EARLY CHINESE IN CALIFORNIA: SOME ASPECTS OF THEIR IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT 1847–1860*

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The Chinese: Emigration and why they came to California

WHEN the peasants of any nation abandon their homes, and, in violation of established law and social tradition, undertake a dangerous voyage across a wide ocean, knowing full well that hardship await them in the land to which they go, and death penalty in case of their return, there will be found some powerful reasons for their action, aside from the hope of financial gain. Emigration for a Chinese before 1860 was very difficult, constrained by traditional teachings and the established order. The majority of the population was bounded by strong family ties rooted in the traditions of Confucian orthodoxy. Filial piety demanded the performance of duties towards the family and ancestral worship. Negligence of these duties would provoke disapproval and adverse comments. It would be considered infilial behaviour and a cardinal sin for a son to leave his ancestral home and parents for any protracted length of time.[1] The ruling Ch'ing dynasty imposed severe laws forbidding emigration of its subject abroad since the late seventeenth century. Section 225 of the *Ta Ch'ing Lu-Li*, (Fundamental Laws of the Ch'ing Dynasty) expressly provided that:

> When officials, whether soldiers or civil servants, illegally go out to sea, to trade or to settle on islands there to live and farm, they shall be considered conniving with rebels, and if caught shall receive the death penalty. Any official responsible for the arrest of ten illegal emigrants shall be accorded one merit toward his promotion; if of one hundred of such culprits his reward shall be promotion to the next higher rank.[2]

When the Manchus overcame the Ming dynasty on mainland China and imposed their rule over the country in the mid-seventeenth century, many Ming adherents fled to Taiwan or out of the country. The Manchus enacted the emigration law because of the strong resistance waged by the Southerners. It was in these southern shores that the Manchus met the fiercest and most heroic resistance. The Manchus ordered that the coastal villages of the Kwantung province be removed fifteen miles inland and that the fishermen and seamen be forced to become peasants.[3] The dynasty anticipated that foreign contact or emigration might promote anarchy, or at least might increase Ming sympathizers. Therefore, it was necessary to impose a severe emigration law and to keep China closed to foreign powers. The repressive policy on emigration was not rescinded until 1860 and the

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[1]Confucius, *The Philosophy of Confucius,* trans. James Legge (New York: Peter Pauper Press, 1953), pp. 13–15.

2Chao Erh-suan, et al., *Ching Shih Kao (Draft History of the Ch'ing Dynasty),* (Kwan-wai edition, Hong Kong, 1928), Vol. 53.

[3]*Ibid.*

death penalty against emigration was formally abrogated in 1849, after thousands of Chinese subjects were already in foreign lands. It took rare courage, grim determination and a venturesome spirit for the Chinese to circumvent the law, to buck society, and to leave the family for unknown destinations. What instigated the Chinese to take all these risks? Why was the government unable to enforce the law? Why did thousands choose to come to California? The answer could be summed up in two main categories, the push and the pull factors.

Among the most common push factors outlined by writers were the political and economic situation of China during the 1840s and 1850s.[4] A proper understanding of these factors is necessary if one is to understand the reasons for the Chinese to emigrate. It was the unfavourable conditions that made a large proportion of the Chinese people from the southern provinces welcome any chance that might be offered to emigrate.[5] In addition, foreign intrigues by several of the European nations and the United States had seriously encroached upon Chinese sovereignty, arousing an incipient nationalism directed against both the foreigners and the Manchu regime.[6]

The First Opium War was considered to be the turning point for the Manchu dynasty, after which the dynasty entered a long period of decay and decline. The War began in 1839 and lasted until 1842.[7] In the provisions of the Treaty of Nanking, signed on August 29, 1842, five Chinese ports, Canton, Shanghai, Ningpo, Amoy and Foo Chow, were opened to foreign trade. In addition, the island of Hong Kong was ceded to Britain.[8] This step was of immense importance for several reasons. Since practically all the Chinese immigration into California came from the

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[4]For good accounts of the ramifications of Chinese emigration in the nineteenth century, see the following: Typed transcripts of tape recorded interviews with elder Chinese Americans in California, Chinese American Resources Oral History Composite, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Persia C. Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries Within the British Empire* (London: King and Songs, 1923; Ta Chen, "Chinese Immigration in the Pacific Area," *Chinese Social and Political Science Review 12–13* (October 1928, January 1929, April 1929), pp. 543–560, 50–76, 161–182.

[5]As mentioned earlier the Manchus encountered strong resistance waged by the Southerners. After the resistance was suppressed, a number of anarchist organizations emerged. The organizations later transformed into triad societies or clan organizations. The existance of these organizations created disorder especially in the 1840s and 1850s, at a time when the Manchu dynasty was entering a period of decay and decline. See Testimony of American-China Missionaries, in California, Senate, *The Social, Moral and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration, Testimony taken before a Committee of the Senate of the State of California* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1876), passim; Matthew S. Culbertson, Diaries kept as missionary in China 1843–1860, Culbertson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[6]Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1908), pp. 175–351; John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842–1854,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); W.C. Hunter, *The 'Fan Kwae' at Canton Before Treaty Days, 1825–1844* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 24–65.

[7]A number of American companies were also involved in the illegal opium trade. See Samuel A. Brimblecom letters 1836–1849, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Letters written by various American firms. Brimblecom was a ship captain, employed by Russel and Company, Petrel, stationed at Chinchew, where he marketed opium for the American firms.

[8]Neville Williams, compiler, *Chronology of the Modern World* (New York: McKay Company, 1968), p. 190.

southern provinces of Kwantung and Fukien, whose natural outlet was Hong kong, the importance of Britain gaining control of that port is readily apparent. After the passage of the British Passengers Act in 1855, Hong Kong became the sole port from which the Chinese sailed to America.[9] A last result of the Opium War was the first American treaty with China, the Treaty of Hwangsin, signed July 3, 1844, providing for commercial intercourse between the two nations.[10]

The war brought a severe impact on China's economy. The government levied a heavy taxation on the people to raise funds for payment of war indemnity to Britain. As always, the burdens of taxes to pay for the costly war fell upon the people with the brutal force of the emperor's tax collectors. The importation of opium almost doubled over the amount imported before the war. Meanwhile, corruption, injustice and misgovernment were at their height. These gave rise to widespread discontent toward the Manchus who were responsible for the loss of national prestige and the sufferings of the people.[11] Hostilities between anarchist groups and government forces spread; the T'ai P'ing Revolutionary Movement called for reforms, and when reforms failed to come, insurrection resulted. The T'ai P'ing Rebellion burst out in 1848 in the Kwangtung province, swept the country in its fury for almost thirteen years, and nearly put an end to the Manchu regime.[12] The people of Canton also attempted a provincial uprising. Authentic triad groups were in constant revolt in the south, and by 1854 every district in Kwangtung was in open rebellion. Most of the important towns were in triad hands. To suppress the subversive activity of the malcontents and to frighten the masses, the Kwantung authorities decapitated 75,000 persons in the summer of 1855.[13] It was estimated that the fourteen years of turmoil cost 30,000,000.[14]

The years that followed the unsuccessful rebellion were another period of upheaval in Kwangtung. Fighting between the Cantonese (sometimes Cantonese referred to themselves as Punti — local people) and the Hakkas (the refugees) living in the Sze Yup districts flared up into open warfare. The fighting spilled over into

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[9]William Speer, *The Oldest and the Newest Empire* (San Francisco: The Bancroft History Co., 1870), p. 489; U.S., Congress, *House Executive Document No. 105,* Slave and Coolie Trade, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855.

[10]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Treaties, Conventions, International Act, Protocal and Agreements between the United States and China 1776–1909,* 61st Cong. 2nd sess., 1909, Sen. Dec. 357, 1:196.

[11]Hosea B. Morse, *op. cit.,* pp. 300–351.

[12]Accounts of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion and its effects on China are best seen in J.C. Cheng, *Chinese Sources for the T'ai P'ing Rebellion 1850–1864* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1963).

[13]Wing Yung, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1909). p. 53.

[14]For a careful analysis of casualties during the T'ai P'ing Rebellion, see Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368–1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 236–247, 275. The T'ai P'ing insurrection has been a continuous object of Sinological study. For some representative works, see Vincent C.Y. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967); Thomas T. Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions* (Stanford: Academic Reprints, 1865).

the neighbouring districts. It was reported that 150,000 people perished in the struggle between the two groups.[15] A Roman Catholic missionary who had laboured among these scenes said that their old men and women were ruthlessly slaughtered, their young men pressed into the service of the T'ai P'ings, their young women carried off and used for the vilest purpose, while their children were daily forced to see spectacles of blood and the most revolting crimes perpetrated under their eyes. As a result of all these catastrophic and dislocating events, hundreds of thousands of Chinese were uprooted from their villages. Most of them fled to Hong Kong, some to the South Seas (Nanyang) and a few of them to America.[16] It is interesting to note that the rebellion started only a year or so after the discovery of gold in California and lasted approximately the same length of time as the gold rush.[17] During this period of time, therefore, the rebellion was an ever-present pressure on the Chinese to emigrate to California. Section 225 of the *Ta-Ching Lu-Li* became a dead letter, as authorities were preoccupied with struggles against foreign powers as well as civil rebellions.

Economic motives for emigration were no less compelling, for in Southeastern China's coastal regions, the land cannot provide enough food or work for the dense population.[18] The economy of Kwangtung province, the most heavily-populated area of China, was badly affected by the turmoil of war and internal hostilities, by Western intrusion, and by natural catastrophe. The importation of large quantities of opium increased the export of silver, thus causing the price of silver to rise. This inflation worked hardships on the peasants since silver was the standard for payment of taxes and levies. The increase in imports of Western goods ruined native handcraft industries, particularly in textiles. Then, in 1849, a terrible flood wreaked havoc on the already wretched lives of southeastern China's peasants. The poor coditions of the soil, followed by periodic floods and droughts, led to agricultural failure.[19]

China was also facing an over population problem. While toward the end of the seventeenth century the Chinese population had been over 100 million, it had

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[15]Matthew S. Culbertson, diaries kept as missionary at Macao and Ningpo from 1844. Comments on the T'ai P'ing Rebellion. Matthew S. Culbertson Papers 1843–1860, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[16]*Ibid.*

[17]"The Discovery of Gold in California," *Hutchings' California Magazine* 2 (November 1857), 194–202. Articles by John A. Sutter and James W. Marshall, reprinted in John A. Hawgood, *America's Western Frontier: The Exploration and Settlement of the Trans-Mississippi West* (New York: Knoff, 1967), pp. 189–198.

[18]In Ta Chen's survey of 905 families in Kwangtung and Fukien province which had sent members overseas, almost 80 per cent claimed they left eighter because they were unemployed, saw little future opportunity for employment or because the family income was insufficient even though all members were employed. See Ta Chen, *Emigrant Committee in South China, a Study of Overseas Migration* (London: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1939), pp. 260–261.

[19]See Matthew S. Culbertson diaries, comment on the economic hardship – 1844, 1849, 1850 and 1854. Matthew S. Culbertson Papers 1843–1860, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

reached over 300 million by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and by the 1840s had passed 400 million.[20] With this rise the average per capita of landholding dwindled from two acres to less than half an acre.[21] A poor peasant found it economically impossible to maintain a large family — his wife, children, and dependent parents —— on his small plot. Political and economic disorder, and devotion to family compelled poor peasants to test the value of the emigration system as a defence of their way of life. They welcomed any chance that might be offered to emigrate.

Within the empire itself working arrangements paralleled the pattern of overseas emigration.[22] Chinese cities had attracted a large number of people from the rural areas who came out of both necessity and choice to seek their livelihood. They considered the city only a place to work and to earn money. For months these workers filled the contractors' demands for hired labourers while their wives and children lived in the old home to which the earnings were forwarded. For all these reasons emigrants from the agricultural and labour class were dominantly male adults.

Perceived opportunities in the country of their destinations were the pull factors that inspired the Chinese to immigrate. The catalyst for the Chinese to immigrate to countries in the South Seas and to California was the news about the discovery of mineral deposits, gold in California and tin in the region of Southeast Asia. The news of James Marshall's discovery reached Hong Kong in the Spring of 1848.[23] Although tin was not as attractive as gold, the discovery of tin in Malaya, which coincided with the discovery of gold in California was marked as the beginning of the Chinese influx to Malaya.[24] The first wave of Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asian countries flocked to the tin mining areas while the early Chinese migrants to California went to the mountain ranges to mine gold. Their success in accumulating wealth in the mines instigated them to write their brothers and cousins telling them to come to the mines. Each shipload brought more and more Chinese. Brothers sent for brothers and even distant kin.[25]

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[20] Ping-ti Ho, *op. cit.*, pp. 110—202.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] See Testimony of the China missionaries, California, Senate, *The Social, Moral and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration, Testimony Taken Before a Committee of the Senate of the State of California;* pp. 78—279.

[23] San Francisco *Chronicle,* (editorial), July 21, 1878.

[24] This statement is subject to some argument, as Southeast Asia was the traditional area of Chinese immigration during earlier dynasties. But if we consider the period of the discovery of the rich tin mines and the number of Chinese immigrants in the middle of the nineteenth century the significance of the discovery of the rich tin mines could not be easily left aside.

[25] The *Daily Alta California,* May 12, 1851 commented "Quite a large number of the Celestials have arrived among us of late, enticed hither by the goldanse romance which has filled the world. Scarcely a ship arrives here that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer of our population; and we hear, by China papers and private advices from that empire, that the feeling is spreading all through the seaboards, and as a consequence, nearly all the vessels that are up for this country are so for the prospect of passengers. A few Chinese men have returned, taking home with them some thousands of dollars in California gold, and have thus given an impetus to the spirit of emigration from their fatherland which is not likely to abate for some years to come."

An elderly Chinese-American recalled the above factors as reasons for his grand-father's coming to America in 1855. He said, "We were very much in debt because of the local warfare. We planted each year, but we were robbed. We had to borrow. When the news about the Gold Rush in California was spread by the shippers, my grand-father decided to take a big chance."[26]

The most constant and, on the whole the most motivating force was the demand for labour. In Southeast Asia, colonialists, as well as established Chinese traders, needed a large labour force in order to exploit the wealth of their colonies. Labour was needed in the plantations, in the mining areas, in the lumbering industry and in building the infrastructure. Through labour agents in Hong Kong and Canton, peasants were recruited and shipped overseas by the hundreds of thousands.[27] California also experienced a pronounced scarcity of labour, which was accentuated by the rush to the gold mines. California was then not yet developed. It was too isolated, too remote and too difficult of access to receive any great increase of population. The state was heavily handicapped to make great progress. There was a great demand for labour on farms, in the construction projects, in homes as well as in the cities.[28] The greatest demand for labour came from the railroads. The news of the high wages paid to labourers in California was spreading gradually among the farmers who tilled their little rice paddies about southern China seaports, and drew them to California as effectively as the tales of gold marvel. Many Chinese labourers were employed for the construction of the early state railway projects, such as the Sacramento and Vallejo Railroad, and the Virginia and Truckee Railroad in the Washoe and Comstock mines of Nevada.[29] In the late 1850s one hundred and fifty of the five hundred hands working on the San Francisco and Marysville Railroad were Chinese, employed by a Chinese subcontractor.[30] Competition among the railway construction companies and the inability to procure white labour compelled the construction companies to employ Chinese labourers.

Besides the push and the pull factors already mentioned, there were other subsidiary factors which stimulated a great influx of Chinese during the first decade of immigration. The American streerage companies played an important role in promoting Chinese immigration to California.[31] The motive of these shipping

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[26]See Shirley Sun, interviewee, typed transcript of tape-recorded interview of the Chinese American Resources Oral History Composite, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1976.

[27]See Ta Chen, "Chinese Migrations with Special Reference to Labour Conditions," *Bulletin of the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics,* No. 340 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923).

[28]See Testimony in favour of Chinese immigration, U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* S. Doc. 689, 44th Cong., 2nd sess., 1877, pp. 66, 514, 610.

[29]Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners.* A reprint of the 1883 Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 253, 355.

[30]California, Legislature, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Relative to the Chinese Population in the State Of California* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1862); see also U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* pp. 512, 66, 649.

[31]See Ernest A. Wiltsee, *Gold Rush Steamer of the Pacific* (San Francisco: Lewis Publishing Company, 1938), pp. 307–309, see also *Daily Alta California,* June 3, Sept. 18, 19, 1853.

companies was primarily commercial, to accumulate as much profit as possible. With the discovery of gold and the demand for labour in California, the companies clearly perceived an opportunity to expand the business. Ships were constructed purposely to ferry as many passengers as they could accommodate and to reach San Francisco, the fastest that they could. Their agents in Hong Kong and Canton were instructed to circulate freely maps, placards and pamphlets, all of which presented a glittering picture of the new world.[32] A copy of a circular issued in the Chinese language, and sent into the country around Canton by a Chinese broker's establishment in Hong Kong, who represented the foreign shipmasters, was translated, and contains the following extract.

> Americans are very rich people They want the Chinamen to come and will make him welcome. There wil. ɔe pay, large houses, and food and clothing of the finest description. You can write your friends or send them money at any time, and we will be responsible for the safe delivery. It is a nice country, without mandarins or soldiers. All alike; big man no larger than little man. There a great many Chinamen there now, and it will not be a strange country. China god is there. Never fear and you will be lucky. Come to Hong Kong, and to the sign of this house in Canton and we will instruct you. Money is in great plenty and to spare in America. Such as wish to have wages and labour guaranteed can obtain the security by application at this office.[33]

The inducement of money with competition from the mandarins and soldiers seemed most attractive to the average Chinaman. His life at home was a continual round of oppression by the soldiers and mandarines, who robbed, taxed, and oppressed the Chinese at every turn of their lives.

The Chinese merchant group could be held partly responsible for the large increase in Chinese immigration to California. The merchants organized Companies to finance the passage and to supply the labour markets. This group of co-operative organisations was the principal agent responsible for the transportation of the thousands of Chinese who entered California during the decade of the 1850s. Without the Companies' (Chinese Six Companies) role, most of the peasants would not have been able to reach California. The Companies also sent agents to the countryside to cajole peasants and artisans into accepting a bounty with promises of an easy fortune and a speedy return. The unendurable poverty and hostilities at home instigated the peasants to seize the "opportunity" offered by the agents. Even parents urged their sons to follow the agents.[34]

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[32]See Gold Rush placards and pamphlets, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Some can also be found in the Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco. For circulars used in the 1860s, see H.H. Bancroft, *The New Pacific,* 3rd ed. (New York: The Bancroft Company, 1915), pp. 413–414.

[33]Chinese Historical Society of America Collections, Gold Rush circulars and pamphlets, Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco.

[34]See statements by various old timers re the reasons why their parents or grand-parents came to California in Chinese American Resources Oral History Composite, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1976.

American missionary activities in Canton may have had a bearing on Chinese immigration to America. During the Closed Door era the missionaries were restricted to Macao and Canton under the protection of the foreign merchants' community. Their activities penetrated deeper into the countryside after the First Opium War, 1839–1842. Their close contact with the converts indirectly introduced western maritime ideas, Christian values, the freedom and the economic opportunities enjoyed by the American people. In fact the ideology of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion, religious ideas combined with an intense anti-dynastic sentiment and the desire for reforms, was partly influenced by Christian missionaries.[35] Christian missionaries were considered to be the mentors of the intellectual revolution. The leader of the rebellion movement, Hung Hsiu Chuan, a devoted convert, had close contact with Issachea J. Roberts, an American Southern Baptist missionary.[36] It is difficult to determine whether American missionary activities had a bearing on Chinese immigration to this country, because there is not any record indicating the number of converts who came to America.[37] But the significance of the role played by the missionaries in introducing American and European maritime ideas cannot be denied. This information could have been the incentive for some of the emigrants to come to America rather than to go to the traditional places in the South Seas. Indeed the emigrants who came to America were from the area with the longest Western ties.

Thus, the factors in the two categories mentioned seem to be the dominant cause for the Chinese to emigrate. If the reasons for remaining were strong, the incentives for leaving were even stronger. The internal and external dissension that was sweeping China, coupled with the roseate reports of Chinese already in California as to the wealth to be obtained and the employment waiting them there, proved to be impelling causes that sent the Chinese across the Pacific Ocean.

Immigration 1847–1860

The first group of Chinese to set foot on the United States soil, according to some sources, was not labourers but students in search of knowledge.[38] An American missionary, the Reverend S.R. Brown, brought with him three Chinese students to the United States in 1847 to study at the Monson Academy in Massachusetts. One of these students was Yung Wing, who graduated from Yale

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[35] Eugene Powers Boardman, *Christian Influence Upon the Ideology of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), pp. 11–18. See also James C. Baker (1879–1969), views on missionary movement in China in the 19 century, China Missionaries Oral History Project, Claremont College, Claremont, Ca.

[36] *Ibid.;* see also Matthew S. Culbertson, diaries kept as missionary at Macao and at Ningpo, China from 1844–1860, Culbertson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[37] The Reverand Otis Gibson in his testimony did not indicate the number of Chinese Christians in California. The total number of Chinese Christians baptized in America up to 1876 was only 271. See *Report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco, on the Condition of the Chinese Quarter of that City, 1876,* Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, p. 69.

[38] *Three Generations of Chinese East and West,* commentary by Shirley Sun (Oakland: The Oakland Museum, 1973), p. 5; Thomas W. Chinn, "Backdrop for Research", *Chinese Historical Society of America,* Third Anniversary Publication (January 15, 1966), pp. 3–5.

University in 1854. After returning to China, he was appointed Commissioner of Chinese Education Mission. This is contrary to another source indicating that the first recorded Chinese in the United States were stranded sailors from the *Pallas* in Baltimore, in August 1785.[39] It is not known whether these sailors ever left America and returned to China. *The Register of Baptized Protestant Chinese* stated that the first Chinese to receive any education in American schools was a group of five, who attended the foreign mission school at Cornwall, Connecticut, between 1818 and 1825. One of them became the first Chinese Protestant in America.[40] It would be difficult to confirm the above statement because a continuous record of immigration to the United States was not started until 1820, while arrivals in California were only recorded after 1850. Without such proper records it is much more difficult to confirm the arrivals of the Chinese in California during the period before 1850.

The statistics on the population of San Francisco in June, 1847 do not indicate the presence of any Chinese in California. The population consisted of 375 whites, 34 Indians, 40 Sandwich Islanders and 40 Negroes.[41] No Chinese names appeared in the list. According to contemporary sources then, no Chinese took up his residence in California previous to 1848. But from this year on through the 1850s immigration from China into California disembarked at San Francisco on February 2, 1948.[42] Davis noted that Charles V. Gillespie reached San Francisco from Hong Kong in the American brig, *Eagle;* with him were three Chinese, two men and one woman.[43] Hubert Howe Bancroft gave the same account of the first Chinese immigrants. He claimed that the men went directly to the mines and the woman went to work in the home of a missionary named Charles Gillespie.[44] Brancroft did not specify the exact date. In the *History of California* he mentioned the year only. In *California Pastoral* he said that the *Eagle* arrived on February 18, 1848. The two statements above were contradictory to an argument stressed by Russel H. Conwell. He said, "The popular idea that the first Chinamen who visited California were 'goldhunters' is now said to be a mistake. They came from Peru in two vessels that put in at Callao for repairs while enroute from New York to San Francisco in 1848. They were fugitives from their masters in Peru. There were about twenty in all, and they were employed for sometime at the rickety old wharf in San Francisco. They were later joined by new arrivals, but, not one of which had ever heard of 'gold' in California before their departure from China.[45] The sources

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[39]U.S., Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States 1785—1945* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), pp. 36—42.

[40]*The Register of Baptized Protestant Chinese, 1813—42,* Collections of the Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco.

[41]Frank Soule, John H. Gihon and James Nisbet, *The Annals of San Francisco* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1855), p. 176.

[42]Augustus W. Loomis, Statement re Chinese in California, recorded for H.H. Bancroft, 1876, A.W. Loomis Paper, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[43]William H. Davis, *Seventy five Years in California* (San Francisco: John Howell, 1929), pp. 571.

[44]Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of California,* vol. VII (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), p. 336.

[45]Russell H. Conwell, *Why the Chinese Emigrate* (Boston: Lee, Shepard and Dillingham, 1871), p. 125.

from Bancroft and William Davis lack the support of convincing documentary evidence. The source given by Conwell has been rejected by most historians, who believe that the first Chinese did not reach Peru until October 1849.[46] However, an editorial in the *Star* mentioned the presence of two or three Celestials in San Francisco who found ready employment.[47] This statement certainly lends support to the belief that there were Chinese in San Francisco by the middle of 1848.

The census of 1850 did not list the Chinese as a separate group, but, between 1820 and 1850 the United States Bureau of Immigration reported the arrival of only forty-six Chinese.[48] There was no specific figure for Chinese arrivals recorded in California, because there was no customs office in California until after its admission into the Union. Authorities generally agree that the first Chinese arrived about the time gold was discovered. This could be based on the reports found in the newspapers published in those years. The *Star* began its report on the Chinese arrival in April 1848; this was followed by the *Daily Alta California* in late 1849. An article published in the San Francisco *Chronicle* in 1878 mentioned that:

> In 1847 a merchant named Chum Ming from Canton arrived in San Francisco. When Gold was discovered in 1848, he went with the first wave of prospectors into the hills. Afterwards he wrote to his friend Cheong Yum in China of his good fortunes. Then in turn told his friends and relatives thus starting the flood of Chinese immigration.[49]

This article was reportedly based on oral history accounts of leading Chinese and other reliable sources. Although its accuracy remains in doubt, some of the information seems to corroborate information from other sources. Therefore, one can conclude that there were Chinese in California in 1848, but the exact number remains uncertain.

Through 1848 and 1849 the number of Chinese landing at San Francisco continued to grow. In February 1849 the number of Chinese had increased to 54 and by Januarv the following year, there were 787 men and two women.[50] Although the estimate lacks the support of documentary evidence, the figure is supported by reports published in newspapers. The *Daily Alta California* reported a meeting of approximately 300 Chinese at the Canton Restaurant on Jackson Street in December 1849.[51] Another report published in the *Daily Alta California* gave a description of Chinese settlement and business activities in Sacramento Street during 1850[52] Although no exact figures were given, both reports could

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[46]The first shipment of Chinese labourers under contract to foreigners was in 1845, from Amoy, China, to the Isle of Bourbon. Peru received her first batch in 1849. See Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru* (Durham, N.C., 1951), p. 17.

[47]San Francisco *Star,* April 1, 1848.

[48]U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the immigration Commission on Statistical Review of Immigration, 1820–1960,* S. Dec. 756 61st. Cong., 3rd sess., pp. 14–24.

[49]San Francisco *Chronicle,* July 21, 1878.

[50]H.H. Bancroft, *History of California,* Vol. VII (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), p. 336.

[51]*Daily Alta California,* December 10, 1849.

[52]*Daily Alta California,* November 21, 1853.

support the assertion that the number of Chinese immigrants by 1850 was more than 300. The Chinese who attended the meeting were those who worked in San Francisco only; there must have been other Chinese who worked outside San Francisco or in other mining areas but were unable to attend the meeting.

There are also conflicting sources concerning the increasing number of Chinese immigrants in the early 1850s. The United States Bureau of Census listed 46 Chinese immigrants in the country between 1820—1850, but gave no information on the number of Chinese who disembarked in the next two years.[53] The Immigration Commission and the Bureau of Immigration did not indicate the number of the Chinese in California in the 1851 and 1852 lists. But the San Francisco Customs House listed the arrival of 2,716 Chinese emigrants in 1851.[54] The Chinese Companies estimated that there were 7,520 Chinese in 1851, and the number increased to 21,100 at the end of 1852.[55] The inconsistency is due in part to the mobility of the Chinese. They were continually on the move, seeking to better their economic condition. It is also in part due to the difficulties faced by the census officers in reaching Chinese settlements in the mining areas. Since San Francisco was the main port of entry for Chinese immigration, the statistics of the San Francisco Customs House and Bureau of Immigration are perhaps the most reliable sources for this investigation. Table I gives the statistics on Chinese immigration to California.[56]

The great influx occurred in 1852, when the number reached 20,026. The *Picayune* remarked, "They are flocking in upon us by the hundreds, every ships arriving from thence bringing from one hundred and fifty upwards. Six ships have arrived since the 25th of March, and have brought an accession to our Chinese population of eleven hundred and twenty-six souls."[57] But the following years there was a decline of annual arrivals. The number of those who disembarked at San Francisco in 1853 was only 4,470. The number of departures increased from 1,768 in 1852 to 4,421 in 1853. The number of arrivals in 1854 was 16,084 and in 1855 arrivals dropped again to 3,369. Annual arrivals hovered between approximately 3,000 and 8,500 for the rest of the decade. The number of departure decreased to an average of 2,300 per every year. By 1860 there were about 41,396 Chinese in California.[58] Most of these immigrants were young males. It is not known the exact number of Chinese woman in California. There is no record indicating the number of departures. Table 2 indicates that about that many

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[53]U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Immigration, Immigrants by Country: 1820—1945,* pp. 35, 36.

[54]California, Senate, *Reports of the Special Committee on Chinese Immigration to the California Senate* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1862), p. 7.

[55]California, Legislature, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Relative to the Chinese Population of the State of California* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1862), p. 7.

[56]For statements on early immigration see Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California,* Vol. IV, (San Francisco: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1896), pp. 98—99; Bancroft, *History of California,* Vol. VI, (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), pp. 124—130.

[57]San Francisco *Picayune,* April 17, 1852.

[58]An estimate based on the following sources: California, Senate, *Report of the Special Committee* on *Chinese Immigration to the California Senate,* p. 35; *Daily Alta California,* July 7, 1866; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population at the Tenth Census,* p. 382.

TABLE 1

CHINESE IN CALIFORNIA 1848–1860

Year	Arrival at San Francisco Custom House	Departure From San Francisco Custom House	Number in California estimated by American authorities
1848	(approx. 3)	....	54
1849	(approx. 300)	....	791
1850	(approx. 450)	....	4,018
1851	2,716	1,768	10,000
1852	20,026	4,421	25,000
1853	4,270	2,339	19,210
1854	16,084	2,339	
1855	3,369	3,473	
1856	4,807	3,028	
1857	5,924	1,932	
1858	5,427	2,542	45,000
1859	3,175	2,450	
1860	7,343	2,088	

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Immigration, Immigrants by Country: 1820–1945,* pp. 35–36; Cal. Senate, *Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral and Political Effect,* Report of the Special Committee of Chinese Immigration to the California Senate (Sacramento, 1878), pp. 35–36; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Ninth Census of the United States: Statistics of Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870); U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population at the Tenth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880).

arrived between 1835 and 1860, but it is unlikely that all of them still were living in California.

TABLE 2

IMMIGRATION OF CHINESE WOMEN TO CALIFORNIA 1820–1860

Year	Arrivals	Number in U.S. Census	Number in San Francisco
1835–51	16		
1852			
1853			
1854	673		
1855	2		
1856	16		
1857	450		
1858	320		
1859	467		
1860	29	1,784	406

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Immigration, Immigrants by country: 1820–1945,* pp. 35–36; California Senate, *Report for the Special Committee on Chinese Immigration to the California Senate;* Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Ninth Census of the United States: Statistics of Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880); U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1957,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), No. 109, "Immigration by Country of Last Permanent Residence: 1820 to 1956," p. 94.

In summary, as news of the discovery of gold and other economic opportunities spread among the peasantry, many were tempted to try their luck in a foreign land. Internal turmoil and economic instability provided the added impetus for many to emigrate. Thus the immigration into California in 1851 was six times that in 1850 and 7.3. times the figures for the previous year. However, unfavourable factors which had a dampening effect on immigration occurred. Chinese were given an unfavourable reception after 1850. The Foreign Miners' Tax, which was imposed in 1850 and repealed in 1851, was reimposed in early 1852, aimed exclusively at the Chinese.[59] Anti-Chinese agitation that led to the expulsion of Chinese miners from the mining areas occurred in the later period of the decade. A number of immigration laws preventing further immigration from China were enected by the California Legislature.[60] The arrival of other immigrants made it difficult for the Chinese to venture into various other fields. These factors undoubtedly played an important role in decreasing the number of immigrants in the fifties. Meanwhile, in late 1851 gold was discovered in Australia; to a certain degree it drew the attention of the Chinese emigrants to journey to the new gold fields.[61]

The Immigrant Groups, How They Came and Their Social Stratification in the New Chinese Community

The Chinese population of California during those years could be divided into three groups: the merchant group, the labour group and the relatively few Chinese women. Each group had a different background, they came under different

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[59]See California, Legislature, "California Taxes the Foreign Gold Miner (1853)", "The Foreign Miner's Tax Translated into Chinese (1853)", *The Statutes of California* (San Francisco: State Printer, 1853).

[60]California, Legislature, "California's Immigrant Tax (1855)" and "An Act to Prevent the Further immigration of Chinese or Mongolians to This State (1858)", *The Statutes of California* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1855); *The Statutes of California* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1858).

[61]The flow of Chinese emigrants to Australia began after the discovery of gold and immigration continued until the enactment of the White Australian Policy in 1901, which exclude all coloured people. See R.D. McKenzie, *Oriental Exclusion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), p. 4.

systems, they engaged in different economic activities, they enjoyed different levels of freedom and maintained a different status in the social stratification of the new Chinese society.

Most of the merchants came from the three districts or "Sam Yap" in the vicinity of Canton. The three districts are Namhoi, Punyu, and Shuntak. The rest came from the Fayuen and Samshui districts. Those who originated from Sam Yup spoke a more refined city dialect and regarded themselves as superior to the illiterate labour group. Most of these merchants originated from the peasant or agricultural class. Hemmed in by mountainous terrain, beseiged by the ever-present threat of starvation and pressured by masses of swarming population, they were forced to look for non-agricultural means of subsistence. Many turned to trade, acting as middlemen between buyers and sellers. As salesmen and merchants, they travelled to big cities and coastal ports, where they came into frequent contact with foreigners. Proximity and contact made them more receptive to the news about the economic opportunities abroad.

The merchant group furnished the first Chinese immigrants to California. An early San Franciscan observed that:

> ... in the fall of 1849 the Chinese in San Francisco numbered several hundred. They were not labourers who came; not of the coolie class at least. Most of them were men of means enough to pay their own way and here they mainly embarked in mercantiles or trading pursuits ... In 1849 ... no Chinaman was seen as a common labourer e.g. labourer....[62]

Because of their wealth, they were able to pay the passage to California for their families. Their objectives were therefore different from the labour groups, whose outlook was that of a sojourner, to achieve economic success as soon as possible and return to China with the evidence of his achievement. Like the Chinese traders in Southeast Asia, their main aim was to establish themselves as the privileged class of the new immigrant society. Their power had emanated out of their positions as brokers and contractors who extended credit and negotiated employment for impoverished peasants seeking passage to America.

The Chinese world in California was without gentry, scholars and officials, for their status in China kept them out of the main stream of emigration. Thus the merchants became community leaders with undisputed eminence, in contrast to their low position with Confucian traditions. In the absence of traditional village and government controls, these self-constituted mandarins often despotically ruled Chinese immigrant life in America through their leadership position in clan and district association.[63] Augustus W. Loomis summed up his observations:

The Companies and other associations were organized by merchants whose

[62]James O'Meara, "The Chinese in Early Days," *Overland Monthly* (May, 1884) n.s. Vol. 111, pp. 477–481.

[63]August W. Loomis, Statement re Chinese in California, recorded for H.H. Bancroft, 1876, A.W. Loomis Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also Gunther Barth, ***Bitter Strength*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 81.

business and residence keeps them in the city ...[64]

These men also handled practically all the merchandise consumed by the Chinese population. In addition they enjoyed a very high reputation among American businessmen for integrity and business ability.[65] An observer noted that majority of them could conduct any business transaction or private conversation in English or could do so satisfactorily with the aid of an interpreter. Besides dealing in oriental merchandise a number of them were proprietors of hand laundries, gambling houses, restaurants and bars.[66]

The merchant group, however, constituted a very small proportion of the total Chinese immigrants in California.[67] The great majority were in the labour group. Immigrants who worked in the gold mines of who worked as wage labourers were classified as parts of the labour group. It was generally agreed that almost all of them were young men and of these one-half were married; for no man in China over twenty remained unmarried unless he was very poor. Most of them could read the names of the ordinary necessities of life, but very few had anything like a common school education. They went quietly about their own affairs, manifesting little inclination to intrude upon the society of other nationalities, seldom retaliating when attacked, and apparently asking only to be left alone in their pursuit of happiness.[68] Most of those who belonged to this group originated from the four districts in the West of the Canton River delta or the Sze Yup-Sunwui, Sunning (Toishan), Hoiping and Yan Ping. Those who could afford passage on foreign vessels left China for California on their own. But the vast majority of this group had no money at all to offer for passage. The "credit-ticket" system, as it has been called,[69] enabled impoverished Chinese to come across the ocean, find lodging and food in San Francisco, and go to work in the mines or in the construction projects, without putting up any cash. The system entailed a debt bondage on the emigrant; thus there is much confusion over the question of the exact status of the labourer who came under this system.

Among Chinese emigrants in Southeast Asia, indentured emigrants relied on the credit-ticket system under which they obtained their passage from Chinese merchants who were reimbursed by relatives of the travellers or by their future employers. In return, the newcomers worked for whoever extended the credit until

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[64]U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* 44th Cong., 24 sess., 1877, Senate Report 689, pp. 407–408, 489.

[65]*Ibid.,* pp. 480–492; Frank Soule, John H. Gihon and James Nisbet, *op. cit.,* pp. 382–387.

[66]Frank Soule, John H. Gihon and James Nisbet, *op. cit.,* p. 38; J.D. Borthwick, *The Gold Hunters a First Hand Pictures of Life in California Mining Camp in the Early Fifties* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 81.

[67]There was no record indicating the number of this group. The *Daily Alta California,* December 10, 1849, reported that "a meeting of approximately 300 Chinese took place at the Canton Restaurant on Jackson Street ..." But this does not offer any insight into the number of merchants.

[68]A.W. Loomis, "The Chinese Six Companies," *Overland Monthly,* 1:222 (September 1868). For other evidence of merchant leadership see *Daily Alta California,* May 8, August 13, 1852, June 1, 7, 15, 23, July 17, 18, 1853, August 25, 1857, October 18, 21, 1859; San Francisco *Herald,* April 12, October 29, 1852, February 8, 1857, October 27, 1858.

[69]Persia Crawford Campbell, *op. cit.,* pp. XVII, XIX, 28–39, 150–151.

the debt was paid. In other cases the merchant creditors utilised the working power of the migrants in any way that guaranteed a profitable return for their investment. The system according to Campbell camouflaged a debt bondage that turned indentured emigrants into slaves of their countrymen.[70]

A contemporary stated that this sytem was adapted to California with some modifications. The changes resulted in part from the dictates of geography, in part from America's conditions, in part from the objections of Californians to any form of bondage or slavery.[71] His conclusion was that the bulk of the Chinese migration to California depended on the credit-ticket system. Chinese brokers and merchants at San Francisco or Hong Kong paid the expenses of the travellers, who remained under their control until the debts were paid.[72] In addition to the cost of voyage, the labourer was also required to pay seventy-five dollars to the creditor as the commission. To facilitate repayment, Chinese merchants in California employed the labourers in their own enterprises or sold the lien on the emigrants' services to their employers. In elaborating upon the credit-ticket system, he emphasized the slave nature disguised in the system. He said that the system partly a disguised slave trade, managed chiefly by Chinese agents or crimps who lured artisans, peasants, and labourers into coolie depots or barracoons and sold them to ticket agent. At the Chinese ports and at San Francisco they were kept in confinement, watched and terrorized by the agents of Chinese societies who acted in the creditors' interest. The agents forced the emigrants to accept employment at low wages as the creditors dictated.[73]

Most of the sources written in the nineteenth century gave almost the same treatment as that stereotyped by Gunther Barth. The editor of the *Daily Alta California* claimed that a large proportion of the Chinese in California were contract labourers who were little better than slaves. Wealthy merchants paid for their transportation and took them into the mines and derived the entire profit of their labour.[74] An observer described the credit-ticket system as a partly disguised slave trade.[75] Another observer noted that a majority of the Chinese came to America bound to some of their wealthy countrymen in San Francisco. Immediately on their arrival they were shipped off to the mines under charge of an agent. The bondage obligated the emigrant to pay his own passage after arriving.[76] The emigrant who had no other goods or chattels to offer as security in the payment of his passage might pledge the life service of his daughter, his wife of the entire family.[77]

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[70] *Ibid.*

[71] Gunther Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

[72] U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* S. Doc. 689, 44th Cong., 2nd sess., 1876, testimony re how the Chinese came to this country, pp. 15–161.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Daily Alta California,* February 21, 1855.

[75] Augustus W. Loomis, "How our Chinamen are Employed," article to H.H. Bancroft, 1876, A.W. Loomis Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] *Ibid.*, B.E. Llyod, *Lights and Shades in San Francisco* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1876), pp. 177–181.

Based on the account of an old Chinese immigrant, one writer concluded that when the ship docked, a delegation of Chinese, headed by the Chairman of the Chinese Companies, came on board to greet the new arrivals. They were taken to the Chinese street for a temporary stay. They were briefed concerning the functions of the Chinese Companies. They were allowed to take supplies on credit from headquarters. They were required to pay dues into the Company fund after they had earned money from their diggings or from their wages.[78] The description could be true if the immigrant did not come under the credit-ticket system. But the description is contrary to the statement of some contemporary writers such as J.D. Borthwick and others who based their accounts on participant observation.[79] Their description of the credit-ticket system was more elaborate.

In 1876, a report to the California Senate furnished evidence on the operations of the credit-ticket system. Several witnesses emphasized that the system was based on debt bondage and not on service contract.[80] Frederick A. Bee, the attorney of the Chinese Companies in San Francisco, stated that the repayment of the debt was the obligation under which the Chinese in California laboured.[81]

It is difficult to reach an early conclusion concerning the status of the labourers who came under the credit-ticket system. The subject needs a deeper inquiry as it was one of the major issues debated during the anti-Chinese movement. It is possible to say that the majority of the labourers who came in the early 1850s came under the contract labour system, which required them to serve the creditor for a certain period to pay their passage across the Pacific. This had been acknowledged by the Chinese Companies which imported workers in the early years of the Gold Rush.[82] However, labour contracts proved to be difficult to enforce. There were cases in which the contract labourers resisted their contract once they were in California. One such case was described by an eyewitness:

> The fifteen coolies I brought from China, and who were under a bond for two years with the party who engaged them, were no sooner ashore when they resisted their contract, and each turned his separate way. Nor would the authorities interfere when the case was reported ...[83]

The system was discontinued because it was not legalised and because of public condemnation. When Senator George B. Tingley introduced in the California State Legislature a bill to make possible the enforcement of contracts by which labourers

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[78] Betty L. Sung, *Mountain of Gold* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1967), pp. 24–26.

[79] Borthwick was a continual traveller through the mines during the period of the fifties. His book abounds in illustration of Chinese mining life, other occupations, etc.

[80] Joint Special Congressional Committee, *Memorial Six Chinese Companies* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1877), pp. 14–19.

[81] See California, Senate, *Chinese Immigration: the Social Moral and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration,* Testimony taken before a Committee of the Senate of the State of California, Sacramento, April 1, 1876.

[82] Chinese Six Companies, Memorial to the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, 1870, Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco.

[83] Edward Lucatt, *Roving in the Pacific 1837–1849,* vol. 2, (London: n.p., 1851), p. 363.

could sell their services to employers for periods of ten years or less at fixed wages, there was strong public protest and the bill was defeated after bitter debate.[84] The white population of California opposed the practise of any system of slavery, reflecting the growing division between North and South in the 1850s. Most of the white population hoped to create a free society in California.

The labourers who came in the latter part of the 1850s were believed to come by means of the credit-ticket system. By this system passage was advanced to the emigrant in a Chinese port by merchant brokers set up in Hong Kong. After reaching his destination, the debtor was expected to repay this debt out of his future earnings. This was different from the contract labour system whereby the labourer was expected to serve a specified period of time.[85] However, the repayment of the debts was collected by connecting firms in San Francisco.[86]

Based on the implementation of the credit-ticket system as practised in South-east Asia, creditors were also responsible for finding the employment for the new immigrants.[87] Contractors normally informed the Chinese Companies when they needed such manpower. Construction companies relied on the Chinese Companies in San Francisco for the supply of manpower needed for construction projects. Some form of arrangement was worked out between the three parties — the labourers, the Chinese Companies and the construction companies — for the repayment of the debts. Without credit, the labourer could not have reached California; without any arrangement with construction companies for the guarantee of repayment, manpower could have not been supplied. Therefore the bondage between the labourer and the Chinese Companies existed as long as the debt was not settled.

There was another group which belonged to the labour class, known as coolies. It is difficult to give an exact definition of the word as it was differently used by writers. A contemporary defined coolie as one who was pressed into service by coercion. The supply of coolies came chiefly from several sources. Some were persons who had been kidnapped. Some were prisoners taken in clan fights, while others were people who had been tricked into gambling and then surrendering their persons in payment. At the coolie depots or barracoons, the coolie was forced to sign a contract for a period of service.[88] It is also difficult to distinguish coolies from other Chinese labourers in California because of a lack of documentary evidence.

The third group of Chinese immigrants was the relatively few Chinese women.

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[84]Governor Bigler, Senator Philip Roach and others opposed further entrance of Chinese into this country on racial grounds. See Philip Roach, Statements recorded for H.H. Bancroft, n.d., Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[85]George F. Seward, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–150.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Persia C. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[88]This group of labourers was common in Peru, Cuba and in some of the British colonies. The labourer was sold to an employer at the port. He then became indebted to the employer and repaid his debt to him. This system was also commonly designated as the "pig business". See Percia C. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 94; Thomas W. Chinn, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Various sources frequently registered the number of Chinese miners during the 1850s. In the fall of 1851, the editor of the Mokelumne *Calaveras Chronicle* spotted in the vicinity of Jackson "several Chinese camps, with a population of Celestials estimated at two thousand souls".[99] The Sacramento *Daily Union* estimated on October 10, 1855 that 20,000 out of 36,557 Chinese on the Pacific Coast mined in the California gold region. Thirty thousand out of 48,391 Chinese worked the mines by the end of 1860, according to the calculation of Chinese merchants in San Francisco.[100]

In the northern mines Chinese settlements were in Goodyear's Bar, Coloma, Palcerville, Dutch Flat, Nevada City, Grass Valley, and Auburn. Among the biggest were those in Weaverville, Oroville and Marysville.[101] Chinese were also numerous in the southern mines. Several thousand settled in Chinese Camp, some ten miles south of Sonora. As the Chinese were gradually driven from other camps in the area, they also congregated in towns such as Bear Valley, Sonora, Coulterville, Mokelumne Hill, Angel's Camp, Hernitos, Knight's Ferry and Columbia.[102] Chinese settlements in the mines were of two distinct types. First there were the numerous camps, located generally on the banks of rivers and their branches. Then there were the Chinatowns, forming parts of various towns in the mining region. In the mines Chinese worked either as individuals or, more commonly, as members of companies, varied in size from fifty to five hundred men. These large groups travelled from digging to digging in the gold region. Upon arrival at the mines, they were usually directed in their attention to old claims, already deserted as "worthless" by white miners.[103] The miners, viewing the Chinese anxiety to work old, abandoned claims, were at first only too willing to sell the old areas already worked out.[104] The Chinese made these claims productive. This aroused envy and antagonism among the white miners, a feeling that later was responsible for many acts of oppression against the Chinese groups in the mines.

A number of observers stated that people from each particular region in Kwangtung Province tended to live and work together. Feuds over mining rights occurred frequently between these groups.[105] An eyewitness gave the following

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[99] New York Herald, October 27, 1851 (quoting Mokelumne *Calaveras Chronicle*), see also Frederick F. Low, Transcript of interview conducted by H.H. Bancroft re foreign immigrants, particularly Chinese, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[100] California, Legislature, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Relative to the Chinese Population of the State of California,* Appendix B, Brooks, Appendix to the opening statement, p. 73.

[101] See James M. Hutchings, Diaries May 1848—1855, described Chinese mining camps, 1851 and 1855, Hutchings Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[102] *Ibid.;* see also California, Legislature, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Relative to the Chinese Population of the State of California,* passim.

[103] See C.W. Haskins, *The Argonauts of California: Being the Reminiscences of Scenes and Incidents that Occurred in California in Early Mining Days* (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1890), p. 189; California, Senate, *Chinese Immigration: The Social, Moral and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration, Testimony Taken Before a Committee of the State of California* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1876), pp. 239—242.

[104] *Ibid.;* see also Stan Steiner, *Fusang: The Chinese who Built America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 118—120.

[105] James M. Hutchings, "Pictorial Letter Sheets," 1855, Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco.

There were a number of reasons for the disparity in numbers. There was a strong sentiment in China against any respectable women leaving home even with her husband. Chinese customs held that, ideally, a wife should remain in the household of her husband's parents even in the event that her husband went abroad. Should his parents die in his absence, the wife was expected to perform the burial and mourning rites.[89] The labourers generally were not able to bring their families with them due to economic reasons. The type of work they were engaged in, mining, railroad building, reclamation, and agriculture, was migratory and temporary. It was the merchants, or those with established occupations, who had the means to bring their spouses. The number of women was therefore relatively small. Other than the respectable wives, female immigrants for the most part were women of the working class or women of disreputable character.[90] The presence of a great number of males invited the traffic in prostitutes, which certain Chinese found to be very profitable business.

It was a common practice in China for poor peasants to sell their daughters who would then be forced into prostitutions or sold as bondage servants. One of these unfortunate women recalled her past, how her father sold her to one man. Later, she was sold to another buyer, a Chinese lady. She was brought to San Francisco together with a group of young Chinese women. All these girls were forced into prostitution in San Francisco's Chinatown. Before she was rescued by a Presbyterian missionary, she was sold as a domestic servant to a white family.[91] An old Chinese man in his account mentioned a number of leading brothels owned by Chinese in California's Chinatowns. The call girls were brought from China, and tongs or Chinese secret societies were hired to secure the business.[92]

In the social stratification of Chinese immigrant society in California merchants were at the apex. They enjoyed both power and status in the various Chinese institutions. They easily assumed a position of dominance on the three levels of clan association, district association and the Chinese Companies. As elders within the associations they controlled all decision-making which affected the group as a whole. As the Chinese population grew, merchants with their superior wealth and education received additional status by assuming positions as spokesmen who represented the community to the outside. Among the labour class, those who came on their own enjoyed greater freedom than indentured immigrants, who had debts to be paid and obligations to be fulfilled. The coolies and the women who were forced into prostitution were considered to be at the lowest strata.

Population Distribution and Economic Activities

Throughout the decade, Chinese population in California was concentrated

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[89] Wen Yen Tsao, "The Chinese Family from Customary Law to Positive Law," *Hastings Law Journal* 17 (May 1966), pp. 727–730; see also Chinese American Resources Oral History Composite, ROHO, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[90] "Memorial From Representative Chinamen in America," Collections of the Rare Books Room, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco.

[91] Lilac Chen, Transcript of interview conducted by H.H. Bandroft, 1887, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[92] Big Pete, Statement recorded for H.H. Bancroft, n.d., Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

almost entirely in the counties of Northern California, as shown in Table 3. This was inevitable for several reasons. In the first place San Francisco was the port of entry into California for ships from China.[93] The agencies which were responsible for providing the passage, shelter and employment were all operating from San Francisco. In the second place all the mining areas of the 1850s were in the northern region of California. The geographical area of greatest interest was called the Mother Lode Country, an area of intrusive deposits of gold ore and associate quartz in a belt 120 miles in length extending north-northwest along the lower flanks of the Sierra Nevada for about 300 miles from Mariposa. Subsidiary areas included the "Northern Diggings," which extended north-eastward from the northern end of the Mother Lode for about 50 miles toward the crest of the range, and the area about Shasta City mining camp in the foothills of the Siskiyous west of Redding.[94]

Most of the early development projects reclamation, building construction, wagon reads, etc. — were concentrated in the northern counties. These projects employed a considerable number of Chinese labourers. This added to the concentration of Chinese settlements in the north. Southern counties did not have many Chinese settlements until the railroad brought them in.[95]

Almost seventy per cent of the immigrants settled in isolated communities in the mining areas, while the other thirty per cent scattered in the valley areas, in the cities and towns, and engaged in various activities.[96]

Chinese in the Mining region

From San Francisco the Chinese usually travelled by boat to Stockton if they were going to the southern mines on the tributaries of the San Joaquin, or via Sacramento for the northern mines on the Sacramento River tributaries. If the Chinese wished to try their luck at the northern mines on the Feather and Yuba Rivers, they proceeded further up the Sacramento River to Marysville.[97] Chinese also appeared on the scene when gold was discovered in the Trinity County area in the early 1850's. In 1853, they first appeared in Shasta County on their way to the new mines.[98]

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[93]William Speer, "An Humble Plea Addressed to the Legislature of California in Behalf of the Immigrants From the Empire of China to This State," 1856, William Speer Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also Casper Thomas Hopkins, Notes on "Shipping and Chinese Immigration into California," Casper Thomas Hopkins Autobiograph, 1885, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[94]W.W. Robinson, *Land in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), pp. 135–136.

[95]The Chinese population began to disperse only after the construction of the continental railroad, their expulsion from the California gold mines and after the implementation of new development projects in the southern counties.

[96]William Speer, "An Humble Plea Addressed to the Legislature of California in Behalf of the Immigrants from the Empire of China to this State", 1856, William Speer Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[97]William Speer, "An Humbel Plea Addressed to the Legislature of California in behalf of the Immigrants from the Empire of China to this State," 1856, William Speer Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[98]Shasta *Courier,* February 2, 3, 10, 1853.

TABLE 3

CHINESE DISTRIBUTION IN CALIFORNIA 1860

Counties	Chinese	Total
Alameda	193	8,947
Amador	2,568	10,930
Butte	2,177	12,106
Calaveras	3,657	16,299
Del Norte	338	1,993
N Dorado	4,762	20,562
Fresno	309	4,605
Humboldt	37	2,694
Kern	....	....
Klamath	533	1,803
Los Angeles	11	11,333
Marin	4	3,334
Mariposa	1,843	6,243
Mendocino	5	3,967
Monterey	6	4,739
Napa	17	5,521
Nevada	3,147	16,446
Placer	2,392	13,270
Plumas	399	4,363
Sacramento	1,731	24,142
San Francisco	2,719	56,802
San Joaquin	139	9,435
San Mateo	6	3,214
Santa Clara	22	11,912
Santa Cruz	6	4,944
Shasta	415	4,360
Sierra	2,208	11,387
Siskiyou	515	7,629
Solano	14	7,169
Sonoma	51	11,867
Stanislaus	192	2,245
Tehama	104	4,044
Trinity	1,638	5,125
Tulare	13	4,638
Tuolumne	1,962	16,229
Yolo	6	4,716
Yuba	1,781	13,668

Source: U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population at the Tenth Census,* 1880, Report of the California State Bureau of Labour Statistics (Sacramento, 1904), p. 73.

account:

> The battle originated in sectional hatred and clannish differences brought from their native land, which gradually increased, so that all endeavors by their leaders of Americans to settle them amicably, were in vain ... On the afternoon of July 15th, 1854, the two factions assembled, one called the small party, and numbering about one hundred and thirty; the other called the large party and numbering nearly four hundred ... the parties were arranged on opposite sides of the gulch. Much defiant language was used ... Americans were the spectators shouting and cheering. Ten people were killed in the fights. The corpses were cremated after a funeral procession with music and banners.[106]

A number of conclusions could be drawn from the above passage. Old feuds starting in China often were renewed in the mining region. A later echo of those conflicts is to be seen in the tong organizations formed in the towns of the Pacific Coast. The whites did not interfere in clashes that would not bring any benefit to them. Finally the funeral procession gave an insight into the tenacity with which Chinese maintained their particular customs and rites even in a wild, strange land.

Mining was not the only occupation in which the Chinese in the mining region were interested. The heavy tax imposed on foreign miners, the exclusion from a number of the diggings, the various discriminatory laws enacted by miners' committees compelled a number of them to enter lines of work in which they proved to be particularly well adapted.

Many of the Chinese hired out to whites for construction jobs in the mines, such as digging tunnels and ditches. A report stated that:

> They were hired first in Placer mining, and then in drift digging to some extent, and finally in hydraulic mining to very greater advantage...[107]

Some were employed as cooks or servants.[108] Other Chinese worked for their compatriots or Chinese companies. One observer noted that among the Chinese miners, "... were Chinamen of the better class ... who no doubt directed the work and paid the common men very poor wages, poor at least for California."[109]

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[106] *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44; see also Thomas Forbes to (friend), March 15, 1850, describing a Chinese funeral, Gold Rush Letters 1849–1852, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[107] U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* 44th Cong., 2nd sess., 1877, Senate Report 689, p. 1103.

[108] California, Legislature, Special Committee on Chinese Immigration, *Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral and Political Effect* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1878), pp. 220–221.

[109] This was continued throughout the 1860s. Chinese companies came into the mining districts and purchased old claims, tailing residues for reworking. The bulk of these companies enjoyed fifteen to twenty workers and owned a claim valued at f 2,000 to f 3,000, exclusive of equipment. See J.D. Borthwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–217; Timothy C. Osborn, Journal, December 26, 1850, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

But, in whatever occupation the Chinamen engaged, whether it was an honest one or not, he was bound sooner or later to encounter opposition from the whites. Whether in the mining region, in San Francisco or in the inland river towns, antagonism toward him was increasing in force. Why? The simple reason is the existence of nativist and racist elements in white American society.

Fishing Industry

The Foreign Miners' License drove a number of Chinese out of the mines. Some returned to the cities and engaged in various occupations. Others turned to the fishing industry. But as the Chinese fishing industry prospered, hostilities began to grow. The white fishermen prevented the Chinese from using drift net and fyke nets, because the whites wanted to exclude the Chinese from inshore fishing. In later years, the pressure of the white fishermen's union limited the Chinese to a minor part in the market fishing in San Francisco Bay. They were also pretty well excluded from the salmon industry.[110] In 1860 a tax of four dollars per month was laid only on Chinese fishermen, to be enforced by the seizure of fish, boat and property.[111] More drastic measures were taken in later years, the purpose of which was to discriminate against and exclude the Chinese.[112]

Labourers in Construction projects

In the early years of American administration, there were few Chinese engaged in the trades. Apparently there were some shoemakers, tailors, cooks and general labourers.[113] Later in the 1850s Chinese were employed in various construction projects. Due to the gold rush, there was a great shortage of labour; Chinese were employed in building houses in San Francisco and other booming cities. One correspondent wrote:

> From early morning until late in the evening these industrious men are engaged in their occupation of house builders. Chinese stone masons and labourers brought from China under contract were used to erect a granite building at California and Montgomery Streets.[114]

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[110] See Robert F.G. Sapier, "Food Habits of the Nineteenth Century California Chinese, *"California Historical Society Quarterly,* California Fisheries," *East-West, The Chinese American Journal* (January 22, 1969), p. 5.

[111] California, *Statutes* (Sacramento: State Printer 1860) p. 307. Later, Chinese fishermen were excluded from fishing by a law excluding aliens ineligible for citizenships from obtaining license.

[112] Upon complaint of the Italians, Greeks and Dalmations, who somewhat later comprised a majority of the fishermen about San Francisco, a law was passed regulating the size of the small meshed shrimp nets chiefly used by the Chinese. The Legislature passed another law requiring Fisherman engaged in the shrimp industry to take a license of two dollars and a half a month. *Daily Alta California,* Jan. 2, 1876; California, *Statutes* (Sacramento: State Printer, 1887), Section 435, Penal Code.

[113] San Francisco *Daily Pacific Press,* August 22, 1850, carried an advertisement offering various Chinese for hire including two cooks, one shoemaker, one tailor and one servant.

[114] Etienne Derbec, *A French Journalist in the California Gold Rush* (Georgetown, Calif., 1864), p. 170. Letter in which the passage is found dated December 1, 1850.

Their hours of labour were from sunrise to sunset with one hour off for lunch. Daily allowance for each man was one half pound of rice and one fourth pound of fish or thier equivalent. Pay was one dollar per day of work.[115] As the population in San Francisco and California increased, more local construction talent became available. Chinese construction workers gradually faded into the background.

One of the earliest railroad construction companies to employ Chinese was the California Central Railroad. The Sacramento *Union* stated that Chinese were employed because white workers left for the gold fields of the Fraser River.[116] A number of Chinese labourers were also employed in the construction of the San Jose Railroad in 1860.[117] In fact almost all the state railroad projects of the 1850s employed Chinese labourers.

Chinese were also used in all types of construction work requiring manual labour, in building wagon roads, in levelling building stites, bridges, developing the San Francisco port, etc. Chinese helped build levees in the delta to reclaim the swamps from the Sacramento River.[118] It was their experience and skill in engineering and hydrology that made possible the building of the levees, irrigation system and waterways.

The Chinese labour force was also used in the agricultural sector. Californian farmers began looking at the use of Chinese on the farms as early as 1848,[119] and some Chinese labour was used in the 1850s.[120] At that time there was a serious labour shortage in the state. One farmer related how difficult it was to hire labour to harvest his large wheat crop. He continued his story:

> I then went to a Chinaman and told him that I wanted to contract for binding and shocking wheat ... I made the contract at so much per acre ... Several hundred of them came. We had one or two hundred acres that had been reaped, and needed putting up very badly, and the next morning it was all in shock. The Chinamen did the work that night. They did the work well and faithfully.[121]

The number of Chinese agricultural labourers increased after 1852, when Chinese

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[115] *Daily Alta California,* August 28, 1852.

[116] Sacramento *Union,* June 15, 1858.

[117] Ira B. Cross, *A History of the Labour Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), p. 14.

[118] The high point of Chinese participation in this work was in the 1860s. The Chinese constructed miles of levees, dikes and ditches, making some 2,192,505 acres of reclaimed land available for useful production. See U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* 44th Cong., 2nd sess., 1876—1877, Senate Report 689, pp. 441, 54.

[119] *Ibid.,* pp. 57, 58.

[120] Franklin Tuthill, *History of California* (San Francisco, 1866), p. 375.

[121] U.S., Congress, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration,* 44th Congress, 2nd mess:, 1877, Senate Report 689, p. 440.

were excluded from some of the mines and after the reinforcement of the Foreign Miners' Tax.[122]

Participation in business activities

In business, whether in the cities or in the mining towns, the Chinese avoided competition with Americans and Europeans. Chinese merchants engaged in some mercantile pursuits, however, trading in silks, shawls and other oriental products. Many of those who established bars and restaurants were also successful, because they served oriental dishes and charged much less (by almost one-half) than ordinary restaurants operated by Americans or other foreigners.[123]

In 1852 the *Daily Alta California* lamented "... a large number of the Chinese (have) left ... At one time nearly all the restaurants in the city were conducted by the Chinese."[124] These Chinese restaurants dropped away one by one until by 1854 there were none in the city besides that in the Chinatowns.

Besides working as domestic servants and cooks, many Chinese found laundry work profitable. In 1850 the *Daily Alta California* announced Chinese launched the first laundry business. In the 1850s Chinese laundries could be found almost in every Chinatown.[125]

Several of the major occupations in which the Chinese were employed have been mentioned. As the years passed their employment became more diversified. The wages received by the Chinese varied with the time, place and occupation. But the wages they received were generally low compared to the average wage of a white labourer. They were generally oppressed by both the Chinese contractors and by the white employers.

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[122]Chinese continued to supply the agricultural and farm labour force throughout the 1860s and 1870s until they were forced to leave the farms.

[123]Frederick F. Low, "Chinese Immigration," Transcript of interview conducted by H.H. Bancroft, n.d., Bancroft Library University of California, Berkeley.

[124]*Daily Alta California,* February 21, 1852.

[125]San Francisco *The Wide West,* April 15, 1854.