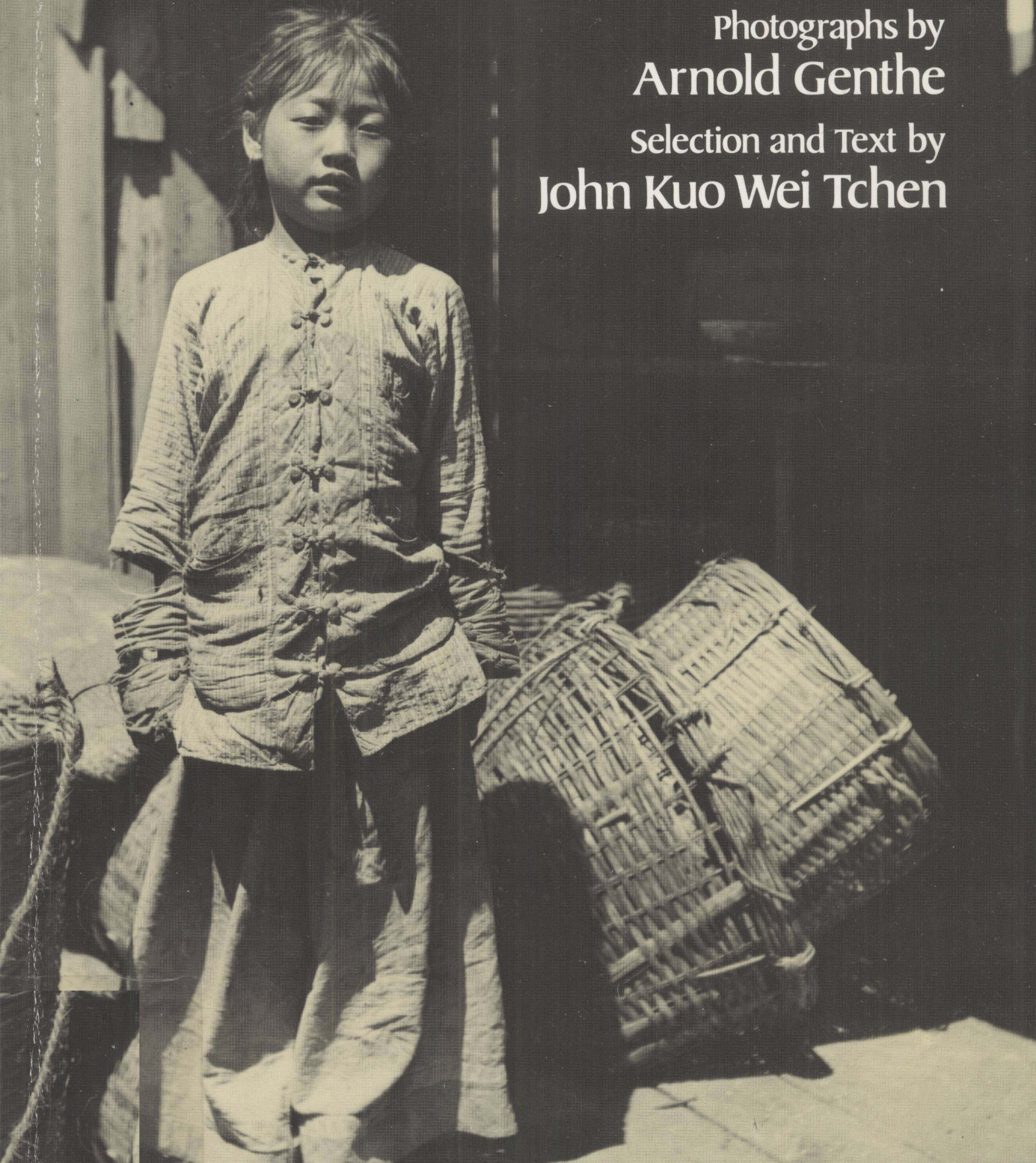


GENTHE'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF SAN FRANCISCO'S OLD CHINATOWN

Photographs by
Arnold Genthe

Selection and Text by
John Kuo Wei Tchen



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DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
New York

To the memory of
Victoria Chen Haider
and to Syed Haider
and Sean Chen Haider.

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Genthe's Photographs of San Francisco's Old Chinatown is a new work, first published by Dover Publications, Inc., in 1984.

Book design by Carol Belanger Grafton

Manufactured in the United States of America
Dover Publications, Inc., 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, N.Y. 11501

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Genthe, Arnold, 1869–1942.

Genthe's Photographs of San Francisco's old Chinatown.

1. Chinatown (San Francisco, Calif.)—Description—Views.
2. San Francisco (Calif.)—Description—Views. 3. Photography, Artistic. I. Tchen, John Kuo Wei. II. Title. III. Title: Photographs of San Francisco's old Chinatown.
F869.S36C473 1984 779'.9979461 83-5319
ISBN 0-486-24592-6 (pbk.)



PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In American popular culture, the Chinese have been caricatured as exotic, sometimes sinister, oddities, always alien to American life. The Chinese, it has been argued, are foreigners. Even those who are United States citizens are in reality still Chinese: after all, they certainly don't *look* American.

Nevertheless, Chinese have been working and surviving in the United States for over 200 years. Therein lies a great deal of yet undocumented, untold history. This book is a work of reclamation. It is an effort to counter deeply rooted myths and stereotypes and, using the great and enduring photographs of Arnold Genthe, to convey the subtle texture and flavor of the everyday life of the Chinese in San Francisco's Chinatown from 1895 through the earthquake and fire of 1906.

As a social historian, I am always painfully reminded of the fragility of the threads connecting our present with the past. When I first began my fieldwork in San Francisco, Mark Lai advised me to speak immediately with Soon K. Lai, a gentleman in his eighties who had been a prominent figure in San Francisco's Chinese community and who had a sharp, clear memory. "He can probably identify everyone in those photographs," I was told. After emerging from a few days of archival research, I discovered that in the interval Mr. Lai had stumbled on some steps, hit his head, and died.

I did not realize how significant Mr. Lai's untimely death would be until I came to find very few Chinese who survived from 1906. Exclusion acts had prohibited the immigration of Chinese women, and antimiscegenation laws had prohibited the marriage of Chinese and whites. This meant that those workers who were here could have no families and therefore had no descendants to pass on their life stories. Like most working people, the Chinese of that time left few written records of their lives. The 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed whatever documents did exist. Soon K. Lai was one of the few remaining threads linking us with the past. Without the benefit of his knowledge, many of the individuals appearing in these photographs must remain anonymous. (If any readers are able to identify any people or places in these photographs, please contact the author, John Kuo Wei Tchen, 448 50th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11220.)

I was fortunate, however, to have spoken with Ching

Wah Lee, Grace Lee, and Yuk Ow before each of them passed away. These elders, along with their contemporaries, were the true experts on the San Francisco Chinatown I have tried to reconstruct. I would like to express my belated, but most heartfelt, appreciation for their generosity and knowledge.

I owe my greatest intellectual debts to two scholars. Harvey Goldberg opened my mind to the importance of historical inquiry. Him Mark Lai has been rightfully called the dean of Chinese-American studies. He is a full-time engineer by day and a dedicated historian at all times. He has helped me during all phases of this book's preparation.

While I was in San Francisco, a number of individuals shared knowledge and rice. Thank you Enid Lim, Laverne Mau Dicker, Major Check Yee, Judy Yung, Alice Fun, Philip Choy, Clinton Young, and Margie Chen. Thanks also to James Dao for looking at a rough draft of the manuscript. David Wright provided me with hard-to-find articles from *The Wave* and *Camera Craft*. Mrs. Ricarda Genthe, wife of Arnold Genthe's nephew, kindly allowed me to interview her in New York City. Bernard Riley and Gerald Maddox of the Library of Congress led me to Genthe's original glass negatives and lantern slides. Toby Quitslund, undoubtedly the single most knowledgeable Genthe scholar, helped me throughout my research and writing. My appreciation to Hayward Cirker, Stanley Appelbaum, and Alan Weissman of Dover Publications for their faith in the significance of Genthe's Chinatown photographs.

My greatest personal debts are to Lin-Sie Zhao Tchen and Judy Susman. Ms. Tchen raised me with an appreciation of Chinese history and culture. Judy Susman provided inestimable intellectual and moral support throughout my work on this book.

In May 1979, my sister and friend, Victoria Chen Haider, was killed by the crash of American Airlines DC-10 Flight 191. She had been reaching new heights in her career as a fiction editor and just beginning her life as mother and writer. It is to her memory, and to Syed Haider and Sean Chen Haider, that this book is dedicated.

All errors in this volume are my responsibility alone.

New York, New York

JOHN KUO WEI TCHEN

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Chinese words and names have generally been transliterated into English according to the pinyin system (in Mandarin, or “national language”). In addition, the Cantonese (using the Yale system) frequently appears in parentheses on the first appearance of a name, word, or phrase, e.g. Siyi (Sei Yap). Asterisks (*) indicate where a proper name has been kept in a nonpinyin spelling used in the United States by that person; in many of those cases the pinyin spelling is then given in parentheses, e.g. Ng Poon Chew* (Wu Panzhao). This procedure is sometimes also followed for ordinary nouns.

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GENTHE'S
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OF
SAN FRANCISCO'S
OLD CHINATOWN

INTRODUCTION

TANGRENBU—THE STREET LIFE OF SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN, 1895–1906

In the sultry late spring of 1895, a young German doctor of philosophy by the name of Arnold Genthe sailed into New York harbor on the liner S.S. *Normannia*. Although he was arriving in the middle of a great migration of impoverished eastern and southern Europeans, Genthe was not coming to the United States as an immigrant. While the steerage below was packed with the desperate poor of many nationalities, Genthe was comfortably traveling first-class with the Baron von Schroeder and family. The Baron had met Genthe in Hamburg and needed a tutor for his son Heini. Having completed his doctoral work at the University of Jena, Genthe wanted to avoid being drafted into Kaiser Wilhelm's Prussian army and had agreed to work with the young von Schroeder for two years in the Baroness's home city, San Francisco.¹

Genthe was beguiled by San Francisco. His poetic description of the city, recorded in his 1936 autobiography *As I Remember*, illustrated how deeply entranced he was:

As soon as I had unpacked I went for a long walk, up hill and down and up again, until the whole glamorous panorama was spread out before me. The approach through vestibule of cliff and mountainside; the golden stretch of the dunes; the Bay, misted by the silver fog, or captured by the softly incandescent blue of a clear sky; the full-rigged barkentines and the many little ships, always coming and going, their sails bellying in the stiff breeze; the long curve of the waterfront with its rows of liners and sailing vessels from all ports of the world, tied up at their berths or lying at anchorage in the stream; the spicy tang of the sea and of cargoes piled high on the quays; Fisherman's Wharf and its rainbow fleet; the deep-throated songs of the Italian fishermen as they mended their nets; Telegraph Hill, where the fishermen's shacks clung like swallows' nests to the sides of the cliff—against the background of the variant sky they created a mural of such beauty that during the fifteen years I was there my eyes never tired of it.²

The German guidebook to the United States that Genthe brought had a sentence about San Francisco that intrigued him: "It is not advisable to visit the Chinese quarter unless one is accompanied by a guide."³ This Chinese quarter, or Tangrenbu (Tong Yen Fau; "Port of the People of Tang [i.e. Chinese]"), was the home base of tens of thousands of Bay-area Chinese. However, to non-Chinese it was known as the mysterious, exotic, and sometimes dangerous Chinatown.⁴ Predictably, Genthe headed for this section of the city the first chance he could. In Tangrenbu, Genthe found a living culture totally foreign to his experience. The colors, the smells, the language made him feel compelled to write to his family. Searching for illustrations to accompany his letters, he

could only find "crudely colored postal cards," none of which satisfied him. He attempted to sketch residents and soon found that "as I got out my sketchbook the men, women and children scampered in a panic into doorways or down into cellars."⁵ He then chose to try his hand at the relatively novel medium of amateur photography.

Building upon these rather innocent beginnings, Genthe returned time and again to Chinatown, taking over 200 photographs on glass negatives. These marvelous photographs of San Francisco's Tangrenbu launched him on a long, productive career as a highly acclaimed photographic artist; and at the same time they preserved rare, priceless glimpses of the rich street life of old Chinatown as it was before being leveled by the disastrous earthquake and fire of 1906.

San Francisco's Tangrenbu

The 1895 Tangrenbu that Arnold Genthe ventured into was hardly the simple "Canton of the West" he perceived it as. It was the spiritual, if not actual, home of tens of thousands of Chinese who, because of a tidal wave of racist hostility, were forced to live in a segregated section of the city. Chinatown had been shaped by the swirling cross-currents of an epic three-way struggle between industrial capitalists who sought to remake the West as they saw fit, Chinese merchants and workers who sought work and survival, and an often racist, yet class-conscious, white working class driven by anger and fear for their livelihood. To truly understand the story that Genthe's photographs tell, it is necessary to comprehend these forces that molded early California history.

Chinese had been reported living in Yerba Buena, a sleepy Mexican trading village, as early as 1838, a full ten years before gold was spotted at Sutter's Mill nearby.⁶ Within a year, the "manifest destiny" fervor of United States ruling interests had wrested vast tracts out of Mexico's northern territories. In 1849, Yerba Buena became San Francisco, and a year later California became the thirty-first state admitted into the Union. James O'Meara, an early San Francisco settler, noted that the pioneer Chinese tended to be merchants and traders. "Most of the Chinese who came here were men of means enough to pay their own way and here they mainly embarked in merchandises or trading pursuits. In 1849 . . . no Chinaman was seen as a common laborer. . . ."⁷ These early Chinese had come primarily from the three wealthy commercial and agricultural districts of Nanhai (Namhoi), Panyu (Punyu), and Shunde (Shuntak), known

as the Three Districts, or Sanyi (Saam Yap), which surrounded the major southern port city of Canton. Merchants from Sanyi often dealt with Chinese agents for Western colonial companies, and therefore had access to travel on American clipper ships. Merchants and traders from Guangdong and Fujian, the two provinces flanking Canton harbor, could be found in ports throughout the Pacific rim. In San Francisco, the earliest Chinese stores were located on Sacramento Street between Kearney (now Kearny) Street and Dupont Street (now Grant Avenue). Sacramento Street was called Tāngrenjie (Tong Yen Gaai) or the "Street of the Chinese People." As the San Francisco economy boomed with hopeful gold seekers, the city experienced continual labor shortages throughout the 1850s and 1860s. It was cheaper for male miners who refused to wash their own clothes, for example, either to send their dirty laundry on a clipper ship to Hong Kong or Honolulu to be washed or to simply throw it away, than to pay the rates to have their clothes done locally. The pioneer entrepreneurs and industrialists of the region needed workers to lay roadways, reclaim swampland, work company-owned mines, make boots and shoes, and perform hundreds of other wage-paid tasks. The white men who flooded the Pacific coast were generally obsessed with making a fortune and returning to their homes back east. Native Americans, derogatorily called "Diggers" by whites, would not cooperate. Nor would the "greaser" Mexicans or other Hispanic Americans who invested their ambitions in gold mining. American clipper ships, which at that time were the world's quickest mode of transportation, offered the most realistic solution to the labor shortage. To the west, across the Pacific, lay China, and Chinese "coolie" laborers had already been profitably used on British colonial plantations in South America and the West Indies. Chinese workers were seen as the solution, and the San Francisco Chinese merchants became the key to bringing them over.

In the mid-1800s, China was in chaos, and its social fabric was unraveling. The repressive Qing Dynasty rule of Manchu foreigners was seriously weakened by the disastrous opium trade forced upon the nation by the British Empire. Western imperial powers forced an "open door" trading policy with the beleaguered country and accelerated the draining of the government's silver coffers. The Taiping Rebellion erupted from 1850 to 1864, and left a wide swath of destruction and death in southern China. Banditry was rampant; the more ruthless landlords exacted large tithes from tenant farmers and evicted them when they couldn't pay. Many of these landless peasants migrated to the growing, Western-dominated urban centers of Canton, Amoy, Macao, and Hong Kong to look for work and escape. These desperate poor formed the ranks of laborers whom Westerners have called "coolies," which in Chinese ("kuli" in the Mandarin dialect) signifies "bitter strength" (and derives from the Anglicization of the Tamil term for "hireling").

The British not only wanted Chinese markets in which to sell their surplus cotton goods and profitable opium, they needed laborers to take the place of black plantation slaves nominally freed by the Emancipation Act of 1833 in the West Indies, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. Chinese laborers were also recruited for plantations in Peru, Cuba, and the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). In a span of 30 years, hundreds of thousands of Chinese laborers were tricked and lured onto British,

American, and other Western ships for the long journey across the Pacific Ocean. Conditions on these frigates were often comparable to, and sometimes worse than, those of the African slave trade with North America. The mortality rate was as high as 40 percent on one ship to Peru. These conditions led to frequent riots, murders, and in several cases the seizing of the ship.⁸

Gentler techniques of persuasion were used to attract Chinese to the United States. Many Guangdong residents had already heard the news of the gold rush. San Francisco, in fact, was called in Cantonese Gam Saan, or "Golden Mountains." American clipper-ship companies were eager to carry human cargo because it was more profitable than goods. They contracted Chinese brokers to lure Chinese as passengers to the United States with enticing handbills conjuring up glittering images that would satisfy a poor person's fantasies. One particularly sensational, but nonetheless typical, handbill circulated in April 1870 stated:

All Chinamen make much money in New Orleans, if they work. Chinamen have become richer than mandarins there. Pay, first year, \$300, but afterwards make more than double. One can do as he likes in that country. Nobody better nor get more pay than does he. Nice rice, vegetables, and wheat, all very cheap. Three years there will make poor workmen very rich, and he can come home at any time. On the ships that go there passengers will find nice rooms and very fine food. They can play all sorts of games and have no work. Everything nice to make man happy. It is nice country. Better than this. No sickness there and no danger of death. Come! go at once. You cannot afford to wait. Don't heed wife's counsel or the threats of enemies. Be Chinamen, but go.⁹

In the late 1840s and 50s a number of Chinese workers were contracted for a specified number of years, in exchange for passage to Gam Saan; however, these contracts were difficult to enforce. One Edward Lucatt stated: "The fifteen coolies I brought from China, and who were under bond for two years with the party who engaged them, were no sooner ashore than they resisted their contract, and each turned his separate way. Nor would the authorities interfere. . . ." ¹⁰ Most Chinese workers came on a credit-ticket basis in which a Chinese merchant in Hong Kong or Canton lent them passage fare, around \$40–50. Upon arriving in the United States the connecting merchants would help find workers jobs and collect the interest and principal from monies earned. The San Francisco Chinese merchant then stood to make double profits by either filling the contract-labor needs of American companies or employing the workers themselves. When contracted by American firms, part of the arrangement was that the labor crews would buy their supplies exclusively from that merchant. The merchant would also hire Chinese foremen to supervise the workers, thus solving the communication problems between the white bosses and the Chinese workers. In 1852 alone, over 20,000 Chinese were reported to have passed through the San Francisco custom-house shed.¹¹ In contrast to the Sanyi merchants, most of these immigrants came from the neighboring, but much poorer, Four Districts, or Siyi (Sei Yap), of Xinhui (Sanwui), Taishan (Toishan), Kaiping (Hoiping), and Enping (Yanping). And as was true with white fortune hunters, few women were among these workers.

Soon stores spread down Dupont Street, spilling onto both sides of Jackson between Kearney and Stockton. In

1856, *The Oriental*, the first San Francisco Chinese-language paper, published a directory listing 33 general merchandise stores, 15 Chinese herb stores, five doctors, five restaurants, five butchers, three tailors, three boarding houses, three wood yards, three bakers, two silversmiths, one wood engraver, one curio carver, one broker for American merchants, and a Chinese interpreter.¹² The concentration of stores in this convenient downtown wharf-side area made it ideal for Chinese workers arriving in the city. However, most Chinese did not live in this area, nor were Chinese businesses restricted to these streets. Fully 80 percent of the Chinese in California in the 1850s and 60s were distributed throughout the mining areas. The *Oriental* directory also listed a candle factory on Brennan Street and Third, Ning Yang* Co. on Broadway, Young Wo* Co. on the slopes of Telegraph Hill, Yan Wo* Co. in Happy Valley, and a Chinese fishing village on Rincon Point.¹³

Chinese miners soon discovered that the mines were not the key to the prosperity they dreamed of. As early as 1849, 60 Chinese working for a British mining company at China Camp, Tuolumne county, were driven off their claim by a party of white miners.¹⁴ A pattern soon developed in which many white Protestant miners declared that these deposits were their exclusive domain and chased away all other people. Chinese were thus forced to mine claims that whites had already abandoned. Although not all white miners were so racist and xenophobic, they all gained from reduced competition with other miners. The independent miners were greatly threatened by companies hiring groups of workers to mine the claims for them.

The conflict between Chinese miners working for companies and independent white miners became especially acute when surface deposits were largely exhausted by the 1870s. Expensive equipment and intensive labor were now required to extract the more elusive gold deposits, putting individual prospectors at a great disadvantage. Although the majority of Chinese miners were independents, they soon became identified with these hated companies, and were driven out of many mining areas. Notices were often posted warning Chinese to leave the area. One such flyer in Mariposa proclaimed: "Notice is hereby given to all Chinese on the Agua Fria and its tributaries to leave within 10 days from this date, and any failure to comply shall be subjected to 38 lashes and moved by force of arms."¹⁵ Attacks against Chinese became frequent, and Chinese were stripped of legal recourse. In 1854, Chief Justice Murray of the California Supreme Court delivered the opinion that the 1850 state law which said, "No Indian or Negro shall be allowed to testify as a witness in any action in which a white person is a party," should be extended to "Chinese and all other people not white."¹⁶

One of the common excuses for restricting the rights of Chinese in America was the contention that they made their money in the United States but sent it back to China, therefore draining the region of reinvestment funds. Ironically, aside from the question of how much money was sent back to workers' families in Southern China, the discriminatory Foreign Miners' Tax, of which Chinese were the primary contributors, accounted for at least half of California's entire state revenues from 1850 to 1870.¹⁷

With the general decline of gold mining in the 1860s, the building of railroads quickly occupied the foreground of industrial capitalist interests. A transcontinental link

from the West to the East and points in-between meant the possible development of the region's agricultural and manufacturing industries. Gabriel Kolko, the noted American historian, states: "From the end of the Civil War until the beginning of the First World War, the railroad was a central, if not the major, element in the political, economic, and social development of the United States. . . . Until the rise of big business in steel, agricultural machinery, and oil, the epic villains in American history in the period from 1870 to 1900 were, John D. Rockefeller excepted, railroad men."¹⁸

The federal government and Eastern banks underwrote the massive capital necessary for the construction costs of the Central Pacific Railroad. This highly lucrative franchise was organized by the soon to be notorious "Big Four" railroad barons of the West: Mark Hopkins, Collis P. Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Leland Stanford. Initially, poor Irish immigrants were hired to start railroad construction beginning from Sacramento; however, as the tracks ascended the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, many workers refused to spend days carving a few feet of granite from a mountainside. In 1865, 50 Chinese workers were hired by Charles Crocker on an experimental basis. Pleased with the results, and desperate for laborers regardless of color, Crocker recruited several thousand Chinese workers within six months. Three years later a total of 8,000 to 10,000, many of whom were former miners, were hired to blast through and over the treacherous mountain range. In the severe winter of 1866, Chinese crews worked and lived underneath the snow. Flash avalanches of snow frequently buried workers. One American reporter witnessed a huge snowslide descending upon two workers. "Seeing it approach, they stepped behind a tall rock, but it buried them 50 feet deep. In spring their bodies were found standing upright, with shovels in their hands."¹⁹ An 1870 newspaper account noted the shipment of 20,000 pounds of bones, representing some 1200 individual railroad workers, being sent back to China for proper burial.²⁰

On June 24, 1867, thousands of Chinese railroad laborers laid down their tools and went on strike demanding better pay and an eight-hour day, stating, "Eight hours a day good for white men, all the same good for Chinamen." Although the strike was lost, the Central Pacific management took the work stoppage quite seriously and wired to New York asking about the feasibility of bringing west some 10,000 black workers.²¹ After the completion of the transcontinental link at Promontory Point, Utah, Chinese railroad workers were employed throughout the North American West, from Texas to Canada, building regional and local lines.

While many Chinese miners found employment on the railroads, others chose to establish fishing operations, familiar to them from what was a common occupation in Guangdong Province, China. Shrimp camps dotted San Francisco Bay from Point San Pedro to Point San Mateo. The shrimp were netted, boiled, and dried primarily for export to Japan, the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), and China. In 1880, approximately 1,000,000 pounds of dried shrimp were shipped across the Pacific. Chinese fishermen were barred from the San Francisco market, which was dominated by hostile Italian immigrants; however, they did supply San Diego and several other coastal areas with fresh fish. The fish that did not sell were salted and dried. Abalone was also harvested; although Americans

did not eat the mollusk, they fancied the shells and bought them from Chinese vendors for jewelry and decorations. Chinese also fished for sharks, caught crabs, and gathered seaweed for food and to make agar-agar. Through the 1880s, the Chinese were excluded from salmon fishing, even though they composed a sizeable proportion of the seasonal labor force in salmon canning, an important national industry emerging in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.²²

During this time, other Chinese supplied the labor-intensive work force critical to the building up of local industry and commerce, such as constructing wagon roads and stone bridges and fences; building levees for swampland reclamation; digging irrigation canals and ditches; filling San Francisco Bay with landfill; and even excavating the caverns of the Napa and Sonoma valleys for wineries. Improved local roads, reclaimed land, irrigation canals, and interstate rail links combined to make the development of a profitable agricultural economy possible.

In the 1850s, still other Chinese miners followed the occupational shift of Hispanics, who were also evicted from the mines. Both groups, one after the other, took up small-scale potato farming and truck gardening. Chinese truck gardens started out as small one-person operations and soon grew in popularity and size. These independent farmers came to supply San Francisco, among other cities and towns, with approximately one-fifth of its fresh vegetables through the 1880s. A network of vegetable peddlers brought these perishables from house to house in neighborhoods throughout the city. Some Chinese cultivated small fields of strawberries and other fruits. Most Chinese farmers occupied land for short terms as sharecroppers. In exchange for raising the crops, tending orchards, and taking care of the properties, the sharecroppers kept two-fifths to one-half of the harvest.

Chinese were but a small minority of California farmers. However, the impact of Chinese agricultural workers was felt not on the small independent plots but on the large agribusinesses of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys, which dominated California agricultural production. Chinese, along with Irish, Germans, and American Indians, formed the ranks of California's farm workers. Unlike the other groups of workers, Chinese were generally not hired full-time, but were brought in only when needed, hence earning the dubious distinction of becoming the region's first migrant farmworkers. They picked grapes, made wine, cultivated and harvested orchard fruits, picked cotton and hops, tended livestock, planted and harvested wheat, and performed countless other farm-related tasks. Carey McWilliams, prominent California labor historian, has even asserted that "in many particulars the Chinese actually taught their overlords how to plant, cultivate, and harvest garden crops."²³

Chinese labor contractors performed the indispensable service of providing labor as needed, at a fixed price, to the state's agricultural businessmen. This ready supply of labor reduced the need for these large farms to maintain a regular force of full-time workers. As these large farms prospered, small independent family farmers came to resent the increasing power that the large cash crops and railroad freight rates had over the market prices. And, as with the mining industry, Chinese laborers came to be identified with the large agribusinesses as the source of

woe for the small white farmer. One such farmer put it the following way:

If those men had not monopolized the growth of currants in large quantities by the aid of Chinese labor, even with the Chinese here and they holding their lands, those currants would be grown by men who would use their own children, their girls and boys, in picking of these currants. . . .²⁴

By the mid-1870s a rural anti-Chinese movement gained strength, and farm producers reluctantly began to replace Chinese with often inexperienced white urban workers. Despite the sometimes fierce agitation, Chinese managed to hang on to their positions as lowly migrant workers, jobs that few Anglo-American workers have been willing to take to this day.

In San Francisco, Sacramento, and other growing urban areas, light manufacturing began to develop. Woolen mills required large capital investments, therefore limiting the industry to large firms and an available force of cooperative laborers willing to subject themselves to factory discipline. During the early to mid-1860s two large San Francisco factories were able to gain Civil War supply contracts for blankets and clothing. However, with the ending of the war in 1865 the two plants ran at only 50 percent of capacity. This recession brought about layoffs. Racist white workers blamed the unemployment and wage reductions upon the 400 to 500 Chinese workers. As with other California industries, hierarchies of pay within the woolen mills developed, reflecting the sexual and racial attitudes of the times. Although Chinese composed three-quarters of the entire woolen labor force, they were paid at the lowest rates. Chinese were forced to work the labor-intensive, less skilled jobs and were paid from \$.95 to \$1.50 per day; white women, who were often hired to replace Chinese, received \$1.25 to \$1.50 per day; whereas white males, who generally had supervisory positions, were paid a uniform salary of \$2.50.²⁵ Factory bosses soon discovered that the industry could not be exclusively Chinese, that it was important to mix Chinese with white workers so as to maintain supervisory control. Robert Peckham, the president of the San Jose Woolen Mills, commended Chinese workers for learning their jobs quickly and being very "industrious," but complained that these employees could be a little "crotchety." "They have the power of combining. If you do not happen to get along with them, and have a difficulty with one, the whole lot will stand up for each other, and as a general thing go together."²⁶

Parallel patterns existed in other growing California manufacturing industries. Chinese workers were pitted against white women and sometimes children in the lower-paying jobs, while white men held skilled or supervisory positions commanding a higher wage, which was often higher than the national average. The prevailing anti-Chinese feeling among whites prevented effective job-action protests. Since upward advancement was limited, the Chinese quite sensibly gravitated toward establishing their own manufacturing businesses in areas that required low initial capital investment. The areas that proved to be the most popular and economically viable were the needle trades, shoe and boot making, and cigar making. In these areas, Chinese could set up their own small-scale factories and escape discriminatory treatment at the workplace.

In all three light industries Chinese workers organized labor guilds that resembled American craft unions. This gave these workers a greater bargaining leverage with Chinese bosses as opposed to white overseers. Yet despite the autonomy gained by Chinese workers and bosses in these industries, they would soon lose their competitive edge to the increasingly technological and powerful businesses that were mass-producing the same goods in the East. Chinese could easily move into these areas of industry precisely because the predominant national trend was away from small sweatshop operations toward concentrated mass-production factories that greatly lowered the costs of items produced relative to labor time invested.²⁷

The completion of the nationwide rail system sparked an explosion of industrial development across the entire nation. Western industries now competed with the East for markets, and the tremendous tide of poor European immigrants entering through Castle Garden in New York City now had means to travel westward in search of a livelihood. The labor shortages that had characterized the 1850s and 1860s, when Chinese workers had entered developing mainstream industries, now gave way to surpluses of white immigrant workers willing to take on jobs that U.S.-born whites had previously shunned. The 1870 California census indicated that the Chinese formed only one-twelfth of the state's population; however, it has been estimated that Chinese workers made up as much as one out of every four California workers.²⁸ In the ensuing decades of white migration to California this relatively high ratio of Chinese workers was quickly reduced. The increasingly integrated national capitalist economy reeled from periodic depressions in the 1870s and again in the 1890s. Western railroads, coupled with increased economic concentration in the form of land monopolization and factory industrialization, so totally transformed the social landscape that many residents and recent migrants were left confused and angered. For the great majority of people, expectations of plentiful job opportunities, through which hard-working Horatio Algers could pull themselves up by their bootstraps and become successful, proved illusory at best. Frustrated expectation bred great social unrest. Masses of unemployed, militant trade unions, and antimonopoly political rallies punctuated these periods of economic downturn. Although the much-hated "monopolists" were a main target of organizational agitation, the Chinese were increasingly often made the scapegoats for social problems.

In July 1877, crowds of mainly unemployed whites gathered in sandlot rallies throughout California. The militant Irish-led state Workingmen's Party initiated many of the sandlotters' demands. Combined with the regional branches of the Grangers, an organization that represented small family farms across the nation, the Party argued for an eight-hour day, the nationalization of the railroads controlled by the "Big Four," the closing off of property-tax loopholes for the wealthy, the cutting of city bureaucrats' salaries down to the same level as those of skilled labor, and additional class-conscious demands. Their first slogan was "Down with the Bloated Monopolists!" On one of the July evenings an angry crowd with torches in hand climbed up to Charles Crocker's Nob Hill mansion and threatened to burn it down. At the same time, many of the same sandlot leaders railed against the

Chinese. White Protestant "manifest destiny" arrogance here translated into a nativist attack on Chinese. "Anti-Coolie" clubs proliferated in working-class San Francisco neighborhoods. Their demand was, "The Chinese Must Go!" Denis Kearney, the fiery orator of the Workingmen's Party, was quoted by local newspapers as saying: "Judge Lynch is the only judge we want." "Bring guns to the sandlots and form military companies; blow up the Pacific Mail docks [the place where Chinese immigrants landed, owned by the 'Big Four']." "The monopolists who make their money by employing cheap labor better watch out! they have built themselves fine residences on Nob Hill and erected flagstuffs upon their roofs—let them take care that they have not erected their own gallows." "When the Chinese question is settled, we can discuss whether it would be better to hang, shoot, or cut the capitalists to pieces."²⁹

Violence mounted against the Chinese. On July 23, bands of young men swept through 20 to 30 Chinese wash houses. On the following evening, they committed random murders of Chinese, set fires, fought with police. And on the third night, they set fire to a lumberyard bordering on the Pacific Mail Steamship docks, and fought with firemen trying to put out the blaze. Although anti-Chinese agitation was not new, the sentiment and scapegoating was now incorporated into the web of local, regional, and state politics. Both the local and state Republican and Democratic parties adopted virulently anti-Chinese platforms throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Opportunistic politicians soon found that vehement anti-Chinese and antimonopoly rhetoric won votes. Many regional politicians were so elected. Countless discriminatory laws were passed. Chinese children, for example, were denied access to public schools, and since Chinese could not legally become naturalized citizens they were not allowed the rights of American citizens. In 1870 a penalty of not less than \$1,000 was to be levied against any "Asiatic" brought into the state without proof of "good character." Six years later the law was declared unconstitutional. In 1874, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed ordinances requiring that those laundries not employing vehicles, which meant Chinese businesses, had to pay a quarterly license fee of \$15, whereas the more prosperous, generally white-owned businesses, which owned one or more vehicles, had to pay only \$2 per vehicle per quarter. Later that same year the ordinance was declared void by the County Court. Whether these laws were eventually overruled or not, these harassing regulations had the cumulative effect of provoking the Chinese to withdraw whatever trust they had had in the American legal and legislative systems.

Pro-Chinese forces, which supported the rights of Chinese to work and live in the West, tended to represent either regional big businesses, which depended on Chinese laborers; traders, who depended on Asia's millions of potential consumers; or Christian missionaries, who sought good relations with China and its possible millions of converts. Before the 1876 State Senate Committee, commissioned to investigate the "Chinese Question," and before the 1877 U.S. Congressional Joint Special Committee, a corps of local and regional businessmen testified to the critical contributions Chinese labor had made to the state. Many argued that their toil actually raised the social position of white labor. Charles

Crocker, one of the "Big Four" rail barons, flatly stated, "I think that their presence here affords to white men a more elevated class of labor. As I said before, if you should drive these 75,000 Chinamen off you would take 75,000 white men from an elevated class of work and put them down to doing a low class of labor that the Chinamen are now doing, and instead of elevating you would degrade white labor to that extent."³⁰ Christian missionaries, who expressed far deeper understanding of and sympathy for the Chinese than most Americans, supported the immigration of Chinese to the United States with the primary goal of converting them to Christianity. Their support, although often truly beneficial to the Chinese, betrayed a condescending paternalism that seemed to apologize for Western imperial domination of China. The Reverend Otis Gibson, a staunch and outspoken supporter of the Chinese, conveyed a fundamental contempt for Chinese culture in his Congressional testimony: "Their civilization is lower than the Christian civilization of America. The religion of the educated may be formulated as a blind fatality; the religion of the masses a heartless, superstitious idolatry."³¹

The anti-Chinese political movement was not restricted to local socio-economic issues; it encompassed a moral world view of right and wrong, good and evil. The issue was intricately entwined with the perceived divine right of America, as a "white" nation, to enlighten and dominate North America and beyond. The United States was commonly personified by Columbia, a lily-white woman robed in white, a symbol of purity and civilization better known today in the form of the Statue of Liberty. China, however, was most often presented as a hoary, ancient, moribund, and pagan country overflowing with look-alike people. Countless political cartoons printed in the American popular press depicted Chinese as devilish, winged, bat-like creatures; hordes of grasshoppers ravaging wheat fields and attacking Uncle Sam; or subhuman-looking workers with octopus-like arms monopolizing jobs while idle white boys loitered around.

There were countless other graphics decrying the "yellow peril." Penny-press pamphlets and books flooded the popular market warning of the impending doom. One typical pamphlet, printed in San Francisco by H. J. West in 1871, was titled "The Chinese Invasion: They are Coming, 900,000 More. The Twenty-Three Years' Invasion of The Chinese In California And The Establishment of a Heathen Despotism in San Francisco. Nations of the Earth Take Warning!" Another, published in Boston by Walter J. Raymond in 1886, was titled "Horrors of the Mongolian Settlement, San Francisco, California. Enslaved And Degraded Race of Paupers, Opium-Eaters And Lepers." A San Francisco doctor published, in the city's Biennial State Board of Health Report of 1871, an article entitled "The Chinese and the Social Evil Question." He stated with full authority that the Chinese were "inferior in organic structure, in vital force, and in constitutional conditions of full development."³² Other local physicians testified that Chinese were, as a race, physiologically different from whites in that their nerve endings were further away from the surface of the skin and they were therefore less sensitive to pain. This meant that Chinese workers could labor for longer hours in terrible conditions and not complain. Much of this anti-Chinese xenophobia dovetailed with crude social Darwinism and human eugenics movements that asserted the evolutionary and inbred superi-

ority of white races over all nonwhite peoples. It was generally accepted by white Christians that interracial sexual relations would dilute the purity of races. Anti-miscegenation laws that already applied to blacks and Native American Indians were extended to include Chinese in over 30 states; California did not repeal its anti-miscegenation law until 1948. These movements were historic forerunners of the fascist and Ku Klux Klan movements of recent American history.

The anti-Chinese movement successfully equated Chinese with the devil and monopoly trusts on a nationwide level. In 1887, a white miner in Lake County, Colorado, when asked what rank and file labor "wanted," responded: "Laws should be passed compelling equal pay to each sex for equal work; making all manual labor no more than eight hours a day so workers can share in the gains and honors of advancing civilization; prohibiting any more Chinese coming to this country on account of physiological, labor, sanitary, and other considerations, as the country would be happier without Chinamen and trusts." What is so significant about this statement is not what the miner said, which was fairly typical of many anti-Chinese workers, but the fact that there were no Chinese in Lake County five years before or after he made the statement. Even by those without direct contact with Chinese, the belief that they were no good for the United States was widely accepted.³³ During times of great socio-economic dislocation the Chinese were characterized in such a way that average, mainstream white Americans perceived them as legitimate targets for the deep-seated frustrations of farmers and workers across the country. In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, prohibiting Chinese workers (though not merchants, students, or diplomats) from entering the United States. Chinese workers thus earned the dubious distinction of being the first national group prohibited from immigrating to the United States. The act was amended in 1884; in 1888 it was renewed as the more restrictive Scott Act, which extended the proscription to all Chinese women, with the exception of merchant's wives. The Scott Act was extended another ten years in 1892, and in 1902 it was extended indefinitely. The passage of the law betrayed a national consensus that the United States was to be a white nation. Even at the height of Chinese immigration in the 1870s, the Chinese represented no more than 4.4 percent of all immigrants, in contrast to the whopping 94 percent who were European. At the height of "yellow peril" xenophobia in the 1880s through the 1890s, the Chinese made up only 0.4–1.2 percent of the immigrant population, whereas Europeans composed 95–97 percent.³⁴

The Chinese were subject to random and organized violence of increasing intensity during the 1870s and 1880s. The most fervent anti-Chinese agitators not only wanted the Chinese restricted—they wanted them expelled from the country. In 1885 and 1886, the white residents of Seattle and Tacoma, Washington, evicted all the cities' Chinese residents, putting them on a barge to San Francisco with warnings not to return. Chinese farmworkers were violently driven out of the fertile Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. In 1880, Denver riots left one Chinese dead and \$20,000 worth of property damage. A riot in Los Angeles' Chinese quarter in 1871 left 15 Chinese hung from balconies and two Chinese shot dead. The single most brutal anti-Chinese riot occurred in Rock