upon questions which are and would be of general interest, even if there was not a single Chinaman in America or any prospect of one coming here (and for the sake of greater clearness), let us eliminate at first the Chinese and local considerations, and treat the general problem. If a general reduction of wages would, as it claimed, work no hardship to the laborer, because prices would fall in the same proportion, then the converse is true that it would work no benefit to his employer — as *his* receipts would diminish in the same ratio as his expenses, while the power of his capital would not appreciate, and no increase of production could take place. If this position is correct, then the knotty labor question is indeed solved; the interests of labor and capital are indeed identical. Provided the movement be general, to raise wages as high and as often as asked would be only an act of empty complaisance on the part of the employers; to submit willingly to any reduction, only cheap courtesy on the part of the employed.

This fallacy rests upon the assumption that all profits, rents, etc., would be reduced by and in the same proportion as the reduction in wages, which is manifestly absurd. Nor, when we speak of a “general reduction of wages” in the sense the term is used in this discussion, we do not mean all wages, but only the wages of manual labor. Wages of superintendence, the professions, etc., would be unchanged, and could only be affected indirectly and after some time, by a reduction in the wages of manual labor.

And, as consumers constitute a larger body than laborers, even if consumers get the whole benefit of the reduction in the cost of production consequent on the lowering of wages, it is evident that the laborer’s gain as a consumer would be less than his loss as a laborer. It requires no argument to show that to take \$5 a day from five men and to divide it again between them and two more, would be a losing operation to the five.

But consumers would not necessarily get the benefit of any part of the reduction in cost of production. The whole benefit would at first go to employers in increased profits. Whether any would subsequently come to consumers would depend upon the competition which increased profits caused. The more general the reduction of wages, the longer would it take for this competition to be felt; for if wages sank equally and profits rose equally, there would be no inducement for capital to leave one occupation and seek another, and the fresh accessions of capital to produce competition could only come from abroad or from new savings.

Plainly, when we speak of a reduction of wages in any general and permanent sense, we mean this, if we mean anything — that in the division of the joint production of labor and capital, the share of labor is to be smaller, that of capital larger. This is precisely what the reduction of wages consequent upon the introduction of Chinese labor means.

There is a certain apparent similitude between the effects of machinery and lower priced labor upon the cost of production, and the argument that they are the same misleads many, who, accepting as an axiom that the use of machinery cannot in the long run injure labor, conclude that the introduction of Chinese labor cannot. But there is a wide and radical difference between the operation and the results of these two causes. The first, the use of machinery, operates primarily upon the *production* of wealth and only incidentally upon division. The second, the production of wages, operates primarily upon the *division* of wealth, and only incidentally upon production. So far as the manufacturer is concerned the operation may be precisely the same, a reduction of 20

percent in the wages of his hands reducing the cost of production to him as much as the introduction of machinery which would give an increase of 25 percent in the result of the same labor, with this additional advantage, that the reduction of wages would not require the conversion of any circulating capital into fixed capital; which the purchase of machinery would. But here the parallel ends. To the community at large there is a gain in the introduction of machinery; there is none in the reduction of wages. Machinery which will increase the efficiency of labor 25 percent adds at once and continuously one-fourth to the production of wealth, and everybody will ultimately be the richer for it. A reduction of wages 20 percent adds nothing to production, and, while some will become the richer for it, it will only be because others are the poorer. In the one case production is increased, purchasing power is increased, and capital is increased, and so, as we have seen it, the demand for labor becomes greater, and its remuneration larger; but in the other case, neither production, purchasing power, nor capital are increased, and the results are very different. By imagining the operations of either in a community of limited numbers, the distinction can readily be seen.

There is a tendency of wages in different industries to an equilibrium, and of wages in general to a level which is determined by the relative proportions of capital and labor. The effect of a reduction of wages in certain trades only is to attract capital to and drive labor from these trades, this increase of demand and decrease of supply, at once causing a counter tendency. Where the reduction of wages extends to all the trades of a community, this counter tendency can only arise from the attraction of capital from abroad, and the reduction in the supply of labor by increased emigration, decreased immigration, and an increase in the ratio of births to deaths, caused by the reduced comfort of the masses. But where an unlimited supply of cheap labor can be drawn from abroad, one of the elements necessary to create this counter tendency is wanting in either of the cases we have supposed. Capital may be drawn from other avocations to those in which a reduction of wages has been effected by the employment of Chinese, and the white laborers previously employed may be driven to other occupations; but so long as China can furnish a supply of labor equal to the demand, wages will not rise again, the only effect of the transfer being to decrease capital and increase the supply of labor in other trades, and thus to reduce wages in them also. And if the increase of the white population is checked, so long as no check is imposed on Chinese immigration the demand for labor cannot gain upon the supply. The only effect will be the substitution of a Mongolian for a Caucasian population.

That a reduction of wages through the employment of Chinese labor will increase the aggregate of production there is no doubt, and thus far its advocates are right. Capital would be made more efficient, and new capital be attracted from abroad. But whether home capital would continue to increase at its former rate may well be doubted. The savings of employers would be more, as their profits would be more; but the savings of the laborers (which, through the medium of loan societies, &c., become as much part of the active capital or "wages fund" of the community as the savings of any manufacturer) would be less, and in the case of the Chinese, would be sent abroad and lost to the country. Whether the increase of production thus brought about is to be considered a benefit to the community depends upon our idea of "what constitutes a State." For this increase in production we must pay a high price, one of the smallest items of which, in my opinion, will be (if the substitution of Mongolians for Anglo-Saxons goes far enough) the utter subversion of Republicanism, upon the Pacific, perhaps upon the continent.

To make places in the higher occupations for the whites who are displaced by the competition of Chinese labor, will require (even admitting them to be qualified for these higher occupations) a great increase of production and a very large Chinese population. This idea supposes a state of society similar to that of which the would-be founders of the Southern Confederacy dreamed, where the laboring masses are of one race, the ruling and employing classes of another.

Even in a society of this kind, those of the superior race who fall from or are unable to gain the position allotted to them must sink to the level of the inferior. The great Chinese labor based empire of the Pacific must, if ever established, have its poor whites just as South Carolina and Georgia had theirs. But the displacement of whites which the introduction of Chinese labor will cause on the Pacific slope, great as it must be, will be slight compared with what it would effect in a thickly-settled country. The coolies will rather take the places of whites who otherwise would come hereafter, than of those now there. And in the present population, the class which will gain by Chinese labor, as compared with the class which will lose, is larger than on the Atlantic side. For the Pacific coast is a new country over which its present population is scouting and prospecting not only for that which is valuable now, but for that which will be made valuable by a greater pressure of population. There are thousands and thousands of men who would not be counted as capitalists in a strict enumeration, but who hold lands, mines, water privileges, &c., which a large population and low wages would make valuable. The interests of these men are with the capitalists, forming with the other classes to which I have alluded, a combination so powerful as to neutralize any effective opposition to the introduction of Chinese; for as the General Government ties the hand of the people of the Pacific coast in this matter, effective resistance to Chinese immigration must be extra-legal. And thus it is that the resistance to Chinese immigration is weakening in our Pacific states.

Capital clearly perceives that its interests lie in the free admission and introduction of these cheap workers, and though labor may oppose it, yet, with the weight of the General Government and the sentiment of the nation thrown in favor of capital, there can be but one issue to the struggle. In every instance in which battle has been joined on this matter, labor has, as usual, gone to the wall. Chinese cigar-makers have been beaten; but the Chinese monopolize the trade today. The Pioneer Woolen Mills were once burned to the ground because of the employment of coolies; but they were rebuilt, and, like the other woolen-mills, employ as many Chinamen as they can. A year ago, when Chinese graders were first set to work in San Francisco, the displaced Irishmen mobbed them; but the strong force of policemen with which it was then necessary to guard them is now withdrawn, and the Chinaman is rapidly taking the place of the Irishman. When, a few months since, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company discharged its white firemen and hired coolies, the coolies had to be smuggled aboard the ships, but now they come and go in peace. And so on. The sticks in the bundle are broken one by one.

PROSPECTS OF FURTHER IMMIGRATION

All the Chinamen now in our Pacific States come from the single Province of Canton; the whole seaboard of China and Japan is yet to draw from. The cost of the passage is a great obstacle, but improvements in marine machinery, with the establishment of new steamship lines, will rapidly reduce this; and as the desire to avail themselves of Chinese labor increases among American employers, the contract system, managed either directly or through the medium of the Chinese Companies (who are abundantly able, without the intervention of special laws, to enforce all

contracts with their own people), will enable many to come over, who could not advance the price of their own passage. The Chinese Companies and capitalists already bring over many in this way, and a perfect system of peonage is maintained.

CHARACTER OF THE CHINESE

The population of our country has been drawn from many different sources; but hitherto, with but one exception these accessions have been of the same race, and though widely differing in language, customs and national characteristics, have been capable of being welded into a homogeneous people. The Mongolians, who are now coming among us on the other side of the continent, differ from our own race by as strongly marked characteristics as do the negroes, while they will not as readily fall into our ways as the negroes. The difference between the two races in this respect is as the difference between an ignorant but docile child, and a grown man, sharp but narrow-minded, opinionated and set in character. The negro when brought to this country was a simple barbarian with nothing to unlearn: the Chinese have a civilization and history of their own; a vanity which causes them to look down on all other races, habits of thought rendered permanent by being stamped upon countless generations. From present appearances we shall have a permanent Chinese population; but a population whose individual components will be constantly changing, at least for a long time to come. A population born in China, expecting to return to China, living while here in a little China of its own, and without the slightest attachment to the country – utter heathens, treacherous, sensual, cowardly and cruel. They bring no women with them (and probably will not for a little while yet) except those for purposes of prostitution; and the children of these, of whom there are some hundreds in California, will exercise upon the whole mass but little perceptible influence, while they will be in all respects as essentially Chinese as though born and reared in China.

To a certain extent the Chinese become quickly Americanized; but this Americanization is only superficial. They learn to buy and sell, to labor, according to American modes, just as they discard the umbrella shaped hat, wide drawers and thick paper shoes, for the felt hat, pantaloons and boots; but they retain all their essential habits and modes of thought just as they retain their cues. The Chinaman running a sewing machine, driving a sand cart, or firing up an engine in California, is just as essentially a Chinaman as his brother, who, on the other side of the Pacific, is working in the same way, and with the same implements as his fathers worked a thousand years ago.

IMMORALITY

Their moral standard is as low as their standard of comfort, and though honest in the payment of debts to each other, lying, stealing, and false swearing are with the Chinamen venial sins — if sins at all. They practice all the unnameable vices of the East, and are as cruel as they are cowardly. Infanticide is common among them; so is abduction and assassination. Their braves may be hired to take a life for a sum proportionate to the risk, to be paid to their relatives in case of death. In person the Chinese are generally apparently cleanly, but filthy in their habits. Their quarters reek with noisome odors, and are fit breeding-places for pestilence. They have a great capacity for secret organizations, forming a State within a State, governed by their own laws; and there is little doubt that our Courts are frequently used by them to punish their own countrymen, though more summary methods are oftentimes resorted to. The administration of justice among

them is attended to with great difficulty. No plan for making them tell the truth seems to be effective. That of compelling them behead a cock and burn yellow paper is generally resorted to in the Courts.

A great many good people doubtless fancy that they see in this migration to our shores a providential opportunity for the conversion of Asia to Christianity; but a more intimate acquaintance with the Chinese in California would probably induce a modification of this sanguine expectation. Though here and there there may be an individual exception, the Chinese among us will, as a rule, remain the heathens they are. If any progress is made in their conversion, it will be in China, not in America.

The Chinese seem to be incapable of understanding our religion; but still less are they capable of understanding our political institutions. To confer the franchise upon them would be to put the balance of power on the Pacific into the hands of a people who have no conception of the trust involved, and who would have no wish to use it rightly if they had – would be to give so many additional votes to the employers of Chinese, or put them up for sale by the Chinese head centers in San Francisco. At least one Chinaman has already been naturalized, and though none of them have any intention of remaining here permanently, if it would pay them to acquire votes and they could be protected in voting, there are none of them who would object to being naturalized every hour in the day. The swearing required is nothing to them, and as for identification, all Chinamen look alike to the unpracticed eye. At present, law or no law, the Chinese on the Pacific coast could not vote, unless between lines of bayonets; but this do not prove they will never vote. Who could have dreamed ten years ago that the slaves of South would now be the voters?

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THEM?

Take it in any aspect, does not this Chinese question merit more attention than it has received? A little cloud now on the far Western horizon, does it not bid fair to overshadow the whole future of the Republic? The 60,000 or 100,000 Mongolians on our Western coast are the thin end of the wedge which has for its base the 500,000,000 of Eastern Asia. The Pacific is 6,000 miles wide, but steam is practically reducing it to the limits of the ancient Mediterranean, and it rolls between countries w[h]ere the reward of labor is at its maximum on the one hand, and at its minimum on the other. Give natural laws free play, and over the sea, from west to east, will sweep greater hordes than ever followed the sun across the plains of Asia. The day has gone by when the sword determined whether a given soil should breed Celts or Saxons; Huns or Gauls, Goths or Romans; but the weapons of peace are no less effective than those of war. The wild mustard can crowd wheat from the field; sheep may drive from the pasture the stronger or; the locust may put the buffalo to flight. Like these the Chinaman can live where stronger than he would starve. Give him fair play and this quality enables him to drive out stronger races. One hundred thousand Mongolians on the Pacific coast means so many less of our own race now and hereafter to be. Five or six millions would mean that all but the crown of the body politic should be Mongolian; would mean a British India instead of a New England upon our Western shores.

Let no one imagine that this is a mere local question. If the Rocky Mountains interposed forever an impassable barrier to Chinese immigration it would still be, economically, socially, politically, a matter of the utmost national importance, affecting vitally every part of the Republic. As the

Colonies were at first compelled against their will to admit negro slaves, so have the people of the Pacific States been denied the power to prohibit in its early stages this influx of Mongolians. Whether they would prohibit it now, if they could, is questionable. In the natural course of things they will learn to prize what they at first hated. The East will be clamoring for restriction upon Chinese immigration, the Pacific – with its capital invested in Coolie labor, if not its whole social and industrial system raised on that basis – will cherish it. California, Oregon, and the great States yet to be, will not easily forego the advantage which enables them to undersell Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania, in the markets of the continent, and even England and Belgium in the markets of the world. And then? The old quarrel between the North and the South renewed between the East and the West. And, it may be, with a different ending.

In truth it is not to be wondered at that Chinese immigration should find so many advocates in the Pacific States. With their unparalleled natural resources, an unlimited supply of this cheap labor will make of them beyond all question the most remunerative field in the world for the employment of capital, where the rich will get richer with unexampled rapidity. California will not only become a great mining and a great agricultural State, but a great manufacturing State; controlling by virtue of her cheap labor the immense market opening in the heart of the continent, and competing successfully with New and Old England almost to their doors. Let but the introduction of Chinese labor go a little further and the same change which was wrought in Southern sentiment regarding Slavery by the invention of the cotton-gin will be completed on the Pacific in the feeling toward Chinese labor. In the early days of California, the same party which endeavored to divide the State for the purpose of establishing Slavery in the Southern portion endeavored to legalize the coolie-trade. It would not be surprising if the effort were ere long renewed by a different class and with better chances of success.

A LOOK AHEAD

But the Rocky Mountains interpose no barrier to Chinese immigration. This cheap and effective labor finds a limitless field in the whole Union. Not only on the sparsely populated Pacific coast, where labor commands higher rates than anywhere else in the world, but in the most thickly settled Eastern States, the Chinese with their economical habits can always secure remunerative employment if allowed to freely enter the market, and will crowd white labor to the wall. I came across the continent in December last with probably the first Chinaman who ever made the overland trip. Many more will follow him, the stream will gradually increase, and the operatives, mechanics, and laborers of the East will find in the markets for their labor competitors who will willingly work for rates on which they would starve.

Nor will this take long to effect. The great interior basin has already its Chinese population, extending as far as Salt Lake. Before a month has passed the Chinese graders of the Central Pacific will have met the Irishmen of the Union Pacific, and the great highway which is to link the two seas will be completed. The new towns along the Platte will then soon have their Chinese quarters, and ere long a Chinaman will have ceased to be a curiosity in the villages of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, where last December men, women and children gathered around Ah Kee.

Our manufacturers have talked of the pauper labor of Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield. Here is cheaper labor at their doors! Labor which will deem itself well remunerated by wages upon

which English operatives could not keep themselves out of the poor-house – which will not agitate for its “rights,” form trades’ unions, or get up strikes; which will not clamor for eight-hour laws, but which will labor without murmur 12 or 14 hours a day, not even asking for Sundays; which is patient, submissive, enduring, with the patience, submissiveness and endurance which countless ages of tyranny have ground into the character of the down-trodden peoples of the East. Here is labor to break our virgin soil, to clothe the foot hills with vineyards, work our poorer mines, and make the alkali desert blossom like the rose; labor to take the place of that of the slave in the cotton and rice-fields of the South; labor which, efficiency considered, is even more economical than the slave. And labor of which there is a never-failing supply.

And here, too, is another potent force, more potent than any of those now operating, to accelerate the prevailing tendency to the concentration of wealth – to make the rich richer and the poor poorer; to make nabobs and princes of our capitalists, and crush our working classes into the dust; to substitute (if it goes far enough) a population of serfs and their masters for that population of intelligent freemen who are our glory and our strength; to rear an empire with its glittering orders round the throne, and its prostrate people below, in place of the Republic of Washington and Jefferson.

It will not go far enough – it cannot go far enough for this, unless it is indeed written that the youngest born of the nations must in its early manhood follow the path and meet the doom of Babylon, Nineveh and Rome – unless our boasted civilization carries with it the seeds of its own destruction, and is to serve but to light the torch to be upheld by some new and stronger race, in what may now be to us a far-off corner of the world. But without looking so far, here plain to the eye of him who chooses to see, are dragons’ teeth enough for the sowing of our new soil – to germinate and bear ere long their bitter fruit of social disease, political weakness, agitation, and bloodshed; to spring up armed men, marshaled for civil war. Shall we prohibit their sowing while there is still time, or shall we wait till they are firmly embedded and then try to pluck them up?

HENRY GEORGE.

See also an article in the NYPL collection: “The Railways and the Overland Mail,” *New York Daily Tribune*, New York, March 5, 1869. Page 3.

Also the John Stuart Mill correspondence which followed.

Also “Why Work is Scarce, Wages Low and Labor Restless,” 1878 in *Journalistic I* also James Maguire’s speech in Congress – unabridged – from 1893-10