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Abschlussprüfung im Master North American Studies

# Master Thesis

The Road to Exclusion – Anti-Chinese Sentiment in California,  
1864-1882

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# 1. Introduction

When the first Chinese miners arrived in California, they named the land *Jīnshān* (金山), which translates to “Gold Mountain.” The name references the precious metal that brought so many to the state in the California Gold Rush. Beyond its literal translation, it also carries the notion of prosperity and a better future. Many Chinese migrants crossed the Pacific to seek their fortune in the United States. Some returned to China with their savings. Others stayed in California, starting families, founding communities and establishing businesses. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, California’s population surged as people from across the United States and the world over traveled to the state in search of opportunities. But not all of them were met with open arms. Right from the start, California’s Chinese were the victims of discriminatory laws and racism, which intensified as California’s economy began to struggle in the 1870s. In 1882, the United States passed “An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese”, better known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, that banned all Chinese laborers from entering the country. It was the first time the nation banned migrants of a specific nationality. With this thesis, I want to understand why this antagonism towards Chinese migrants developed, what caused it and what it can teach us about antagonism against other migrant groups.

One model that seeks to explain the mechanics behind the development of discrimination is Split Labor Market Theory by sociologist Edna Bonacich. Bonacich posits that antagonism arises when two groups of workers vie for the same jobs, but are paid at different rates. She constructs a triangular model consisting of the two laborer groups and the business owner class. These groups all pursue their own goals. Tensions between them arise when these goals intersect. In this model, discrimination is not the result of blind prejudice or malintent, but the consequence of a market system that places groups of workers in competition against each other. I want to apply Bonacich’s model to the Californian movement for Chinese exclusion to see if the situation reflects her conclusions. By analyzing anti-Chinese rhetoric from the era leading up to the Exclusion Act, I test the thesis that anti-Chinese sentiment was primarily motivated by labor competition.

Chinese migrants started mainly as independent gold miners, but gradually began expanding into other branches of California's economy, like agriculture, manufacturing, the service industry and the railroads. At the same time, the state's economy developed from independent entrepreneurs towards larger consolidated corporations with a growing demand for labor. The largest and most prominent among these was the Central Pacific Railroad Company (CPRR) that started construction on the transcontinental railroad to connect California to the metropolises of the East. The year 1864, when the CPRR hired its first Chinese crews, marks the beginning of my time frame of analysis. I trace California's economic development and analyze anti-Chinese sentiment in the crucial 18 years leading up to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

The most important source for my primary analysis is the *Placer Herald*, a newspaper published in the Gold Rush town of Auburn, located along the route of the transcontinental railroad at the edge of California's Sierra Nevada mountain range. The newspaper is an excellent source for several reasons. Auburn is located in a rural mining district, yet also relatively close to Sacramento, one of California's early industrial centers and an important population hub for the state's Chinese migrants. The newspaper was staffed by firm Democrats, several of whom held important political offices before, during and after the timeframe under investigation. While both Republicans and Democrats engaged in anti-Chinese politics, the Democrats were fiercer in their rhetoric and their demands. This political leaning also finds its way into the *Herald* and provides valuable material to gain insight into the facets of anti-Chinese rhetoric. In addition to the *Placer Herald*, I factor in other sources like the writings of corporate officials and politicians to gather a comprehensive overview of the labor market dynamic.

My thesis is structured into three parts. The first part situates my project within the discipline of North American Studies and introduces Split Labor Market Theory as a frame of analysis. I trace the history of academic research on Chinese migration to the United States and the challenges and opportunities that the field presents. Based on the foundational text by Edna Bonacich and its specific application to California's economic structure by Terry E. Boswell, I outline the key points of Split Labor Market Theory as it relates to my topic.

The second part establishes the historical context of my project. This part begins with an inquiry into the Chinese workers that came to the United States. I elaborate on the conditions in the Guangdong province where most of them emigrated from and outline how they lived and worked in California. Subsequently, I investigate California's economic development from the early days of the Gold Rush until 1882, with a primary focus on the mining and railroad sectors. Here, I showcase how macroeconomic changes affected California's working class and its Chinese population in particular.

The primary source analysis constitutes the third and most extensive part of my thesis. In this part, I investigate contemporary documents and engage in close readings and discourse analysis to see how labor market dynamics affected anti-Chinese discourse in the *Placer Herald* and beyond. I begin by investigating the coverage of relationships and conflicts between European-American workers and two groups of Chinese migrants; firstly, laborers that competed for jobs within the working class and secondly, higher class Chinese individuals that did not directly take part in this competition. I subsequently analyze relationships between workers and employers with a focus on working-class resentments towards the emerging industrial monopolies and on the resulting internal conflicts that emerged between Chinese and white workers. Following up on the investigation of the three groups of Bonacich's economic model, I move beyond economic competition and towards two chapters that deal with cultural differences. These chapters investigate sociopolitical factors that hindered the emergence of interethnic working class solidarity between Chinese and white workers. The first of these chapters deals with stereotypes about Chinese ways of life and clashing gender notions between the two groups, while the second is concerned with the entanglement of Chinese exclusion in the West with abolition and racial hierarchies in the South, as America debated the implications of free labor in the antebellum era.

By combining an investigation of the historic context with a discourse analysis of selected sources, I am able to ascertain how the anti-Chinese movement was motivated by economic concerns and workers' fear of losing their job security. The aim here is not to excuse the movement, but to understand its causes and to see what could have been done to prevent it. A key theme of my analysis is solidarity. I want to understand the reasons that united

workers to engage in collective action, and the hindrances that set them apart and caused internal conflicts. The fear of migrants “stealing” jobs is not unique to Chinese migrants in California. It’s a sentiment that is echoed across anti-migration movements in many different countries and time periods. The details are different, but certain patterns mirror each other. The significant advantage of a systemic frame of analysis like Split Labor Market Theory is that learning more about one of these cases also teaches us about others, as we gain a better understanding of the dynamics at work. At the core of this endeavor lies the aspiration to better understand the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized communities and how these challenges can be overcome.

# PART ONE - THEORY

## 2. Research History

Researching Chinese American history, particularly during the period of significant migration in the late 19th century, presents unique challenges. A primary difficulty is the inaccessibility of source materials. This inaccessibility stems not only from the language barrier but also from the scarcity of records. For example, thousands of Chinese migrants built the transcontinental railroad. Yet, astonishingly, not a single record authored by a Chinese worker has been discovered.<sup>1</sup> Most Chinese individuals' names have been lost or distorted in historical records because of record keepers' unfamiliarity with Cantonese naming conventions, which lead to numerous variations and inaccuracies in the documentation. These inaccuracies extend to official records such as the U.S. Census, where statistics on the Chinese population are considered unreliable by historians - yet, they agree that these records often represent the best available data.<sup>2</sup> In approaching this field, researchers must remain acutely aware of these gaps and be mindful that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The lives of California's Chinese residents were undoubtedly rich and varied, even if they are not documented.

To overcome these challenges, scholars have employed creative and interdisciplinary methods. Some have explored the experiences of Chinese migrants in other countries, such as Peru and the West Indies, to draw parallels and gain insights into their lives in America. The Gold Rush in Victoria, Australia, has made for a particularly popular comparison due to its temporal proximity and structural similarities to the Gold Rush in California. Where written evidence is absent, archaeological investigations at sites where Chinese migrants lived and worked have provided valuable information, contributing significantly to our understanding of their community. These methodologies highlight the resourcefulness and creativity required in historical research, especially when dealing with under-documented and marginalized groups. The

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Sue Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), xx; xxix-xxxii.

study of Chinese American history, while fraught with challenges, continues to evolve as scholars find new ways to discover the past.

One and a half centuries of research history have provided their own share of discourse. Scholars have debated and continue to debate the demographic background of the Chinese migrants, the push and pull factors of their migration, their degree of intermingling with American society and countless other topics. The transcontinental railroad has been an especially popular topic, both because it is a milestone in the United States history but also because it combines a plethora of narratives in one project. The railroad connected a nation that was divided by the civil war, but also drove away the Native Americans that lived in its way. It is a feat of engineering, yet fraught with business scandals. It is celebrated as an American project, yet was largely built by Chinese migrants. Historians have produced countless interpretations that place the railroad somewhere between patriotic prodigy and colonial conquest.

These multifaceted narratives influence our understanding of the Chinese workers involved in these historical events. It is crucial, therefore, to critically examine how this knowledge has been generated and what perspectives have shaped it. In the absence of direct sources from the Chinese migrants themselves, much of our understanding is derived from contemporaneous accounts by white Americans. These sources, such as newspaper articles, are often highly partisan, biased, or even made-up, offering a skewed portrayal of the Chinese experience.<sup>3</sup> Mae M. Ngai, professor of history and Asian American studies at Columbia University, wrote that “[...] we know a lot more about what whites thought about Chinese labor than about Chinese labor itself.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is essential to evaluate these sources with a critical eye.

In this thesis, I aim to delve into the processes through which knowledge about Chinese migrants in California was generated. By analyzing the concerns and biases of California’s workers during this era, I intend to uncover how these factors influenced their perceptions of Chinese immigrants. Through this

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<sup>3</sup> Scott Zesch, “Chinese Los Angeles in 1870-1871: The Makings of a Massacre,” *Southern California Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 109–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41172418>, 112.

<sup>4</sup> Mae M. Ngai, “Chinese Gold Miners and the ‘Chinese Question’ in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria,” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (2015): 1082–1105, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav112>, 1083.



approach, we can gain a more nuanced view of both the historical era and the academic discourse that has evolved around it.

### 3. Split Labor Market Theory

To effectively fight systematic injustice, it is important to identify the root causes that promote such a dynamic. Split Labor Market Theory is a model that seeks to understand how discrimination develops when two distinct labor groups operate in the same market, but are paid at different rates. Developed by sociologist Edna Bonacich in her 1972 essay “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market,” the model identifies three separate factions that operate in such a market: the business class, the higher paid labor group and the lower paid labor group:

Business or Employers—This class aims at having as cheap and docile a labor force as possible to compete effectively with other businesses. If labor costs are too high (owing to such price determinants as unions), employers may turn to cheaper sources, importing overseas groups or using indigenous conquered populations [...].

Cheaper labor may be used to create a new industry having substantially lower labor costs than the rest of the labor market [...]. Or they may be used as strikebreakers or replacements to undercut a labor force trying to improve its bargaining position with business [...].

Higher Paid Labor—This class is very threatened by the introduction of cheaper labor into the market, fearing that it will either force them to leave the territory or reduce them to its level. If the labor market is split ethnically, the class antagonism takes the form of ethnic antagonism.<sup>5</sup>

Bonacich notes that she specifically uses the term antagonism to allow for the possibility of mutual conflict, rather than one merely superimposed by the dominant higher paid group.<sup>6</sup> The market pits these labor groups against each other in competition. Both threaten the other’s position. Antagonism in this model is not rooted in the prejudice or ignorance of individuals, but arises as a systematic consequence of the market structure. The advantage of such an analysis frame is that it elevates the focus above individual persons or institutions and instead makes visible the capitalistic power structures that

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<sup>5</sup> Edna Bonacich, “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market,” *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (October 1972): 547–59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2093450>, 553.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 549.

determine class relations.<sup>7</sup> This comprehensive approach allows for systemic insights that may also be applied to other groups in similar situations.

According to Split Labor Market Theory, discrimination manifests as a result from the intrinsic antagonism if the higher paid group manages to establish legal or social barriers that weaken the cheaper group's position. These can take the form of either exclusion, which prevents cheaper labor from participating in the labor market, or a caste-like system, which relegates cheaper laborers to a limited range of jobs in which they do not compete with the higher paid group.<sup>8</sup> The business class is profit-oriented and supports any measures that lower the price they have to pay for labor, which can mean different things depending on the situation. For example, the business class may support Chinese migrants to make the migration process easier and help them fight against violence, but turn against them when they unionize. In general, since conflict and increased competition between laborer groups lowers average wages, the business class profits from this conflict dynamic.<sup>9</sup> To further encourage lower wages, they may engage in anti-union strategies or rally for migration to increase the labor supply. Bonacich's model presupposes a slack labor market, where labor supply exceeds labor demand and workers therefore compete for available jobs. The lower paid group thus has the capability to undermine the higher paid group in this competition. In a tight labor market, where there are more job openings than available workers, this antagonism between the two laboring groups would not occur since workers would have more leverage, gaining increased bargaining power to vie for better wages and working conditions.

The reason for the existence of a market with two distinct, differently paid groups is an initial disparity in resources and motivation between the groups. Resources determine a group's leverage to negotiate for better wages, while motivations describe their ambition to improve working conditions over

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<sup>7</sup> Rudi Batzell, "Free Labour, Capitalism and the Anti-Slavery Origins of Chinese Exclusion in California in the 1870s," *Past & Present* 225, no. 1 (November 18, 2014): 143–86, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtu030>, 148f.

<sup>8</sup> Bonacich, "The Split Labor Market," 554f.

<sup>9</sup> Terry E. Boswell, "A Split Labor Market Analysis of Discrimination against Chinese Immigrants, 1850-1882," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 3 (June 1986): 352–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095307>, 354.

time. Bonacich names three factors that determine a labor group's resource level:

*Level of Living* - The current socio-economic condition of a group, in comparison to the opportunities presented by new labor prospects, serves as a determinant for the wage they are willing to accept. Essentially, those who are impoverished or disenfranchised are more likely to settle for lower wages. The present condition, which can be measured by indicators like wealth or quality of life, influences the individual's or group's relative bargaining power in the labor market. Even if the wages on offer are sub-par for the market as a whole, they may still be attractive to an impoverished population since they present a relative rise in living standards.

*Information* - A well-informed populace is more likely to make judicious decisions in the labor market. Informational asymmetry can lead to uninformed choices that adversely impact the workers, such as entering into disadvantageous contracts or falling prey to false promises. Deceptive advertising can further exacerbate this issue. A comprehensive understanding of economic opportunities enables a group's self-protection and provides for better negotiation conditions in the labor market.

*Political Resources* - The long-term development of a labor market is not solely controlled by economic forces but is also tied to political resources. This can range from collective bargaining and worker movements to policy support from the government, whether through support from the workers' country of origin or through representation in the destination country's government. Politically disenfranchised groups are more susceptible to exploitation, thus reinforcing the wage gap.<sup>10</sup>

These three factors have a hand in determining the bargaining power of a group and its individual members. The stronger a group is positioned in these categories, the better their ability to secure favorable conditions for themselves. Two additional, motivational factors come into play when looking at a temporary workforce that only intends to be part of the labor market for a certain period of time, as many Chinese workers did. Firstly, Bonacich posits

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<sup>10</sup> Bonacich, "Split Labor Market Theory", 549f.

that these groups have a larger tolerance for undesirable working conditions as a consequence of the transitory nature of their employment status. The workers perceive adverse conditions as fleeting hardships, thus making them more amenable to accepting lower wages. Additionally, many temporary workers, often men traveling alone, do not have to finance familial responsibilities such as housing and education for household members and are therefore able to accept lower wages. Secondly, Bonacich argues that temporary workers also exhibit a tendency to avoid long-term commitments and conflicts in the labor market. Given their short-term participation in the labor force, these individuals generally have no vested interest in extended negotiations or labor disputes that determine future working conditions. As a result, they are more willing to undercut established wage standards in the interest of securing immediate employment. This can make them prime candidates for serving as strikebreakers, undermining collective bargaining efforts and reinforcing existing wage gaps.<sup>11</sup> In addition to a disadvantage in resources, these workers therefore also have different goals and prefer short-term gains over long-term stable employment, which can cause them to undercut the more established group that is interested in the long term development of the labor market.

Notably, Bonacich argues that employer prejudice is not a factor that initially determines wages. Her determinants are fundamentally rational in nature, rather than driven by biases. She writes:

In sum, the prejudices of business do not determine the price of labor, darker-skinned or culturally different persons being paid less because of them. Rather, business tries to pay as little as possible for labor, regardless of ethnicity, and is held in check by the resources and motives of labor groups.<sup>12</sup>

and further notes that “[w]hite capitalists would gladly dispense with and undercut their white working-class brethren if they could, and have done so whenever they had the opportunity.”<sup>13</sup> While Bonacich acknowledges that resource differences often align with ethnic divisions, she contends that they are not necessarily intrinsic to them, citing the examples of women and prison labor

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 550f.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 553.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 557.

markets as divisions based on non-ethnic factors.<sup>14</sup> Subsequent research has called into question the argument that bias and discrimination are not initial factors in determining labor prices. For example, empirical studies have demonstrated the persistence of racial hiring bias based on stereotypes, even when qualifications between applicants are identical.<sup>15</sup> Such findings suggest that bias and stereotypes should not be excluded from labor market analyses. This notion is supported by author Terry E. Boswell in “A Split Labor Market Analysis of Discrimination Against Chinese Immigrants, 1850-1882.” Boswell applies the framework of Split Labor Market Theory to the specific context of Chinese workers in California, proposing modifications to better align the theory with the state’s historical economic conditions. He argues:

The discourse of racism is critical for a dynamic analysis of the reproduction of split labor market conditions because a self-perpetuating relationship exists between ethnic discrimination and racist ideologies. An initial ethnic difference in the cost of labor will not be continually reproduced under competitive market conditions unless workers continue to be ideologically identified.<sup>16</sup>

My thesis expands upon this argument by closely investigating anti-Chinese discourse to show how it emerged from the interplay of economic anxieties and preexisting stereotypes. By situating racist discourse within its socio-economic context, I aim to offer a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which discrimination against Chinese migrants was both generated and sustained. Improving our understanding of this dynamic helps us to visualize the challenges that Chinese migrants faced. Making abstract market mechanisms and their consequences tangible can shed light on the circumstances of marginalized groups, both historically and in contemporary contexts. By integrating Split Labor Market Theory with close readings of historical sources, I hope that my thesis can make a meaningful contribution to this discourse.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 552.

<sup>15</sup> cf. Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination,” *The American Economic Review* 94, no. 4 (September 2004): 991–1013, <https://doi.org/10.3386/w9873>; cf. Patrick Kline, Evan K. Rose, and Christopher R. Walters, “Systemic Discrimination among Large U.S. Employers,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 137, no. 4 (June 11, 2022): 1963–2036, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjac024>.

<sup>16</sup> Boswell, “Split Labor Market Analysis,” 354.

## PART TWO - HISTORY

### 4. California's Chinese Population

To understand the tensions that arose around Chinese migration, it is essential to be familiar with the population themselves. This chapter serves as an introduction to Chinese migration, covering the demographics of the migrant population and the way their life was structured in California. This short overview is necessarily an oversimplification and is intended only as a general introduction to a plethora of complex lives and persons.

#### 4.1 From Guangdong to Gold Mountain

The majority of 19th-century Chinese migrants in the United States came from the Guangdong Province in southeastern China, especially from the counties Enping, Kaiping, Taishan (then called Xinning) and Xinhui, collectively called the Siyi. The Siyi are located in the delta of the Pearl River and several other, smaller rivers, which provide a humid climate with fertile soil that promotes agriculture. Gordon Chang, author of *Ghosts on Gold Mountain*, describes the landscape as similar to that of the Mississippi River delta in the Southern United States. The people hailing from the Siyi region spoke a variety of different dialects that later became summarized under the umbrella term Cantonese. Most of them likely had a rudimentary level of education.<sup>17</sup> The geographic position of the Siyi region, a coastal river delta, naturally fostered a robust trade network. The people of this region were familiar with market economics, seafaring, and had occasional interactions with foreigners. This exposure to trade and commerce may have played a role in their subsequent migration patterns.<sup>18</sup>

In the mid-19th century, a confluence of events spurred significant emigration from China. Factors contributing to this exodus included overpopulation, famines, crop failures, the impacts of British colonialism and the Opium Wars, the Taiping Rebellion, and various internal conflicts within

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<sup>17</sup> Chang, *Gold Mountain*, 15-18.

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Chinese Labor Migrants to the Americas in the Nineteenth Century: An Inquiry into Who They Were and the World They Left Behind," essay, in *The Chinese and the Iron Road Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, ed. Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 42-54, 45f.

China. Faced with this instability, people sought better conditions in various destinations across the Pacific, including Canada, the United States, the British and Spanish West Indies, and Peru.<sup>19</sup>

Men made up the vast majority of Chinese migrants. The women who traveled to California often did so under duress as victims of forced prostitution. Their lives in California were fraught with hardship. Some managed to escape prostitution through marriage or by joining Christian missions, but many others died enslaved.<sup>20</sup> The federal Page Law of 1875 eventually banned the migration of prostitutes to the United States, but was in practice also used to ban almost all Chinese women from entering the country.<sup>21</sup> According to census data, California's Chinese population was between 92 and 96 percent male in the years between 1860 and 1890.<sup>22</sup> Unlike most women, the men that left for California were voluntary laborers. A portion of them had their passage partly funded by their families, indicating that they were not from the most destitute segments of Guangdong society. Another prevalent method was the credit ticket system. Under this arrangement, they entered contracts with creditors who financed their journey and were in exchange entitled to a portion of the migrant's earnings, until the agreed-upon debt was repaid.<sup>23</sup> Being familiar with the origins of the Chinese workforce helps us to better understand their role in California's economy. Their specific origins also influenced the way that groups of Chinese workers were organized in California.

#### 4.2 Life in California

Chinese migrants in California were part of a relatively complex social structure. They were organized into clans, which consisted of people with common ancestry or shared surnames; *tong*, which were fraternal organizations with

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid; 42-46; Batzell, "Free Labour," 154.

<sup>20</sup> Chang, *Gold Mountain*, 177-81.

<sup>21</sup> Chung, *Pursuit of Gold*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Welch, "Our Neighbors but Not Our Countrymen.: Christianity and the Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Victoria (Australia) and California," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13 (2004): 149-83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187656106793645204>, 170. As mentioned previously, census data about California's Chinese population may be inaccurate. Additionally, the data points only capture the gender ratio at the time the survey was taken. In the interim years, it may have fluctuated above or below the percentage given.

<sup>23</sup> Chang, *Gold Mountain*, 27-31.

members of various backgrounds, and *huigan*, which consisted of people from the same ethnic group, region, or who spoke the same dialect. Of these three, the *huigan* were the most important for the majority of migrants and became a key instrument for the organization of Chinese labor. Several *huigan* formed in California throughout the 1850s and 1860s and eventually consolidated into the Six Chinese Companies, which were the primary body of Chinese representation in California. At the ports of San Francisco, members of the Six Chinese Companies would receive migrants from their respective groups and provide them with food and housing until they found employment. In their headquarters, they offered medical services and some space for recreation and fraternization. The Six Chinese Companies also oversaw the payment of loans that migrants may have taken to finance their voyage. In many cases, they functioned as contractors that arranged employment for laborers belonging to their respective organization. Beyond these practical matters, the *huigan* also fulfilled important diplomatic functions. In the absence of official representation by the Chinese government, they acted as mediators in political matters concerning Chinese life in America. Lastly, if a Chinese migrant died in the United States the *huigan* organized the burial and handled the shipping of physical remains back to China.<sup>24</sup>

The majority of migrants did not intend to leave permanently, but wanted to send money back to their families in China while working abroad and then eventually return with a better economical standing. Their temporary stay also meant that they would be less interested in integration than many migrants from other countries.<sup>25</sup> Federal law also banned them from obtaining citizenship, which likely further disincentivized permanent integration.<sup>26</sup> Most Chinese migrants in California were unable to speak English. Those who did would often learn Chinese Pidgin English, a simplified contact language that

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<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen, "The Chinese Six Companies of San Francisco and the Smuggling of Chinese Immigrants across the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1882-1930.," *Journal of the Southwest* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 37-61, 38-44.

<sup>25</sup> Eric W. Fong and William T. Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics in California in the 1870s: An Intercounty Analysis," *Sociological Perspectives* 45, no. 2 (2002): 183-210, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2002.45.2.183>, 188.

<sup>26</sup> Chang, *Gold Mountain*, 33.



adapted English vocabulary to Cantonese grammar.<sup>27</sup> Workers tended to rent housing instead of purchasing land and were geographically mobile, moving between places whenever work opportunities became available.<sup>28</sup> Their flexibility meant that they would most likely not have strong ties and close personal relationships to the local, settled population. When Chinese migrants did settle, they typically resided in segregated Chinatowns. Most of these Chinatowns were relatively isolated from the rest of the town and fostered a self-contained community where Chinese workers lived and traded mostly among themselves.<sup>29</sup> The perception of Chinatowns in the press was frequently negative, painting them as unsanitary, unfamiliar, and unsafe.<sup>30</sup> This portrayal discouraged the white population from visiting these areas, thus further deepening the divide.

Chinatowns sometimes became sites of anti-Chinese violence. The most extreme case was the Los Angeles massacre of 1871, wherein a mob of 500 people demolished the town's Chinese quarter and killed between 18 and 21 victims, amounting to a tenth of the Chinese population of Los Angeles at that time.<sup>31</sup> This example and others like it show that anti-Chinese discrimination

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<sup>27</sup> Mae M. Ngai, "A Slight Knowledge of the Barbarian Language': Chinese Interpreters in Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 30, no. 2 (Winter 1, 2011): 5–32, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerethnhist.30.2.0005>, 8f; 25f.

<sup>28</sup> J. Ryan Kennedy and Eric J. Guiry, "Exploring Railroad Impacts on Meat Trade: An Isotopic Investigation of Meat Sourcing and Animal Husbandry at Chinese Diaspora Sites in the American West," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 27, no. 2 (May 11, 2022): 393–423, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10761-022-00663-6>, 397; Welch, "Christianity and the Chinese," 158.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Denver, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2011), 172; Kenneth H. Marcus and Yong Chen, "Inside and Outside Chinatown: Chinese Elites in Exclusion Era California," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (August 2011): 369–400, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2011.80.3.369>, 372; Arthur Sommers, John Knox, and April McDonald-Loomis, *Early Auburn* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 74f. Sommers, Knox and McDonald-Loomis note that the Chinatown in Auburn, the town where the *Placer Herald* was published, was an exception to the rule and was located relatively centrally. Marcus and Chen contend that members of the upper echelons of Chinese American society were considerably less segregated from California's white population than most Chinese laborers. Their argument is expressed in more detail in chapter 7.2.

<sup>30</sup> R. Scott Baxter, "The Response of California's Chinese Populations to the Anti-Chinese Movement," *Historical Archaeology* 42, no. 3 (2008): 29–36, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03377097>, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Zesch, "Chinese Los Angeles," 139–142; Victor Jew, "The Anti-Chinese Massacre of 1871 and Its Strange Career," essay, in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed. William Deverell and Greg Hise (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014), 110–28, 110; 124. The authors cite varying

did not spontaneously manifest with the 1882 Exclusion Act, but emerged from a long and storied history. Some Chinese individuals resisted against the exclusion movement by writing letters to newspapers, confronting members of the anti-Chinese movement and challenging discriminatory laws in courts.<sup>32</sup> California and its municipalities enacted a number of laws and taxes against Chinese Californians starting in the Gold Rush era. Some were not explicitly biased against Chinese migrants, but were applied in a discriminating way that specifically targeted them.<sup>33</sup> Both the Republican and the Democratic party adopted an anti-Chinese stance, though the latter was more fervent. Additionally, 1877 saw the emergence of the Workingmen's Party of California, led by Irish immigrant Denis Kearney. The party emerged from a series of labor strikes and combined criticisms of corporate power and inequality with a radical anti-Chinese stance through its populist platform. The Workingmen quickly gained a foothold in California municipalities, especially in urban areas, but eventually split into two factions and lost much of their influence. Nonetheless, they had a considerable impact on anti-Chinese politics and were a key contributor to the passage of the Exclusion Act.<sup>34</sup> Their stance shows the close intermingling of labor concerns with the call for Chinese exclusion. The following chapter takes a closer look at how California's industrializing economy shaped the roles of Chinese and white workers.

## 5. California's Economic Development

Labor relations do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by the surrounding economic landscape. During the period spanning the mid-1860s to the early 1880s, California experienced a series of macroeconomic shifts that

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death tolls. Scott Zesch lists 18 victims, while Victor Jew writes of 19 to 21 and adds in a footnote that different sources mention between 15 and 21 victims.

<sup>32</sup> Baxter, "Response of California's Chinese," 32; Nancy Wey, "A History of Chinese Americans in California," essay, in *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*, ed. California Department of Parks and Recreation (Sacramento, CA: State of California - The Resources Agency, Department of Parks and Recreation, 1988), 103–58, 116.

<sup>33</sup> Scott Alan Carson, "Chinese Sojourn Labor and the American Transcontinental Railroad," *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 161, no. 1 (March 2005): 80–102, <https://doi.org/10.1628/0932456054254443>, 82-83; Wey, "Chinese Americans in California," 116.

<sup>34</sup> Batzell, "Free Labour," 143-46; Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 189-93.

fundamentally reshaped its labor dynamics and organizational structures. This chapter delves into three critical factors that played a key role in the state's transformation:

1. The evolution of mining from the relatively simple and accessible placer deposits to more complex methods. Over the course of the Gold Rush, California's miners turned from independent entrepreneurs to an industrialized working class that relied on capital-intensive employers.
2. The rise of the Central Pacific Railroad Company as a predominant employer in the region, which became a key catalyst for Chinese migration as the company sought labor for its expansive project.
3. The broader economic downturn of the 1870s, spurred by a national recession and the opening of California's economy to the Eastern states, which increased competition on the labor market.

### **5.1 From Pans to Paychecks: The Industrialization of California Gold**

The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848 marked the beginning of California's expansion, triggering a massive influx of gold seekers. In the late 1840s and early 1850s, the mining process was relatively straightforward, allowing prospective miners to strike success with little more than a pick, a pan, and the physical ability to work long hours.<sup>35</sup> Gold was primarily found in so-called placer deposits, alluvial concentrations on river banks where the precious ore could be extracted by hand in simple surface diggings.<sup>36</sup> Miners either worked as individuals or formed small groups, creating basic mining structures like cradles or sluices to enhance gold extraction.<sup>37</sup> The entrepreneurial nature of early mining fostered a competitive environment. Miners viewed each other as rivals and the era saw the passage of the first discriminatory legislation. Author Mark Kanazawa, who investigated anti-Chinese laws in the Gold Rush era, posits that the exclusion of foreign and especially Chinese miners was easier to rationalize, which made them

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<sup>35</sup> Karen Clay and Randall Jones, "Migrating to Riches? Evidence from the California Gold Rush," *The Journal of Economic History* 68, no. 4 (December 2008): 997–1027, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002205070800079x>, 999ff.

<sup>36</sup> Ngai, "Chinese Gold Miners," 1083.

<sup>37</sup> Clay and Jones, "Migrating to Riches," 1001.

vulnerable to discriminatory practices. The state established taxes and tariffs for foreigners entering California, as well as a \$20 monthly tax imposed on foreign miners. Many of these legislatures specifically targeted Chinese, Kanazawa argues. Some counties and districts also passed laws that explicitly banned Chinese from purchasing or working on mining claims.<sup>38</sup> As a result, mining in California became a two-class system, with white miners working the prime claims and Chinese either focusing on the less promising sites or taking over claims that white miners abandoned after most of the gold had been extracted.<sup>39</sup>

This split was further emphasized during the 1860s, when the mining trade underwent a significant shift. The depletion of easily accessible surface diggings meant that more complex methods had to be employed to reach the deep-seated ore. This circumstance caused a transition from independent placer mining to the more centralized and capital-intensive methods of hydraulic mining and lode mining. Technological advancements and the economies of scale allowed companies with financial resources to mine on an industrial magnitude.<sup>40</sup> Boswell describes the impact of the economic shift:

As early as 1859, with the discovery of the Comstock Lode in Nevada, the capital requirements of lode mining began to make mining an industrial occupation rather than the independent petty-commodity production associated with placer mining. An industrial revolution was taking place in a matter of decades.<sup>41</sup>

Mining transformed from an independent enterprise to one controlled by mining corporations with investors from urban centers.<sup>42</sup> This shift towards company-controlled mining turned the gold-seekers from entrepreneurs into a large proletarian working class that depended on employers and investors. Enterprises reached tipping points as wages offered by companies began to surpass independent earnings achievable through placer mining. Most Chinese miners, however, were initially excluded from this transformation, both because

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 03 (September 2005): 779–805, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050705000288>, 782–87.

<sup>39</sup> Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man*, 156; Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 188.

<sup>40</sup> Kanazawa, "Anti-Chinese Legislation," 782.

<sup>41</sup> Boswell, "Split Labor Market Analysis," 360.

<sup>42</sup> Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 7.

the new industrial methods required skilled labor and because discriminatory practices kept them out of the sector. A series of mineworker strikes from 1867 to 1869 entangled anti-company protests with anti-Chinese sentiments, which further increased the precariousness of their situation.<sup>43</sup> As a result, the number of Chinese miners declined over the course of the 1860s. While the mining sector employed more than 70% of California's Chinese workforce in 1860, that number dropped to only 46% in rural areas and a third overall by 1870.<sup>44</sup> The remaining Chinese miners either worked abandoned claims or engaged in tertiary semiskilled and unskilled jobs. These jobs paid at a lower rate and were thus unattractive to whites. Chinese workers in these mining subsectors earned half as much or less compared to their white counterparts.<sup>45</sup> The mining sector of the 50s and 60s resembled the caste-like system of segregation that Bonacich describes, where there is a clear hierarchy that restricts the lower paid group to undesirable jobs.

## **5.2 Changing Tracks: Chinese Labor and the Railroad**

The reason for the decline of Chinese numbers in mining lies not only in developments within the sector, but also in the emergence of another massive employment sector in the 1860s: The railroad, first and foremost among them the CPRR. Entrepreneurs had been captivated by the prospect of a transcontinental railroad since the 1840s, but it was the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859 that catalyzed the transformation of these interests into concrete plans.<sup>46</sup> The construction of this monumental project was divided between two companies: The Union Pacific Railroad (UP), building westwards from Omaha, Nebraska, and the CPRR, commencing its journey eastwards from Sacramento, California.

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<sup>43</sup> Boswell, "Split Labor Market Analysis," 356-60.

<sup>44</sup> Sucheng Chan, "Chinese Livelihood in Rural California. The Impact of Economic Change, 1860-1880," essay, in *Working People of California*, ed. Daniel Cornford (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 57-82, 66f.

<sup>45</sup> Ngai, "Chinese Gold Miners," 1094; Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 188.

<sup>46</sup> Xavier Duran, "The First U.S. Transcontinental Railroad: Expected Profits and Government Intervention," *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 1 (March 2013): 177-200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050713000065>, 196.

The CPRR arguably faced a significantly more challenging undertaking compared to its counterpart. While the UP laid tracks across the relatively straightforward terrain of the Great Plains, the CPRR had to navigate through the rugged, mountainous landscape and the harsh weather conditions of the Sierra Nevadas.<sup>47</sup> Compounding these geographic challenges, the company grappled with severe financial and staffing issues. In stark contrast to the steady westward progress of the UP, the CPRR struggled in California, having constructed less than 50 miles of track by mid-1864, barely extending past Auburn.<sup>48</sup> The labor force for the CPRR was initially composed of a few hundred white men, but it was notoriously unstable. Many of these workers were only briefly employed, their primary aim being to earn enough money to cross the Sierra Nevada and seek fortune in the silver mines of the Comstock Lode.<sup>49</sup> Some of these workers were presumably the same individuals who had previously relinquished their depleted placer gold claims to Chinese miners and were now intent on mining silver for companies in Nevada. The workforce was in constant flux, with workers frequently abandoning the railroad whenever news or rumors of gold discoveries reached the railroad camps.<sup>50</sup>

In response to this labor shortage, the CPRR turned towards employing Chinese workers, albeit very reluctantly. The company leaders were prejudiced against Chinese workers and believed that they would be incapable of matching the quality of white labor. Charles Crocker, construction superintendent and one of the investors known colloquially as the Big Four, later testified before Congress, revealing the prevalent sentiment against Chinese migrants: “I believe that all our people were prejudiced against Chinese labor, and that there was a disposition not to employ them.”<sup>51</sup> The first Chinese workers were hired in 1864

<sup>47</sup> Julia H. Lee, *The Racial Railroad* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2022), 88.

<sup>48</sup> Carson, “Chinese Sojourn Labor,” 83; Lee, *The Racial Railroad*, 88-89; Don K. Nakayama, “Chinese Railroad Workers, the Transcontinental Railroad, and the Indispensability of Immigration to America,” *The American Surgeon* 0, no. 0 (July 2023): 1-4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031348231191453>, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Herman B. Chiu and Andrew Taylor Kirk, “‘Unlimited American Power’: How Four California Newspapers Covered Chinese Labor and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad, 1865–1869,” *American Journalism* 31, no. 4 (December 2014): 507–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2014.969673>, 509f.

<sup>50</sup> Carson, “Chinese Sojourn Labor,” 90.

<sup>51</sup> United States Congress Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, version archive.org, 44th

on a trial basis. Right from the start, they were paid less than their white counterparts, receiving \$26 per month without board, while white workers earned \$30 plus board.<sup>52</sup> These initial Chinese railroad workers were miners who had arrived during the Gold Rush. The CPRR soon began recruiting more extensively abroad and California's Chinese population grew alongside the state's demand for labor.<sup>53</sup> As the Chinese workers on the railroad demonstrated their efficiency and reliability, the CPRR expanded rapidly. By the fall of 1865, the workforce was 90% Chinese and had grown to more than 6,000 laborers.<sup>54</sup> Employment was managed through the Six Chinese Companies acting as subcontractors, making it difficult to ascertain the exact number of Chinese involved in the construction. Due to the high turnover rate, some estimates suggest that more than 20,000 Chinese laborers may have participated in the CPRR alone.<sup>55</sup> Chinese railroad workers were in high demand afterwards, and countless more contributed to the many railroad projects that emerged across California in the following years.<sup>56</sup> According to US census data, California's Chinese population grew from 34,933 in 1860 to 49,277 in 1870, though countless more temporary workers that only stayed for some years in the interim period do not appear in this statistic.<sup>57</sup> The impact of the transcontinental railroad on California's economy was profound. At the time, it

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Congress, 2d Session, Report no. 689 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1877), <https://archive.org/details/reportofjointspeoounit/page/n5/mode/2up>, 666.

<sup>52</sup> Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, "Key Questions," Chinese Railroad Workers in North America, 2019, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/faqs/>. Wages were raised in 1867, but remained below white levels.

<sup>53</sup> Gordon H. Chang, "Chinese Railroad Workers and the US Transcontinental Railroad in Global Perspective," essay, in *The Chinese and the Iron Road Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, ed. Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 27–41, 33; Ryan Dearing, "Chinese Immigrants, the Landscape of Progress, and the Work of Building and Celebrating the Transcontinental Railroad," *California History* 96, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 66–98, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ch.2019.96.2.66>, 72.; Baxter, "Response of California's Chinese," 29.

<sup>54</sup> Chiu and Kirk, "Unlimited American Power," 516.

<sup>55</sup> Chang, "Global Perspective," 33.

<sup>56</sup> Nakayama, "Chinese Railroad Workers," 4.

<sup>57</sup> Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)*, version census.gov (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/overview/1880.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1880.html), 379.

was the largest construction project in American history and potentially the largest workforce ever commanded by a private enterprise.<sup>58</sup> It also stimulated a range of economic activities, as workers required logistics, crop farming, laundry, lumber, mining services and more, all either providing support for the railroad workers or being directly intertwined with the railroad.<sup>59</sup>

Chinese and white workers were largely segregated during the construction. Chinese workers typically formed teams exclusively with their countrymen, including Chinese cooks who prepared their rations.<sup>60</sup> Segregation was not only social but also spatial, as Chinese and white workers lived in different campsites. Archaeologist Barbara L. Voss, in a comparative analysis of worker camps, observed that “Chinese encampments were invariably located in uneven, mosquito-infested areas, indicating that camp geography reinforced ethnic hierarchies among workers.”<sup>61</sup> Railroad construction in the 1800s was exceptionally challenging and dangerous, surpassing other industries of the time, including mining and manufacturing, in terms of risk.<sup>62</sup> Potential hazards along the transcontinental railroad included avalanches, snowstorms and explosions during tunnel construction.<sup>63</sup> While exact figures are elusive, estimates of Chinese worker fatalities during the construction range from as low as 50 to over a thousand.<sup>64</sup> Compared to their white counterparts, they endured longer hours for less pay.<sup>65</sup> The marginalization of Chinese workers extended beyond the physical conditions to the realm of historical recognition. This is

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<sup>58</sup> Carson, “Chinese Sojourn Labor,” 80–81; Chang, “Global Perspective,” 33.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan P. Harrod and John J. Crandall, “Rails Built of the Ancestors’ Bones: The Bioarchaeology of the Overseas Chinese Experience,” *Historical Archaeology* 49, no. 1 (2015): 148–61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03376965>, 150.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Christine Heffner, “Exploring Health-Care Practices of Chinese Railroad Workers in North America,” *Historical Archaeology* 49, no. 1 (2015): 134–47, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03376964>, 136.

<sup>61</sup> Barbara L. Voss, “Archaeological Contributions to Research on Chinese Railroad Workers in North America,” essay, in *The Chinese and the Iron Road Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, ed. Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 103–9, 107.

<sup>62</sup> Harrod and Crandall, “Ancestors’ Bones,” 150.

<sup>63</sup> J. Lee, *The Racial Railroad*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, “Key Questions.”

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



notably evident in the famous photograph capturing the moment when the railroad was completed (fig.1). The image, which depicts the meeting of the two trains from the East and West, conspicuously lacks the presence of any Chinese individuals. This omission serves as a stark reminder of how the significant contributions of Chinese laborers were minimized and rendered seemingly unimportant in the historical narrative of the transcontinental railroad's completion. This neglect in acknowledgment reflects a broader pattern of marginalization and undervaluing of Chinese contributions to this monumental American enterprise.



Figure 1: The famous photograph shows the CPRR and UP meeting at Promontory Summit, Utah. Chinese workers are not part of the celebration.<sup>66</sup>

Within the context of Split Labor Market Theory, the CPRR presented a segregation of the labor market, wherein Chinese laborers were relegated to a lower caste and did undesirable jobs, thus limiting the extent to which their

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Joseph Russell, "East and West Shaking Hands at Laying of Last Rail.," photograph, *Wikimedia Commons* (New Haven, July 1, 2015), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East\\_and\\_West\\_Shaking\\_hands\\_at\\_the\\_laying\\_of\\_last\\_rail\\_Union\\_Pacific\\_Railroad\\_-\\_Restoration.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East_and_West_Shaking_hands_at_the_laying_of_last_rail_Union_Pacific_Railroad_-_Restoration.png).

labor competed directly against that of white workers. This was, however, the result of a labor shortage, rather than higher paid group activism relegating the lower paid group into this position. According to Boswell, railroad construction presented a passive segregation of labor, as whites gradually left the railroad, thereby creating vacancies that were filled by Chinese laborers.<sup>67</sup> Split Labor Market Theory assumes a competitive labor market, where different groups vie for a limited amount of job openings. Chinese workers did not compete for jobs with white workers, but were consistently employed in undesirable positions that whites were unwilling to fill. This dynamic illustrates an instance where the influx of migrant labor did not lead directly to competition in the labor market but rather filled a critical void in a rapidly expanding industry. The steady migration and the work experience that migrants gathered would, however, have considerable impacts in the years to come. The scale of the CPRR shows the growing power of big corporations in California. Combined with mining, the developments in both sectors indicated a trend towards monopolization. What began as a development in a single sector began looking like a general trend when the CPRR entered the playing field. California was monopolizing and financial hierarchies became manifested more clearly: Investor-backed corporations at the top, a large working class at the bottom.

### **5.3 Boom to Bust: Economic Upheavals Post-Railroad**

In the 1870s, California's economy experienced a series of challenging stressors. The completion of the transcontinental railroad, while initially heralded as a beacon of progress and prosperity, brought with it a mix of consequences. The railroad successfully bridged the gap between California and the Eastern metropolises and enabled unprecedented levels of trade.<sup>68</sup> However, this advancement was not without its drawbacks. The influx of cheap goods from the well-established manufacturing centers in the East had a detrimental impact on Californian manufacturers, who struggled to compete with these cheaper products. The labor market also grew more competitive, as large numbers of unemployed European immigrants traveled to California to find work.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Boswell, "Split Labor Market Analysis," 361.

<sup>68</sup> Kennedy and Guiry, "Meat Trade," 394.

<sup>69</sup> Wey, "Chinese Americans in California," 114.

Simultaneously, the 1870s marked the beginning of a national economic recession, spurred in part by the end of federal railroad funding.<sup>70</sup> Arthur Rolston, in an article about how California's class structure influenced its constitution, summarizes: "The boom years of the Gold Rush and economic expansion following completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869 gave way to recession and growing unemployment."<sup>71</sup> This downturn in economic fortunes was further accelerated by the financial panic that stretched from 1873 to 1876.<sup>72</sup> Rolston argues that the period was especially devastating for wage laborers and small farmers, who were already susceptible to economic instability.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, the Chinese workforce was diversifying. The completion of the transcontinental railroad released thousands of Chinese workers into the state's labor market.<sup>74</sup> While some of these workers remained with the CPRR to do maintenance work, a majority sought employment elsewhere.<sup>75</sup> These Chinese laborers, having acquired skills in drilling, explosives, construction, and metalwork during their tenure with the railroad, were now well-equipped to transition into various other sectors.<sup>76</sup> They found employment not only with other railroad companies but also in agriculture, common labor, and personal services. Additionally, they ventured into the burgeoning manufacturing industries in San Francisco and Sacramento, particularly in clothing, wool, shoe, and cigar factories.<sup>77</sup> Despite these advancements, the Chinese workers continued to face significant challenges. They were often paid less than their

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<sup>70</sup> Chiu and Kirk, "Unlimited American Power," 512.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur Rolston, "Capital, Corporations, and Their Discontents in Making California's Constitutions, 1849–1911," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (November 2011): 521–56, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2011.80.4.521>, 535.

<sup>72</sup> Alex Wagner Lough, "Henry George, Frederick Jackson Turner, and the 'Closing' of the American Frontier," *California History* 89, no. 2 (2012): 4–54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/23215319>, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Rolston, "Making California's Constitution," 535.

<sup>74</sup> Chan, "Chinese Livelihood," 69.

<sup>75</sup> Voss, "Archaeological Contributions," 106.

<sup>76</sup> Boswell, "Split Labor Market Analysis," 361f.

<sup>77</sup> Chan, "Chinese Livelihood," 67–71.

white counterparts for equivalent work and were typically relegated to less desirable job positions. Additionally, their reputation for reliability and availability made them assets to employers but simultaneously positioned them as threats in the eyes of the white working class.<sup>78</sup> This dynamic was particularly pronounced as California's economy struggled; the Chinese, being a lower paid labor group, could afford to undercut white workers. This economic leverage enabled them to secure available positions in a tightening job market. The expansion of their skills and their entry into various employment sectors meant that an increasing number of laborers across different fields became aware of the presence of Chinese migrants in their respective areas of work. This growing visibility and perceived economic threat likely contributed to the surge in anti-Chinese sentiment, as fears of being replaced by Chinese workers became more pronounced among the white working class. Such fears and perceptions were clearly reflected in the anti-Chinese discourses prevalent during that era.

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<sup>78</sup> Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 188f.

## PART THREE - ANALYSIS

### 6. The Placer Herald

Contemporary newspapers capture not only the politics of labor but also the everyday interactions between the two groups of workers. The *Placer Herald* was one of the many newspapers founded in California during the gold rush. It was published in the town of Auburn in Placer County at the Western outskirts of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The county's name, being derived from the many placer gold deposits in the area, highlights the region's heavy reliance on the mining sector, which was a cornerstone of local economic activity and invited many goldseekers to settle there.<sup>79</sup> First published on September 11, 1852 by Tabb Mitchell, Richard Rust, and John McElroy, the *Placer Herald* became the first newspaper in the county and remained one of the longest consecutively operating ones.<sup>80</sup> By the year 1864, which marks the beginning of my investigation timeframe, the newspaper was under the helm of Tabb Mitchell and his brother Charles H. Mitchell, who published it together.

The two were the sons of a newspaper publisher, editor and printer from Ohio, offering them an early opportunity to learn the trade.<sup>81</sup> Tabb Mitchell moved to Iowa at a young age to found his own newspaper, but was drawn to California during the gold rush, where he tried his luck at mining for some years before eventually returning to the publishing trade.<sup>82</sup> Charles H. Mitchell's historical record is quite scarce, but clippings from the newspaper reveal that he, too, took an interest in mining, as the pair of brothers filed patents for

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<sup>79</sup> "About The Placer Herald.," *Chronicling America*, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid; M. E. Gilberg, *Auburn, a California Mining Camp Comes of Age* (Newcastle, CA: Gilmar Press, 1986), 20.; Chelsie Brokenshire, "American River Townsites: Examining Connectivity and Community in Physically Discrete Populations," *Cultural Resources Management Program, Sonoma State University*, Masters Thesis, 2017, <http://hdl.handle.net/10211.3/200582>, 46; Paul B. Smith, "Highway Planning in California's Mother Lode: The Changing Townscape of Auburn and Nevada City," *California History* 59, no. 3 (1980): 204–21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25157988>, 206.

<sup>81</sup> "Welcome to California!" *Placer Herald*. December 17, 1870. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/1870-12-17/ed-1/>; Myron Angel, *History of Placer County, California, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Oakland, CA: Thompson & West, 1882), <https://www.loc.gov/item/01001140/>, 291–95.

<sup>82</sup> Angel, *History of Placer County*, 294f.

several mining claims in 1871 along with several other partners.<sup>83</sup> Both brothers were active in local politics and held public positions in the county government as well as the Democratic County Central Committee.<sup>84</sup> Another brother of theirs also owned the American Hotel in Auburn, showing the family's connection to the economic development of the town.<sup>85</sup>

The *Placer Herald* changed ownership and editorship several times over the investigated period.<sup>86</sup> In October 1867, the brothers leased the *Herald* to Wm. H. Smith & Co, with former governor Joseph Walkup being hired as editor. Walkup joined the company as a partner in January 1868 and eventually became the sole owner and editor in April of the next year.<sup>87</sup> Walkup was born in Ohio and began working as a carpenter before migrating to Auburn in 1849, where he and a business partner raised livestock and opened a general store together. He was elected as state senator in 1852 and 1856 and served as California's lieutenant governor and president of the senate under the Democratic administration of John B. Weller.<sup>88</sup> During his political career, Walkup was particularly known for his prison reform efforts.<sup>89</sup> He remained the

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<sup>83</sup> “[No. 154. Application for a Patent To a Quartz Gold Mining Claim.” *Placer Herald*. June 17, 1871. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/1871-06-17/>; “[No. 155.] Application for a Patent To a Quartz Gold Mining Claim.” *Placer Herald*. June 17, 1871. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/1871-06-17/>; “[No. 164] Application for a Patent To a Quartz Gold, Silver and Copper Mining Claim.” *Placer Herald*. June 17, 1871. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/1871-06-17/>.

<sup>84</sup> “The Old Set Out, And The New Set In.” *Placer Herald*. June 4, 1859. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/1859-06-04/ed-1/>; “Meeting of the Democratic County Central Committee.” *Placer Herald*. June 15, 1861. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014998/1861-06-15/ed-1/>.

<sup>85</sup> [Appointment of J. L. Mitchell as Receiver of Public Moneys]. *Placer Herald*. May 2, 1874. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=PH18740502>.

<sup>86</sup> This chapter provides a selective overview of the most important personnel changes. A comprehensive history of the *Placer Herald's* ownership and editorship up until 1882 can be found in Angel, *History of Placer County*, 292-95.

<sup>87</sup> Angel, *History of Placer County*, 293.

<sup>88</sup> “Death of Hon. Joseph Walkup.” *Placer Herald*. October 18, 1873. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385744942/>. Since the information is taken from Walkup's obituary, the neutrality of the source cannot be guaranteed. Nonetheless, it is the most comprehensive available overview of his life. The obituary erroneously states that Walkup assumed ownership and editorship in 1867 instead of 1868.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*; Sommers, Knox, and McDonald-Loomis, *Early Auburn*, 27.

*Herald's* sole owner and editor until 1872, when he was joined by Joseph A. Filcher.<sup>90</sup>

Like the Mitchell brothers and Walkup, Filcher was born in the Eastern United States. As a child, he migrated from Iowa to California with his family in 1859 and was initially unable to attend school since he worked on his family's farm.<sup>91</sup> He pursued an education in his early adulthood and became a school teacher and principal afterwards.<sup>92</sup> Filcher joined the *Herald* as co-proprietor in 1872 and became the newspaper's owner after the death of Walkup, who suffered a stroke in his office in 1873.<sup>93</sup> Over the years, Filcher partnered intermittently with several co-publishers, including Joseph Walkup's widow Elizabeth A. Walkup. Filcher remained owner of the newspaper until 1900.<sup>94</sup> Like the owners and editors before him, Filcher was an active Democrat and held a variety of political offices in his later years. He served as delegate to the State Constitutional Convention in 1878 and 1879, was elected as senator from 1883 to 1887 and narrowly lost the election as state railroad commissioner in 1888. In addition, he served as a member of the electoral college, state prison director and secretary of the State Agricultural Society, among others.<sup>95</sup> Filcher held Georgist political views and saw the *Herald* as a vehicle to fight against monopolies, writing in his salutatory that "[t]he HERALD has ever stood by and

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<sup>90</sup> "Salutatory." *Placer Herald*. August 24, 1872, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385704729/>.

<sup>91</sup> Roger Olmsted and Nancy Olmsted, "The Crooked-Neck Horse and the Side-Wheel Mule," *California History* 57, no. 4 (1978): 332–41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25157869>, 334; William L. Willis, *History of Sacramento County, California with Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County Who Have Been Identified With Its Growth and Development From the Early Days to the Present* (Los Angeles, CA: Historic Record Co., 1913), 1014ff; Angel, *History of Placer County*, 295. The three publications contain conflicting information about Filcher's birth year and his age at the time of his migration. Olmsted & Olmsted write that Filcher arrived in California at the age of fourteen, while Willis lists his date of birth as August 3, 1846 and states that he was twelve years old at the time of his arrival. Angel lists Filcher's date of birth as August 3, 1845 and states that he lived in Iowa until the age of fourteen. Since neither publication references a source, these claims cannot be verified. Additionally, since the books by Willis and Angel are local histories that were published while Filcher was still alive, they may not be entirely neutral. Both books speak about Filcher in very positive terms, so a potential conflict of interest cannot be ruled out. Nonetheless, I have chosen to include them, since they present by far the most comprehensive available record of Filcher's life.

<sup>92</sup> Willis, *History of Sacramento County*, 1014.

<sup>93</sup> *Placer Herald*, "Death of Walkup."

<sup>94</sup> Gilberg, *Auburn*, 22.

<sup>95</sup> Willis, *History of Sacramento County*, 1014–16.

defended the rights of the people against the approaches of a corrupt, unprincipled, moneyed monopoly [...].”<sup>96</sup> In 1878, he also published a short-lived monthly newspaper by the name of *The Caucasian* for the Supreme Order of the Caucasians, an organization that rallied against Chinese migration.<sup>97</sup>

Several factors make the *Placer Herald* a particularly interesting source for my investigation. The town of Auburn is located in the gold-rich Placer County and therefore had a large mining sector during and immediately after the Gold Rush years, as well as a significant Chinese population.<sup>98</sup> The transcontinental railroad passed through Auburn on the way from its starting point in Sacramento to the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The city of Sacramento is located just 31 miles (50 kilometers) away from Auburn and was one of California’s main Asian population centers in the years under investigation. Chinese migrants called it *Yi Fou* (二埠), meaning “second city,” since it was often their next destination after arriving at the ports of San Francisco, which they knew as *Dai Fou* (大埠) or “big city.”<sup>99</sup> Sacramento also became the first city outside of San Francisco which exhibited a major influx of Chinese workers into the manufacturing and factory production sectors.<sup>100</sup> This not only puts the towns in close geographical proximity, but also shows the economic ties of Chinese labor to the local area. In addition to being a manufacturing center and a Chinese population hub, Sacramento has been the seat of the California State Legislature since 1854. The biographies of the *Placer Herald*’s owners and editors show the newspaper’s firm rooting in Democratic politics. They not only reported on the government of the state, but also had a hand in shaping politics and policies themselves. Newspapers from this era are

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<sup>96</sup> Gordon Morris Bakken, “Mexican and American Land Policy: A Conflict of Cultures,” *Southern California Quarterly* 75, no. 3–4 (1993): 237–62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41171681>, 249; *Placer Herald*, “Salutatory.”

<sup>97</sup> Angel, *History of Placer County*, 301; John C. Eastman, “From ‘Plyler’ to ‘Arizona’: Have the Courts Forgotten about ‘Corfield v Coryell’?,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 80, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 165–99, 166.

<sup>98</sup> Chang, *Gold Mountain*, 69.

<sup>99</sup> Wey, “Chinese Americans in California,” 115. Due to the complexities of translating Chinese names to English, spellings may differ. Other spellings include *Yee Fou* or *Yee Fou* for Sacramento and *Dai Fou* for San Francisco.

<sup>100</sup> Chan, “Chinese Livelihood,” 71.



often regarded as highly partisan.<sup>101</sup> The *Placer Herald* is no different in this regard and often features attacks against Republican officials and advocates, as well as on newspapers that supported the Republican party. While both Democrats and Republicans engaged in anti-Chinese politics during the timeframe under investigation, the Democratic party was usually more brazen in their demands and their rhetoric. The *Placer Herald* frequently featured articles about the politics of Chinese migration, but also provided insight into the daily interactions and cultural clashes between Chinese and white residents of California. Its close proximity to Sacramento and the strong presence of the railroad and mining sectors make the *Herald* an ideal contender for an investigation into the intermingling between economic concerns and anti-Chinese rhetoric.

While it is important to note that the views expressed by the *Herald* are not necessarily representative of public sentiment, they provide a good representation specifically of anti-Chinese discourse. Placer County voted Republican in all presidential elections within the timeframe, but the Democratic newspaper nonetheless maintained a steady presence in the region.<sup>102</sup> A contemporary source wrote that “[t]he paper was prosperous from the beginning.”<sup>103</sup> The author noted that by 1882, it “flourished and prospered, and became widely known throughout the State.”<sup>104</sup> A certain degree of embellishment cannot be ruled out, but the sustained presence of advertisers also suggests that the paper had a reasonably large readership and was of interest to local businesses. Readership numbers are not available, but the *Herald’s* ability to not only sustain publication but also expand in length over the years suggests that the newspaper’s perspective resonated with a considerable audience.

To anchor the analysis of the newspaper’s contents, I investigated the first issue of every quarter from 1864 to 1882 across three online archives: *newspapers.com*, the *Chronicling America* database by the Library of Congress

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<sup>101</sup> Fong and Markham, “Anti-Chinese Politics,” 195.

<sup>102</sup> Albert J. Menendez, *The Geography of Presidential Elections in the United States, 1868 - 2004* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 154.

<sup>103</sup> Angel, *History of Placer County*, 292.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 293.

and the *California Digital Newspaper Collection* by the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research at the University of California Riverside. The methodology included searching these issues for keywords related to Chinese migration (namely *asian*, *asiatic*, *china*, *chinese*, *chinaman*, *celestial*, *heathen*, *mongol* and *mongolian* and the respective plurals of these terms), supplemented by a manual review to ensure contextual accuracy and depth. Within the 72 issues considered, a total of 173 articles pertaining to Chinese life in California were identified.<sup>105</sup> Most of these articles were written by the newspaper's editors themselves, while others were reprints from other newspapers in the region. Some of these reprinted articles are explicitly endorsed by the editors. In other cases, endorsement is implied through prominent placement in the newspaper or through the uncritical dissemination of the arguments. This substantial collection of articles provides a rich foundation for understanding the prevalent anti-Chinese attitudes and arguments during this era.

The ensuing subchapters will delve into a detailed examination of selected sources to offer insights into the common themes, arguments, and rhetoric employed in anti-Chinese materials. Since the newspaper's political stance and tone stayed largely consistent throughout the period studied, the analysis in these subchapters is arranged topically, rather than chronologically. This approach aims to highlight various facets of anti-Chinese rhetoric and explain how they were shaped by larger economic conditions. The analysis will illuminate the various dimensions of anti-Chinese sentiment to explore how economic, social, and political factors interwove and shaped attitudes towards Chinese Americans in California during the critical period that culminated in their exclusion.

## 7. Labor Relations

This chapter explores how newspapers like the *Placer Herald* depicted Chinese Americans as a monolithic, dehumanized group and juxtaposed them in conflict against white workers. Additionally, the chapter delves into the experiences of

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<sup>105</sup> Four issues in the sample are missing from the consulted archives and are therefore exempt from this analysis. These are October 5, 1867, January 4, 1868, April 4, 1868 and April 3, 1869.

higher class Chinese individuals, contrasting their societal interactions and the discrimination they faced with those of the laborer class, thereby highlighting the role that class played in shaping Californians' perceptions of Chinese exclusion.

### 7.1 Worker Competition

Conflicts between white and Chinese workers had already arisen in the 1850s and continued in the 60s. For example, in early 1867, the *Placer Herald* reported about an "indignation meeting" that was held because nearby mine owners had considered hiring Chinese laborers.<sup>106</sup> Employers of the era sometimes exploited tensions between the worker groups by threatening to hire Chinese laborers as strikebreakers. By the late 1860s, many Chinese workers had acquired skills in drilling and the use of dynamite, enhancing their desirability to employers. Although this threat was not always actualized, the mere possibility of hiring Chinese workers empowered corporations and framed migrants as a potential threat to job security. The *Herald* often depicts the relationship between Chinese and American workers as a zero-sum game, wherein the gain of one group is perceived as the loss of the other. For example, an article about a local farmer hiring white labor states: "Mr. Bird is well satisfied with his experiment. He says that his work is done in better shape than it was ever done by Chinamen and that he will never employ Mongolians again, as long as there are white people within reach."<sup>107</sup> The article underscores this sentiment with a celebratory title, announcing proudly: "A Grand Success. White Boys and Girls in the Hop Fields - The Mongolian Takes a Back Seat."<sup>108</sup> The wording further reinforces the idea that white and Chinese workers were in a fight for the same, limited opportunities.

Both groups are consistently portrayed as distinctly separate and alienated from each other. The Chinese, in particular, are depicted not as a collective of individuals but rather as an anonymous mass, stripping them of

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<sup>106</sup> "Public Mind Agitated." *Placer Herald*, January 5, 1867, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385623966/>.

<sup>107</sup> "A Grand Success. White Boys and Girls in the Hop Fields - The Mongolian Takes a Back Seat." *Placer Herald*, December 6, 1877, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385765577/>.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

individual identities and reinforcing their otherness. Boswell highlights that the cost gap between ethnic groups in Split Labor Market Theory is only perpetuated if the two labor groups are continually ideologically identified as different from each other.<sup>109</sup> This identification is evident in anti-Chinese writings, where Chinese workers are primarily identified by their nationality and rarely acknowledged as individuals. By depersonalizing Chinese workers, they are framed as a monolithic group, distinct and separate from their white counterparts. The dehumanizing language that the *Herald* uses to describe Chinese migrants illustrates this ideological identification. Among others, they are called “cargo,” “leeches,” “an overwhelming tide of invasion,” a “horde,” “barbarians,” a “dark cloud” and are described as “flooding the country.”<sup>110</sup> Using metaphors from the realms of nature, military, and logistics, the paper effectively strips the subjects of their humanity and individuality. Rather than a group of individual people, they become an anonymous collective that is subject to economic forces.

A cartoon from the San Francisco Illustrated Wasp, a political satire magazine, illustrates this perception (fig. 2). The image, titled “Uncle Sam’s Farm in Danger,” was published in 1878, a period marked by heightened anti-Chinese sentiment. It depicts a swarm of grasshoppers with exaggerated Chinese facial features and the traditional queue hairstyles, invading a field. Uncle Sam and a worker are shown attempting to repel this swarm. In the background, a devilish figure looms large, accompanied by the ominous word “famine.” The image plays off the trope of China’s “numberless millions” of inhabitants.<sup>111</sup> While the grasshoppers in the foreground are drawn with clear lines, those behind them are blurry and blend into each other and into the background. They are, in a literal sense, innumerable. The caption heightens

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<sup>109</sup> Boswell, “Split Labor Market Analysis,” 354.

<sup>110</sup> In the order in which they are listed, the terms appear in the following articles: “Effects of the Labor Movement.” *Placer Herald*, January 5, 1878, sec. San Francisco Letter, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385774984/>; 1. Geo. E. Mason, “To the Voters of Placer County.” *Placer Herald*, July 6, 1867, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385628954/>; “The Chinese Question,” *Placer Herald*, accessed January 6, 1877, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385740791/>; “The Chinese Problem.” *Placer Herald*, July 7, 1877, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385758163/>; Ibid; *Placer Herald*, “The Chinese Question; “A Good Bill Defeated.” *Placer Herald*, April 2, 1870, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/388964960/>.

<sup>111</sup> Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, 82.

this effect by warning of 70 million Chinese potentially emigrating to the United States, a staggering number compared to California's population of less than one million at the time. In her analysis of the caricature, Michele Walfred points out that the Midwest had recently experienced a severe grasshopper plague. Therefore, the metaphor of the insects as a destructive force and a threat to livelihoods would have been particularly poignant for contemporary Californians.<sup>112</sup>

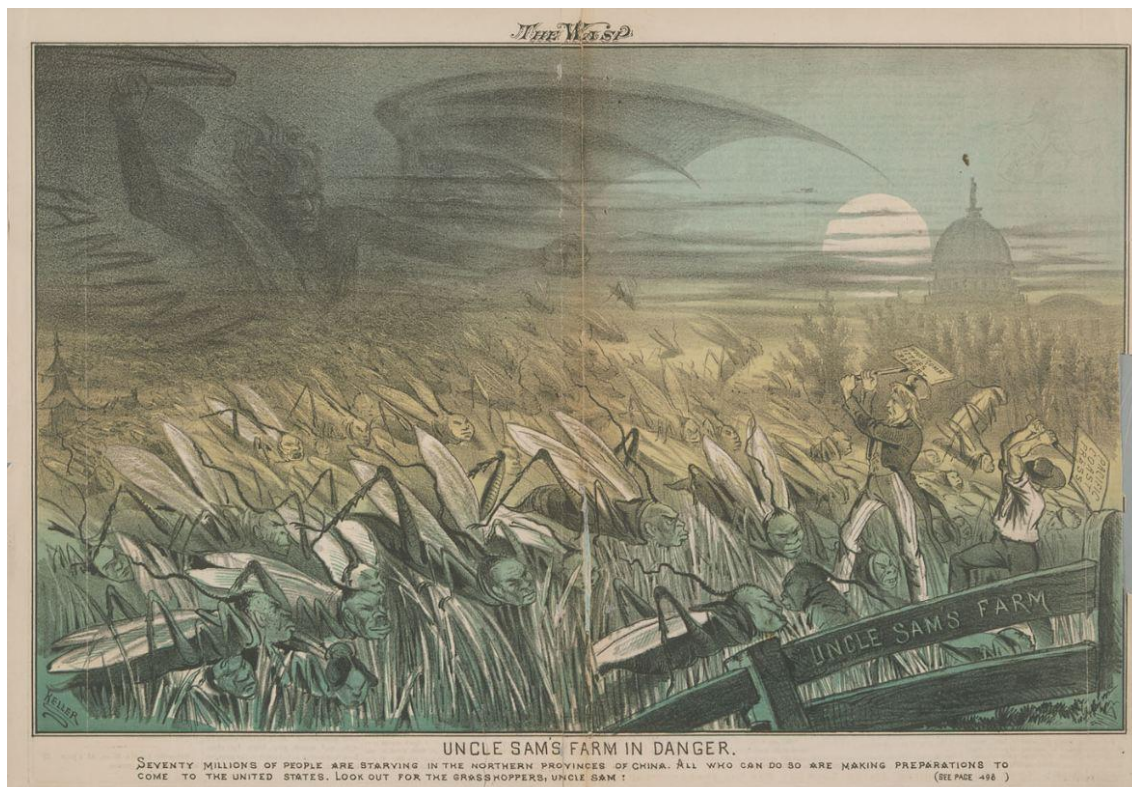


Figure 2: Uncle Sam's Farm in Danger, an anti-Chinese cartoon that portrays migrants as a swarm of insects that befall the United States<sup>113</sup>

Some employers also expressed views that stripped Chinese migrants of their humanity and individuality. Manu Karuka, in his postcolonial reading of the transcontinental railroad, discusses how the CPRR leadership perceived Chinese laborers as “Closer to the status of tools, of drills, gunpowder, and

<sup>112</sup> Michele Walfred, “‘Uncle Sam’s Farm in Danger’ 9 March, 1878,” *Illustrating Chinese Exclusion*, February 14, 2014, <https://thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/02/14/uncle-sams-farm-in-danger-9-march-1878/>.

<sup>113</sup> George F. Keller, “Uncle Sam’s Farm in Danger,” cartoon, *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp*, March 9, 1878, <https://archive.org/details/waspjanjuly1878unse/page/496/mode/2up,504f>.

nitroglycerin than white workers [...].”<sup>114</sup> He cites construction supervisor Charles Crocker, who admitted that the company was unable to distinguish Chinese workers by name. The Chinese laborers, typically hired not directly by the CPRR but subcontracted by the Six Chinese Companies, were seen as an anonymous commodity by the railway company.<sup>115</sup> The CPRR leadership had initially been hesitant to hire Chinese laborers, but changed its stance after witnessing the efficiency and results of their work.

This reluctant acknowledgment of the Chinese work ethic also appears in some anti-Chinese articles in the *Herald*, which, despite its opposition to them, occasionally expresses a begrudging respect for the quality of Chinese labor. This complex dynamic is captured in an 1877 article titled “Employ White Labor,” which the *Placer Herald* republished from another newspaper by the name of *Hall’s Land Journal*. The author of the article concedes:

We are willing to admit that the Mongolians have some advantages as mere working machines, but we are sure that our people will make a great mistake, [...] if they continue to discourage white immigrants by employing Mongolians, and giving them the preference in every case.<sup>116</sup>

Again, the subjects of the article are stripped of their humanity and reduced to mere machines - but in this role, the paper admits that they are economically effective. In a similar way, a news snippet published two years later reported on an investigation by a labor committee and concluded:

Farmers, tradesmen, mechanics, peddlers, miners and workmen all agree that they could not hold their own against Chinamen, and, without intending anything of the sort, they bore the strongest testimony to the skill, business capacity, industry, patience, endurance and frugality of that race.<sup>117</sup>

While these comments seem to positively recognize the qualities of Chinese workers, they also highlight the economic threat they posed to established workers, fueling the competition. This economic argument for banning Chinese

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<sup>114</sup> Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, 89.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>116</sup> “Employ White Labor.” *Placer Herald*, October 6, 1877, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385765747/>.

<sup>117</sup> [Labor Committee Investigating Economic Conditions and Chinese Immigration], *Placer Herald*, October 4, 1879, sec. News Summary, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385755921/>.

labor is rooted in the perception that the Chinese workforce was more cost-effective than the white one, making them a direct threat to white laborers' livelihoods.

The division between Chinese and white workers was exacerbated by the limited contact between the two groups, who led largely separate lives. As temporary workers that intended to return to China after some years, many Chinese migrants had little interest in becoming part of the broader American society. Those that did integrate had to adapt to a new culture and a new language, all while being subjected to discrimination.<sup>118</sup> Their relative degree of segregation likely hindered the formation of interethnic alliances between Chinese and white workers. Cooperation was further hindered by the policies of white unions, which banned Chinese workers from membership, did not support their strikes, and rejected the notion of advocating for equal wages across ethnicities.<sup>119</sup> On the transcontinental railroad, the CPRR set up competitions between white and Chinese workers to pit them against each other.<sup>120</sup> The culmination of these factors – competition, dehumanization, segregation and union policies – contributed to the clear conflict lines between white and Chinese workers. This separation not only perpetuated economic competition and racial bias but also entrenched the societal view of Chinese workers as outsiders, exacerbating tensions and hindering any potential collaboration or mutual understanding between the two groups.

## 7.2 Higher Class Chinese

Race undoubtedly played a crucial role in the discrimination against Chinese migrants in late 19th and early 20th-century California, but class was also a significant factor in shaping their experiences and interactions with the wider society. In *Inside and Outside Chinatown*, Kenneth H. Marcus and Yong Chen offer valuable insights into the experiences of higher class Chinese citizens, by investigating Chinese Christian missionaries and medical herbalists during the

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<sup>118</sup> Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 188.

<sup>119</sup> Wey, "Chinese Americans in California," 114.

<sup>120</sup> Hilton Obenzinger, "Geography of Chinese Workers Building the Transcontinental Railroad. A Virtual Reconstruction of the Key Historic Sites," ed. Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, 2018, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/virtual/>.

exclusion era. Compared to laborers, these groups enjoyed a higher degree of social mobility and frequently interacted with white Californians, crossing traditional lines of race, gender, and geography. They also provided a cultural touchpoint; for instance, Chinese herbalists appealed to white customers, especially women, who preferred their noninvasive methods over Western medicine. Chinese doctors established practices both inside and outside of Chinatowns. The cousins Tan Fu-yuan and Li Wing, for example, opened a successful practice in a white, residential area of Los Angeles. Herbalists began to advertise to the white population, but in their advertisements they continually emphasized their Chinese traditions. This suggests that, in certain higher class contexts, California's white population was open to engaging with Chinese culture. Marcus and Chen note that other higher class Chinese individuals, such as traders, scholars, and diplomats, likely had similar experiences.<sup>121</sup> Their analysis shows that these interethnic forms of contact differed significantly based on social and economic class.

The class distinction is also evident in the *Placer Herald*. In 1881, during the height of the exclusion movement, the newspaper published an article about Chinese students from Yale passing through San Francisco on their way home to China. The paper usually describes Chinese people in harsh words, but in this case, the editor's tone is very positive: "By their gentlemanly deportment they made many friends. Some of them expressed much regret that they were obliged to return home so soon."<sup>122</sup> Their language skills also receive praise: "The progress some of the younger ones have made in acquiring the English language is something astonishing. They speak it with all the fluency and correctness of expression of a native American."<sup>123</sup> The article describes that the students visited public institutions, met officials and even sang patriotic American songs upon their departure.<sup>124</sup> Such instances demonstrate that class significantly influenced the Chinese experience and their perception in the press. Soon after, it would also dictate the terms for their exclusion.

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<sup>121</sup> Marcus and Chen, "Inside and Outside Chinatown," 369f; 376-82; 399.

<sup>122</sup> "The Chinese Students." *Placer Herald*, October 1, 1881, sec. San Francisco Items, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=PH18811001>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.



The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, is another indicator of this class-based differentiation, as pointed out by Erika Lee: “Demonstrating the class bias in the law, merchants, teachers, students, travelers, and diplomats were exempt from exclusion.”<sup>125</sup> The act explicitly banned laborers but did not include more affluent groups. This selection suggests that groups who possessed cultural and material resources and posed less of a threat to the white working class were able to somewhat resist the exclusion movement. While they still faced discrimination, their experiences differed markedly from those of lower class Chinese laborers.

These instances show that class played a substantial role in shaping both the Chinese experience in America and the terms of their exclusion. The portrayal of Chinese workers as a faceless, dehumanized collective, often reduced to mere economic tools or threats, reflects deep-seated racial prejudices and fears that were further exacerbated by the limited contact between Chinese and white worker communities. However, an exploration of the experiences of higher class Chinese citizens offers a contrasting narrative. While they were still subject to discrimination, these individuals, through their professional and social engagements, interacted more fluidly with white Californians and even garnered their respect and interest. Their ability to integrate to some extent into American society, as well as the differential treatment they received, underscores the prominence of class in shaping the anti-Chinese movement.

## 8. Business

The preceding chapter delved into the dynamics between the two labor groups. Working conditions are of course not exclusively defined by laborers, but also by their employers. A critical aspect of understanding the anti-Chinese sentiment prevalent during this period involves examining the relationship of the worker movement with the business class. This examination can provide deeper insights into the underlying motivations of the movement.

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<sup>125</sup> Erika Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 36–62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27502847>, 36.

## 8.1 Managing Monopolies

During the era under investigation, anti-monopoly sentiments were escalating and became a pivotal force in several political movements, especially in the mid to late 1870s. The interplay between the state's populace and large-scale capital owners was a highly contentious issue, particularly as the economic conditions for the majority of California's citizens deteriorated in the 1870s. The preceding decades witnessed the emergence of a substantial corporate mining sector. The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s highlighted the profound impact that major economic entities could have on the state's economy. In California and beyond, the occurrence of several high-profile business scandals such as the Credit Mobilier, the Whiskey Ring, and the Tweed Ring, likely played a role in eroding public trust in large corporations and contributed to the rising anti-monopoly sentiment.

The Workingmen's Party of California is often reduced to its anti-Chinese stance, but in fact also supported a broader array of issues. While opposition to Chinese migration was their central demand, the party's platform encompassed demands for economic reform as well. As summarized by Fong and Markham,

The Workingmen endorsed a populist platform that called for ending land monopoly, increased aid for the poor, free public education, regulation of railroads, shifting the tax burden to corporations and large landowners, and ending the domination of state government by the railroad.<sup>126</sup>

The Democratic party similarly engaged in class issues and presented itself as the representative of workers and farmers, and as an opposition to the Republican party that was seen as catering primarily to capital owners and emerging industrialists.<sup>127</sup> Amidst growing concerns over the relationship between capital and labor in California, the state's politicians met to overhaul the 1849 state constitution. The California Constitutional Convention met in 1878 and 1879 to debate issues such as railroad regulation, tax reforms and corporate accountability.<sup>128</sup> *Placer Herald* editor Joseph Filcher was one of the

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<sup>126</sup> Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 192.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>128</sup> John F. Burns, "Taming the Elephant: An Introduction to California's Statehood and Constitutional Era," *California History* 81, no. 3-4 (2003): 1-26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25161698>, 12f. The author notes that the newly passed 1879

delegates there and stated in a speech: “The evils of land monopoly, the concentration of great bodies of land in the hands of the few people, is one of the greatest evils of which the people of this State complain.”<sup>129</sup> Chinese exclusion has to be understood in this context. The movement was entangled with issues of corporate control and economic inequality. Chinese laborers were perceived as instruments of industrial monopolists, exacerbating the plight of local workers. This perspective, while not justifying the anti-Chinese sentiment, helps in understanding its origins. The goal of this investigation is not merely to condemn the exclusion movement but to understand its roots, the reasons for its emergence, and strategies for preventing similar occurrences in the future. The conflict between laborers and business owners plays a critical role in this analysis.

The relationship between Democrats and the Workingmen’s Party was complex, as they both appealed to similar demographics but did not always align in their views. As a firmly Democratic paper, the *Placer Herald* also had a stake in this discourse. In 1878 the paper published an article on the conflict, wherein Filcher describes the *Herald’s* stance on the Workingmen’s Party.<sup>130</sup> He declares that the paper is not pro-workingmen, but pro-worker, and elaborates his ideology in more detail:

Our financial system is what it is because capital is benefited to the exclusion of labor by having it so. Our tariff system is what it is because capital is benefited to the exclusion of labor by having it so. Our railroad, land and water monopoly system is what it is because capital is benefited to the exclusion of labor by having it so. Our tax system is what it is because capital is benefited to the exclusion of labor by having it so. The Chinese slave trade system is what it is because capital is benefited to the exclusion of labor by having it so. It is so with the whole category of evils that exist—they are as they are, not because they are just, nor because the wisdom of our law makers cannot better them, but because capital is benefited by having them so, and thus far proven itself powerful enough to prevent their alteration in favor of the masses.<sup>131</sup>

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constitution also contained an attempt to ban Chinese migration, but failed to put it into motion because it violated federal law.

<sup>129</sup> E. B. Willis and P. K. Stockton, *Debates and Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of California, Convened at the City of Sacramento, Saturday, September 28, 1878*, version archive.org, vol. 2 (Sacramento, CA: State Office, 1880), <https://archive.org/details/debatesandproce03stocgoog/page/879/mode/1up>, 879.

<sup>130</sup> The article is written in first person plural and indicates that it is not just the editor’s personal stance, but the opinion of the staff as a whole. Of course, this is difficult if not impossible to verify.

<sup>131</sup> “Some Reflections.” *Placer Herald*, July 6, 1878, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385794410/>.

Chinese migration is mentioned here as a subordinate topic among many others, all motivated by a manipulative business elite. The parallel sentence structure and repetition of key phrases underline the implied all-encompassing nature of the conflict between labor and capital. Beginning with specific grievances, but then extending the framing to the “whole category of evils,” Filcher suggests that other issues of public interest can also be viewed through this lens. The characterization of Chinese migration as a slave trade is problematic in itself and will be further explored in its own chapter - but it is principally identified as exploitation based on business interests.

However, this acknowledgment of the exploitation of Chinese workers did not lead the *Placer Herald* to a position of solidarity with them. Instead, it appears to have exacerbated the perceived threat they posed to white labor. The ensuing conflict turned inward, pitting different labor groups against each other in a divisive struggle. When the Chinese Exclusion Act passed the House of Representatives in early 1882, the *Herald* celebrated:

This result is exceedingly gratifying to Democrats everywhere. They believe their party to be the party of the people, the party to oppose the centralization of power, and to protect from the evils of discrimination and consequent oppression the great laboring and producing mass of the American people. This vote shows that their representatives are true to this great principle. It shows that when the rights of American laborers are in jeopardy Democracy can be depended upon to come to the rescue; that true to its ancient fame the party still believes in fostering American interests and protecting American manhood.<sup>132</sup>

The choice of words in this excerpt is noteworthy. The exclusion of a marginalized group is called an act of resistance against “discrimination” and “oppression,” putting the excluding party in a victim role. The use of the word “protect” supports this and casts the act as a defensive measure. A patriotic tone is evoked through the frequent use of the word “American” and the illusion to the “ancient fame” of a party that was founded little more than half a century earlier. Further on, the article draws a clear battle line between the Democratic and Republican party, stating:

On one side we see a disposition to protect American labor and discourage the evils that come from association with an immoral race. On the other side the interests of labor, the

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<sup>132</sup> “The Anti-Chinese Bill Passed.” *Placer Herald*, April 1, 1882, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385646772/>.

morality of our people, yea even the future prospects of our country are all sacrificed to the one controlable [sic] desire to play into the hands of rich contractors, transportation companies and bloated corporations, those whose profits are enhanced in proportion as wages are reduced and labor degraded.<sup>133</sup>

Chinese workers are firmly placed on the side of the employers. The article leaves no room for ambiguity by establishing a dichotomy between “the morality of our people” on one side and “an immoral race” on the other. The author rejects any notion of a middle ground and instead supports a highly polarized view.

Where Split Labor Market Theory sees a triangular relationship between higher paid labor, lower paid labor and business, the *Herald* sees a clear line with just two factions - higher paid labor on one side, lower paid labor and business combined on the other. It identifies a conflict between white labor and employers, as well as between white labor and Chinese labor, but no such potential for conflict between Chinese labor and employers. Chinese workers are seen as subservient to business interests and their distinction as immoral marks this as not a consequence of the economic system, but as an inherent flaw of the Chinese people.

## **8.2 Solidarity and Hostility**

An option that Bonacich does not explore in her initial publication on Split Labor Market Theory is cooperation between the two labor groups. She proposes that a victory for the higher paid labor group can take two forms: either the exclusion of the lower paid labor group, or their segregation into a separate caste. Boswell criticizes the distinction of either of these cases as victories, since in both cases labor conflict between groups drives overall wages down.<sup>134</sup> The underlying prerequisite that causes a split labor dynamic to arise is the ability of lower paid labor to undercut higher paid labor. Another way to resolve the issue would be to ensure equal wages for equal work across both labor groups. This solution would admittedly be less advantageous for the higher paid labor group, since it prevents undercutting, but does not reduce the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Boswell, “Split Labor Market Analysis,” 354.

size of the labor pool.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, it would improve job security for the higher paid group and secure livable wages for the lower paid group. In California, neither unions, nor any major political parties supported equal wages.<sup>136</sup> The worker movement exhibited a persistent lack of cross-demographic solidarity. Bonacich suggests that the lack of a combined working class identity stems from the lower paid workforce prioritizing immediate gains over long-term economic security, which disincentivizes their participation in worker movements and encourages them to accept poor working conditions or engage in strikebreaking. Conversely, the rhetoric analyzed in this chapter reveals an active resistance to interethnic solidarity by the higher paid group. Whether Chinese workers were interested in joining white worker movements is difficult to tell, given the limited source material, and may be an interesting avenue for future research. Evidence does show that they were well capable of resistance on their own.

In late June 1867, several thousand Chinese laborers on the transcontinental railroad ceased their work and demanded a monthly wage of \$40 and a shorter workday, striving for the same conditions as the white workers. At that time, it was the largest strike in the nation's history.<sup>137</sup> The incident elicited a rare positive response from the *Placer Herald*. The paper's correspondent from nearby Cisco, writing about the strike, commented: "The thing worked beautifully—the strike— A Chinaman rode along the line and left small notes with the bands of workmen, and on his return later in the day they all systematically stacked their shovels and picks and quit labor."<sup>138</sup> The focus on their strong cooperation and organization shows an appreciation for the concerted labor action. The correspondent mentions rumors about the cause of

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 365.

<sup>136</sup> Fong and Markham, "Anti-Chinese Politics," 188f; Boswell, "Split Labor Market Analysis," 365. Boswell mentions one instance of white miners demanding equal wages for Chinese workers, but notes that the intention in this case was to exclude the Chinese workers. The strike participants reasoned that if the wage difference was eliminated, employers would only hire white workers.

<sup>137</sup> Obenzinger, "Virtual Reconstruction,"; Wey, "Chinese Americans in California," 113; Nakayama, "Chinese Railroad Workers," 3.

<sup>138</sup> "Cisco Correspondence. Cisco, June 28th, 1867." *Placer Herald*, July 6, 1867, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385628954/>.

the strike and explicitly praises it as an act of resistance against a supply monopoly:

From appearances it is a preconcerted movement, backed by importing China merchants, who are contending for the right to feed the men, or to get them fed at the lowest possible price—thus benefiting the men and breaking down at the same time a powerful monopoly, who are making thousands monthly from extortionate prices.<sup>139</sup>

This expression of support is a rare exception. Within the sample investigated in this thesis, it is the only time the paper ever explicitly supported a Chinese labor action. The article does not state the workers' demand for equality and thus does not take a stance on the issue, but it indicates that solidarity with their movement was not out of the question and could have materialized.

By the time the *Placer Herald* reported on the strike, it had already concluded. It had lasted for eight days and ended when the CPRR cut off the food supply to the workers, effectively starving them back to work. A correspondence between Mark Hopkins and Collis Huntington, two of the Big Four railroad investors, reveals that during the strike, the company had also contemplated recruiting recently freed slaves from the Freedmen's Bureau to replace the striking workers.<sup>140</sup> In a letter to Huntington, Hopkins endorsed the idea, writing: "A Negro labor force would tend to keep the Chinese steady, as the Chinese have kept the Irishmen quiet."<sup>141</sup> His statement reveals a calculated awareness of interethnic labor dynamics by the company's leadership and demonstrates their readiness to exploit these tensions for their benefit.

Solidarity among workers across demographic groups could have combated this potential for exploitation by strengthening their collective bargaining power, but such alliances were not formed. California's labor movement at the time was predominantly oriented towards representing the interests of white men and neglected to bridge the gap and form coalitions with other labor groups. At times, it actively acted against them. The Workingmen focused their energy against migrants, the Constitutional Convention voted against women's suffrage and labor unions barred Chinese workers from

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Obenzinger, "Virtual Reconstruction."

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

becoming members.<sup>142</sup> This pattern reflects a persistent lack of solidarity of the white working-class movement with other groups marginalized by California's economic structure. The failure to bridge these divides and form coalitions with other labor groups not only weakened the overall labor movement but also perpetuated the systemic inequalities and divisions within the workforce. The subsequent chapters of this analysis delve into the prevalent stereotypes and cultural motifs that exacerbated the divide between Chinese and white workforces. These societal narratives and beliefs played a significant role in widening the gap between these two groups, further inflaming the conflict and obstructing opportunities for collaboration and mutual understanding.

## 9. Cultural Clashes

This analysis has thus far argued that class anxieties were the primary driver of the exclusionist sentiment and the ensuing discrimination against Chinese migrants in California. However, attributing these attitudes solely to economic concerns would be an oversimplification. The critical question arises: why were Chinese laborers specifically targeted for exclusion, while other groups remained unaffected? The movement could have easily turned against migrants from any other nation, domestic workers from a specific region within the United States, a particular age group, or any other arbitrarily selected demographic. To explain the specific case of California's Chinese population, it is helpful to investigate some of the cultural differences that caused tensions.

### 9.1 Defining Difference

California, a melting pot of diverse global backgrounds and aspirations, was predominantly an immigrant state. The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act marked a pivotal moment in American legislative history; it was the first instance of a law that explicitly prohibited migration based on nationality. Many Americans took pride in the country's history of immigration, yet they made an exception when it came to Chinese people.

The article "The Chinese Problem," published in the *Herald* in July 1877, confronts this contradiction. The piece was originally published in another

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<sup>142</sup> Burns, "Taming the Elephant," 13.



newspaper, cited as the *Examiner*, and while the editor of the *Herald* does not explicitly comment on it, the placement as the front issue on the very first page indicates that the *Herald's* staff supported the message. The article takes issue with critiques of the Chinese exclusion movement that were expressed by journalists in the Eastern United States. The author counters these critiques by asserting that Eastern commentators fundamentally misunderstand and misrepresent the situation in California. In response, they write:

Let us admit that Chinese labor has done no damage to the Pacific Coast. The unremitting, willing work of two hundred thousand of the most industrious hands on earth must have done something to develop our productions. In fact, it may be admitted, one of the corner-stones of California's prosperity is Chinese labor. For every dollar he sends across the Pacific, the Chinaman leaves a full equivalent; it is no valid grievance against him that he carries away his own. What he is really guilty of is being a Chinaman. He is an integral part of that enormous empire whose semi-civilization crystallized some thousands of years ago—if, indeed, it did not rather then initiate a slow and resistless retrogression towards primitive barbarism.<sup>143</sup>

This excerpt reveals a complex stance. Despite acknowledging their economic contributions, the article does not express sympathy for Chinese migrants. Instead, the argument pivots to a notion of cultural incompatibility. The phrase “guilty of [...] being a Chinaman” encapsulates a belief in an inherent flaw associated with an entire nationality. By labeling China as semi-civilized and barbaric, the author not only denounces the Chinese people but also asserts their supposed inferiority to Americans.. This perspective illustrates the deeply rooted cultural stereotypes that underpinned anti-Chinese sentiment during this period, highlighting a bias that transcended economic reasoning and was firmly rooted in prejudice. The argument continues:

The people of all other nations amalgamate with and become a part of us. The European of whatever origin, becomes an American very soon; his children lose some of the parental traits and begin to show the race-characteristics of Americans. Even the African adopts our language and religion; the steps of his progress are easy and sure—a savage, a slave, an intelligent contraband, a freedman, a citizen. The Chinaman never adopts an iota of our civilization, or becomes in any sense an American. Universal brotherhood does not and cannot apply to him, because he will not be a brother.<sup>144</sup>

The author expresses the belief in a stark racial hierarchy. Chinese migrants are depicted as fundamentally incapable of integrating into American society, a

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<sup>143</sup> *Placer Herald*, “The Chinese Problem.”

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

viewpoint that conveniently overlooks various structural barriers such as discriminatory laws, the transitory nature of many Chinese migrants' stay in the United States, and the legal impossibility for them to become naturalized citizens. Additionally, the author ignores instances of successful integration by Chinese Americans, instead portraying an inflexible racial determinism that deems Chinese people as inherently unassimilable.

This supposed racial and cultural inferiority is then connected back to labor conflicts. The argument presented is that Chinese labor is able to underbid Californians because the Chinese migrants are

[...] drilled by a long course of the severest struggle for existence until they have reduced the problem of subsistence to the very finest point—a diet of rice and entrails, a lodging in the rudest of bunks, one of a dozen others, built in what was once a sub-sidewalk coal-hole; clothing of the simplest pattern and cheapest materials. Imagine such a people, with no ambition for progress, no taste for education or the arts and sciences, no possibility of expansion into anything but confirmed Mongolianism. Could one blame a New York laborer—with perhaps a wife to support and children to educate and aspirations of his own to gratify—if he became a little restive when underbid by such a proletariat?<sup>145</sup>

Here, the description of Chinese living conditions serves to other them from Western ways of living and therefore explain why Chinese migration is incompatible with California's economy. Cultural arguments against Chinese migration almost always start with or circle back to labor issues. Economic competition is the cataclysm that creates hostility and arguments around race or culture are used by exclusionists to resolve the issue in their favor.

The line of reasoning presented in the article aligns with the concept of Level of Living within Split Labor Market Theory. Next to Information and Political Backing, Level of Living is one of the initial determinants of the cost difference between the two labor groups. According to Bonacich, people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds will be more likely to accept low wages (and by extension, deficient working and living conditions) if the offer still presents an improvement over their current situation. A wage that the higher paid workers would reject could still be attractive to the lower paid group, since it presents a relative gain to them. Bonacich writes: "In general, the poorer the economy of the recruits, the less the inducement needed for them to enter the new labor market. Crushing poverty may drive them to sell their labor relatively

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

cheaply.”<sup>146</sup> The presence of migrants willing to accept lower wages creates a challenging situation for white laborers, but it is only one side of the equation. It is crucial to recognize that the availability of cheap labor is not solely due to the willingness of migrants to accept lower wages; it also stems from employers’ readiness to exploit these laborers by offering them substandard pay. If employers were to provide Chinese workers with the same livable wages as their white counterparts, it would not only prevent the undercutting of white workers but also improve the living conditions of the Chinese laborers.

The author of “The Chinese Problem” does not acknowledge this possibility. Instead, they view Chinese migrants as inherently inferior within a racial hierarchy, excluding them from the possibility of achieving the status of “true Americans.” This perspective leads the author to blame exploitation on the exploited, rather than acknowledging the systemic issues at play. The problem of singling out a particular group and excluding them from the American notion of freedom can then be justified by declaring that group unfit to be American:

Yet the fundamental theory of our attitude as a nation on this immigration matter is that we open our doors and invite ‘all mankind.’ Really, we do no such thing; we issue our invitation expecting but a limited acceptance, and only by those who will submit to our ways and laws and customs.<sup>147</sup>

By this logic, the author resolves the contradiction of an immigrant nation advocating for exclusion. The argument is structured to frame the excluded population as inherently incapable of integration, thus shifting the blame onto them. This approach not only absolves the dominant society of any responsibility but also justifies exclusionary policies under the guise of protecting national identity and social order.

## **9.2 Gender Roles**

In addition to race and class, prejudice against Chinese Americans was also informed by gendered notions of masculinity. Several scholars have commented on the gender dynamics that were at play in Gold Rush California. Sarah Penry provides an insightful analysis of the family ideals prevalent during the era, which glorified a rugged, self-reliant form of masculinity through prospecting

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<sup>146</sup> Bonacich, “The Split Labor Market,” 549.

<sup>147</sup> *Placer Herald*, “The Chinese Problem.”

and independent mining. At the same time, cultural representations, including songs, poems, and literary works, often emphasized the importance of home and hearth as a moral compass and a motivation. These narratives served to remind miners of their responsibilities towards their families, both present and future, and thus reinforced Anglo-European family standards.<sup>148</sup> While the dominant culture emphasized the importance of traditional Western family ideals, Chinese laborers transgressed some of these boundaries. “The Chinese Problem” alludes to this by juxtaposing the image of a New Yorker laborer with a wife and children against the Chinese communal living situation in which a worker shares his lodging with several other men. This contrast underscores the perceived transgression of Chinese miners against established gender norms. Rudi Batzell points out that while many Chinese migrants had families at home in Guangdong, the invisibility of these families to European-Americans in California led to a perception that Chinese migrants violated family standards. He writes that Western masculinity relied on the exploitation of women for household labor, whereas Chinese migrants necessarily had to perform these household tasks themselves.<sup>149</sup> This necessity sometimes also evolved into commercial ventures, with laundry businesses and Chinese domestic service workers in hotels and private homes becoming the most prominent examples.<sup>150</sup> These add another layer of complexity to the intermingling of cultural and economic facets.

Christopher Herbert argues that white masculinity during the Gold Rush was closely tied to personal economic success. Qualities such as courage, determination, and honor were seen as prerequisites for prosperity, while financial failure was often attributed to a lack of these traits.<sup>151</sup> The economic downturn of the 1870s threatened the financial stability and, by extension, the

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<sup>148</sup> Tara Penry, “Manly Domesticity on the Gold Rush Frontier: Recovering California’s Honest Miner,” *Western American Literature* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 330–52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.2004.0013>, 331–36.

<sup>149</sup> Batzell, “Free Labour,” 181.

<sup>150</sup> Joan S. Wang, “Race, Gender, and Laundry Work: The Roles of Chinese Laundrymen and American Women in the United States, 1850–1950,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 1 (2004): 58–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27501531>, 60–67.

<sup>151</sup> Christopher Herbert, “Life’s Prizes Are by Labor Got’: Risk, Reward, and white Manliness in the California Gold Rush,” *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (August 2011): 339–68, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2011.80.3.339>, 340–45.

masculinity of many Californian men, particularly as they witnessed Chinese workers establish themselves in trades traditionally considered feminine. Herbert also mentions risk-taking as another integral aspect of Gold Rush masculinity. White miners viewed themselves as adventurers, staking new claims with the potential for immense wealth. In contrast, Chinese miners often took over their abandoned claims, which offered lower risks and rewards, and were thus perceived as less masculine.<sup>152</sup> As mining in California evolved in the 60s and 70s, the viability of self-employed prospecting diminished, and miners increasingly sought employment with companies to make a living. This shift marked a departure from the idealized image of the rugged individualist miner. The economy was becoming more interconnected, with the service and manufacturing sectors expanding and providing opportunities for Chinese workers. This transition from an economy dominated by individualistic pursuits to one characterized by interconnectedness and industrialization posed a direct challenge to the traditional ideals of rugged frontiersman masculinity.

This perception of Chinese influence as a threat to masculinity is expressed in a satirical song about President Rutherford B. Hayes that the *Placer Herald* published in 1879. The song, titled “Nancy Hayes,” was a response to Hayes’ veto of a bill aimed at limiting Chinese migration. By addressing Hayes in a feminized manner and mocking his perceived submission to Chinese culture, the song seeks to undermine his authority and masculinity.

You’re a nice old woman, you are,  
Nancy Hayes, Nancy Hayes,  
For a Presidential cha—ir,  
Nancy Hayes, Nancy Hayes.  
O you’d ought to go over the sea,  
To the beautiful land of Chinee,  
Eat stewed rats and drink bohea,  
Nancy Hayes, Nancy Hayes,  
That would fit the size of ye,  
Nancy Hayes.<sup>153</sup>

The conflation of a gendered attack with the accusation of embracing Chinese culture in these lyrics associates the acceptance of Chinese culture with a negative stereotype of femininity. The intent of the author is to undermine

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 345.

<sup>153</sup> Hank Wagoner, “Entre Nous. Nancy Hayes.” *Placer Herald*, April 5, 1879, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385737352>.

Hayes' authority by suggesting that his stance on migration diminishes his masculinity. The mention of eating stewed rats is designed to evoke disgust and emphasize the cultural differences between American and Chinese societies. The next stanza continues:

O! why don't you take in washee,  
 Nancy Hayes, Nancy Hayes,  
 And set up a Chinese Joshee,  
 Nancy Hayes, Nancy Hayes<sup>154</sup>

While the first stanza metaphorically sends Hayes to China to adopt Chinese customs, the second stanza focuses on the influence of Chinese migrants in California. The term “washee” refers to the laundry businesses often run by Chinese migrants, and “Joshee” refers to the Chinese community centers known as Joss houses.<sup>155</sup> The suffix -ee is added to these words, as well as “Chinee” in the previous stanza, as a mockery of Chinese Pidgin English. By suggesting that the feminized version of Hayes should engage in Chinese businesses and culture, the author implies that the acceptance of Chinese culture is inherently feminine and unbecoming of a Western statesman.

Interestingly, the song does not explicitly mention women, neither Chinese nor white. The effect of feminizing Hayes is achieved by comparing him not to Chinese women, but to Chinese men. This approach subtly implies that Chinese men themselves violate the expected masculine behaviors as perceived by the contemporary European-American society. This satirical piece, therefore, not only reflects the gendered prejudices of the time but also highlights how such biases were interwoven with xenophobic and racist attitudes towards Chinese migrants.

While Chinese exclusion was a movement primarily led by men, there was also some involvement by women that were concerned with gender roles.<sup>156</sup> Others had a stake in the labor question. Women's employment opportunities in

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Joss House Museum and Chinese History Center, “About the Joss House,” Auburn Joss House, accessed December 28, 2023, <https://www.auburnjosshouse.org/about>. Joss is not the translation of a Chinese term, but a phonetic corruption of the Portuguese word *deus*, meaning God. The name derives from the use of Joss houses as religious sites.

<sup>156</sup> Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 131.

California at the time were limited. The majority of working women were engaged in the domestic and service sectors, working in hotels, restaurants, laundries or as tailors. Alternative employment options included sex work or factory labor, primarily in textiles.<sup>157</sup> However, sex work carried a social stigma and industrial manufacturing was mainly confined to urban areas. The domestic and service sector therefore remained the most feasible employment avenue for many women.

The entrance of Chinese men into sectors that traditionally employed women created potential for conflict. The Chinese laundries that the song references are one such example. In some cases, white and African-American laundrywomen found themselves competing with Chinese men for jobs in this field. While the groups often catered to different customer bases, there were also instances of direct competition. This was especially significant for women who depended on such work for their livelihood, including widows, divorcees, or those managing households on their own while their husbands worked in mines elsewhere.<sup>158</sup> In Nevada, there were instances of Paiute Native Americans joining white anti-Chinese protests over this issue, as competition between Chinese and Native American workers led to lower wages overall.<sup>159</sup> From the perspective of Split Labor Market Theory, the entry of Chinese men into traditionally female job sectors can be seen as a disruption of a caste system. Bonacich defines caste as an arrangement where access to certain jobs is exclusive to a certain group. She states that in Western societies like the United States, gender hierarchies often enforced such castes that segregated the workforce.<sup>160</sup> The arrival of Chinese workers in job sectors typically reserved for women blurred this socially enforced segregation, leading to heightened competition caused by the expanded labor pool.

The topic illustrates how ethnic conflict in California was intricately linked with class and gender dynamics. Anti-Chinese sentiment picked up on the transgression of Western gender roles by Chinese workers and used these

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<sup>157</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 51f.

<sup>158</sup> Wang, "Race, Gender and Laundry," 75ff.

<sup>159</sup> Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 14-18.

<sup>160</sup> Bonacich, "Split Labor Market," 555.

cultural differences as a basis for exclusion. As California transitioned from an idealized rugged frontier to an industrializing society, conflicts between wage labor and the American masculine ideal of self-reliance were projected onto Chinese laborers. Simultaneously, the intersection of Chinese workers into employment sectors traditionally occupied by white women shows the influence of labor competition in shaping anti-Chinese exclusion sentiments.

## 10. The Coolie Myth

One of the recurring themes in anti-Chinese materials is the coolie myth, a prevalent narrative which depicted Chinese laborers as an unfree, slave-like population. This chapter examines the ways in which this myth was employed to justify exclusionary practices and reinforce racial hierarchies. Furthermore, it examines the interconnection between anti-Chinese and anti-Black racism, illustrating how these prejudices were intertwined as the United States negotiated the ideals of free labor after the Civil War.

### 10.1 Framing Antipathy as Abolition

The coolie myth has its origins in the historical context of the so-called coolie trade, the 19th-century practice of transporting indentured laborers, particularly from India and China, to work in colonial regions such as the Caribbean and the Americas. The practice arose as a means to fill labor shortages on plantations after the abolition of slavery, and it often subjected these workers to harsh and exploitative conditions.<sup>161</sup> In California, anti-Chinese advocates used this context to draw parallels between the state's Chinese population and the victims of the coolie trade. They portrayed the Chinese in California as a servile group, obediently fulfilling the demands of monopolists, whether due to binding contracts or an alleged innate docility.

The myth found a frequent platform in publications like the *Placer Herald*. For instance, the aforementioned article "Employ White Labor" laments:

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<sup>161</sup> Chang, "Global Perspective," 34; Moon-Ho Jung, "Outlawing 'Coolies': Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 677–701, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2005.0047>, 679.



Could our farmers but visit some of the States where the slavery system was once common, and then compare them with the great free States of the North, they would easily see the terrible consequences which slavery, or labor under servile contracts, (and Chinese labor is nothing else,) is sure to bring upon a community. We wish this great State of ours to be filled up with free American citizens, who will come to make a home with us, and have a common interest in our commercial and agricultural interests, and in the general welfare of the State.<sup>162</sup>

The argument is not grounded in moral opposition to slavery but rather in demographic and economic concerns, positing that an enslaved population, equated here with the Chinese, would hinder the long-term development of the state. In the conclusion, the author elaborates: “We hope that every farmer will be ‘Anti-Chinese’ enough to discharge the Mongolians in his employ and give their places to some of the honest and capable white men who are seeking in vain for labor.”<sup>163</sup> By juxtaposing the “honest and capable” whites against the Chinese, the article implies that the latter are dishonest and that the quality of their work is worse. The needs of white workers surpass the needs of Chinese workers because of an alleged moral superiority. Implicit in this sentiment is a condemnation of the alleged Chinese slave labor, not on the basis of human rights or ethical considerations, but due to perceived demographic threats and economic disadvantages. This narrative serves not only to marginalize the Chinese community but also to rationalize their exclusion based on a constructed economic rationale that frames them as detrimental to the state’s progress.

This sentiment is echoed in other contemporary articles. In April 1870, the *Herald* published a comment on a bill aimed at prohibiting the allocation of public funds to companies employing Chinese workers. The bill initially passed the California State Assembly, but was defeated in the Senate. Editor Joseph Walkup, a former senator himself, expresses disappointment at this outcome, viewing it as an injustice to white laborers. He is particularly critical of Democrat senators who voted against the bill, stating:

The doctrines of the Democracy in the last campaign were the discouragement of Chinese Immigration and coolie labor, but here is a direct bid for flooding the country with

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<sup>162</sup> *Placer Herald*, “Employ White Labor.”

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

bestly, heathenish coolie slaves, to the exclusion of the white laborers. And professed democrats support the infamous measure!<sup>164</sup>

Walkup's description of Chinese immigrants as "bestly" and "heathenish" indicates that his objections to slavery are not rooted in empathy for its victims. By labeling them as sub-human, the paper perpetuates the era's prevailing racist attitudes.

The extent of freedom and the pressures under which Chinese migrated to California have been subjects of considerable debate. Modern scholarship generally agrees that, while they often took loans to finance their journey, male Chinese migrants generally came to California voluntarily.<sup>165</sup> In the aftermath of the Civil War, a period marked by the recent struggle over the abolition of African slavery, discussions regarding the ethical and economic implications of free labor were widespread. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, researching the demographics of the Chinese population that migrated to California, posits that the political climate of the time would have dissuaded large employers like the CPRR from hiring workers with an ambiguous legal status that could in any way resemble slavery.<sup>166</sup> This avoidance was not just a matter of public perception, but also a practical consideration for long-term planning, to avoid potential disruptions that could take place if a large part of their workforce was suddenly emancipated or affected by significant changes of their rights. In an 1865 statement to U.S. President Andrew Johnson, CPRR president Leland Stanford declared thusly:

No system similar to slavery, serfdom, or peonage, prevails among these laborers. Their wages, which are always paid in coin at the end of each month, are divided among them by their agents, who attend to their business, in proportion to the labor done by each person.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Placer Herald*, "A Good Bill Defeated."

<sup>165</sup> Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 53.

<sup>166</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Migrants to the Americas," 50.

<sup>167</sup> Leland Stanford, "Leland Stanford, President of the Company, Submits His Report on the Progress of the Road," essay, in *Message of the President of the United States, and Accompanying Documents, to the Two Houses of Congress, at the Commencement of the First Session of the Thirty-Ninth Congress.*, ed. United States Department of the Interior (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865), 988–92, <https://books.google.de/books?id=8mEvAQAAAJ>, 990.

This statement suggests that the CPRR viewed its Chinese workforce as free laborers or, at the very least, was keen to project such an image, depending on the degree of honesty that one accords to Stanford.

Hu-DeHart also argues that conditions for Chinese workers in California were comparatively better than those in other destinations like Cuba and the West Indies, where many Chinese migrants were deceived or coerced into migration. In contrast, California likely attracted voluntary migrants who were well-informed about their destination.<sup>168</sup> However, this does not imply that Chinese migrants in California were free from being taken advantage of. Their passage loans often had steep interest rates, and their migrations were usually managed by the Six Companies, a central representative of commercial power in the Chinese community.<sup>169</sup> The power dynamics and the ethics of migration in this context remain subjects of debate. Split Labor Market Theory highlights the significance of information access and political support as two factors that contribute to the initial difference in working conditions between white and Chinese laborers. American workers, being fluent in English, more culturally assimilated, and likely better informed about their rights, were more equipped to resist unfair labor practices. This contrast may have contributed to the stereotype of Chinese workers as docile and more manageable for large-scale capitalists.<sup>170</sup> Such nuances mattered little to the anti-Chinese pundits that used the coolie narrative to stoke hatred against migrants. Manu Karuka argues that the term coolie was not so much a description of a labor system as it was a label assigned to a nationality to legitimize differential treatment.<sup>171</sup> The portrayal of Chinese workers as slaves was not born out of a genuine concern for their welfare or a desire to understand their circumstances. Instead, it reinforced a racial hierarchy that placed Chinese workers as inferior to their white counterparts, thereby justifying their exclusion. The rhetoric painted Chinese migrants as inherently incompatible with the American way of life, using economic disparities to argue that Chinese labor was fundamentally at odds with American values.

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<sup>168</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Migrants to the Americas," 50ff.

<sup>169</sup> Welch, "Christianity and the Chinese," 155; Batzell, "Free Labor," 158.

<sup>170</sup> Batzell, "Free Labour," 178.

<sup>171</sup> Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 83.

## 10.2 The West and the South

Instead of collaborating with Chinese workers against economic inequality, anti-Chinese movements found allies elsewhere. Terry Boswell adds another dimension by discussing how through the melding of racial hierarchies with abolitionist sentiments, the coolie narrative allowed political advocates to intertwine anti-Chinese populism in California with resistance to African-American emancipation in the Southern states.<sup>172</sup>

The combination of anti-Black and anti-Chinese rhetoric is evident in an article condemning Black emancipation, which the *Placer Herald* published in 1868. The article, reprinted from another newspaper, concerns a riot following Washington's 1868 mayoral election and reports the killing of three white men by Black suspects, which the author uses to condemn the entire race. The section features an introduction by the editor: "True to their brutal instincts [...], these savages, under the very dome of the National Capitol, and in hearing of Grant's headquarters, brutally murdered and imbued their filthy hands in the blood of unoffending white men!"<sup>173</sup> It asks the paper's readers: "Voters of Placer, read and ponder well the following letter written by the accredited Washington correspondent of the Bulletin, and let it sink deep in your hearts [...]."<sup>174</sup> The letter itself carries the same vitriol and uses the incident to argue against the emancipation of both Black and Chinese Americans:

Is this not enough to make the blood run cold in the veins of every man who has one drop of white blood in his nature? Yet these are the savages for whom the nation sacrificed on the bloody fields of the South one million of its truest and best men! Yes, these are the black devils for whom we have burthened [sic] the country with a debt as countless as the stars, and as endless as the universe itself, and which is grinding the life out of you poor white men, and starving the widows of the brave soldiers of the nation! [...] White men of Placer, are you yet in doubt as to the intentions of this Mongrel party? Do you yet believe that they are not in favor of universal suffrage, and when the time comes they will force both negro and Chinese suffrage upon the whole country?<sup>175</sup>

The article uses incendiary language and manipulates emotionally charged imagery to position white people as victims of a "Mongrel" Republican party. It

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<sup>172</sup> Boswell, "Split Labor Market Analysis," 366.

<sup>173</sup> "Radicalism in Washington." *Placer Herald*, July 4, 1868, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/385632363/>.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

employs the distressing visuals of dead soldiers and starving widows to underscore this victimhood. Further on, the author warns of “secret political agents” and “secret societies” purportedly intent on undermining American liberties, though it stops short of specifying these groups.<sup>176</sup> This portrayal of emancipation as a threat to the social order underscores the author’s belief in white superiority.

Under the pretense of advocating for American freedom and abolitionist principles, the coolie myth actually masks a deeper, racially driven agenda. It positions itself as a defense against the perceived threats to American values, yet at its core, it perpetuates a racial hierarchy that prioritizes the needs and interests of whites over others. It leverages the atrocities of slavery not to challenge the system itself, but to target its victims. The myth posits that Chinese migrants, being alleged subjects of this system, are inherently unfit for integration into American society. This narrative does not seek to alleviate the plight of Chinese migrants or address the structural disadvantages they face. Instead, it is employed to rationalize their exclusion. The coolie myth acknowledges the presence of exploitation but shifts the blame onto the exploited themselves. In doing so, it serves not as a genuine critique of labor abuses but as a tool to reinforce existing social and racial hierarchies.

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

## 11. Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, I have analyzed the factors that contributed to the discrimination of Chinese migrants through a lens of labor market competition. Through close readings and discourse analysis, coupled with Split Labor Market Theory as a framework, I have discovered that discrimination was driven by economic concerns, but also by cultural animosity. These factors reinforce each other.

The self-perpetuating nature of the relationship between discourse and discrimination turns Split Labor Market Theory into a “chicken and egg” problem: a split labor market only manifests because the two groups are already being treated differently in the first place. Bonacich outlines the labor groups’ motivations and resources as price determinants. Modern research and historic examples like the transcontinental railroad show that the preconceptions held by employers factor into the dynamic as well. Chinese migrants were paid differently because they were perceived differently. Othering enables the split labor market and the split labor market, in turn, reinforces othering. Hence, the theory is not a way to pinpoint the exact origin of ethnic antagonism, but rather an analytical framework for understanding its evolution. This is not necessarily a flaw. Labor and ethnic conflicts, both in the modern day and throughout history, do not start on a blank slate, but are the culmination of historical material conditions and entrenched discourses. Split Labor Market Theory explains how economic mechanisms in the labor market can reinforce and accelerate these existing conflicts, thereby marginalizing certain groups.

Conflict between white Californians and Chinese migrants emerged early and started a continuous cycle of strife. From the early years of the Gold Rush onwards, migrants were targeted by unfair legislation and harmful stereotypes. These restrictions drove the white and Chinese labor apart and essentially led to the development of parallel societies, where each group maintained a relatively distinct sphere of work, living, and trade. This segregation in turn deepened the divide, thereby fostering conflict and hampering mutual cooperation.

Labor competition was a strong driver for ethnic antagonism. The differential treatment of Chinese laborers and higher class Chinese that operated outside of direct labor competition shows the significance of class in

shaping their interactions in California. However, the rhetoric employed in anti-Chinese publications like the *Placer Herald* shows that the issue goes beyond rational, calculated economics and extends to deep-seated prejudices and harmful stereotypes. The newspaper may not be an authoritative voice that speaks for the whole labor movement, but its close connection to Democratic politics, Placer County's central position in the railroad and mining sectors and its proximity to the industrial and legislative center of Sacramento make it an excellent sample to gain insight into the topics that motivated anti-Chinese sentiment.

The persistent dehumanization and deindividualization of Chinese workers characterize them not as a collective of individuals, but an abstract and depersonalized economic force. Combined with white workers' concerns about their job security, especially during times of economic crisis like in the 1870s, this characterization contributes to the prejudiced depiction of Chinese workers as merely tools of the business class. Economic anxieties are projected onto the Chinese workers, who become a scapegoat for the adverse effects of California's rapid industrialization. Cultural differences and clashing gender notions between Chinese and white workers reveal prevailing negative stereotypes that contribute to the division between the groups, therefore reinforcing the cycle of rivalry and prejudice. When competition for jobs heightened, animosity between these groups grew. Because the marginalized Chinese group had fewer resources to defend itself, it bore the brunt of this competition and became targeted by harmful political campaigns. An alternative approach could have been a collaborative effort, advocating for systemic changes beneficial to both groups. However, in California, the white working-class movement did not form such alliances.

White worker advocates in California acknowledged some patterns of exploitation but, regrettably, redirected this awareness towards hostility against the exploited rather than fostering solidarity with them. This is evident in narratives like the coolie myth, which use the stereotype of Chinese exploitability as a justification to declare them incompatible with American ideals, rather than a call to action to fight exploitation together. This perspective culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act, which strengthened the position of white Californian workers, but only because it discriminated against the

Chinese. The fundamental flaw in this approach is that it was predicated on conflict rather than solidarity. Democrats and Workingmen attacked the business class and the lower paid labor class in tandem, but while the business class had the influence and resources to defend itself, the excluded Chinese workers did not.

The participation of Paiute Native Americans in anti-Chinese protests and the CPRR's deliberations to replace striking Chinese workers with African Americans hint that a split labor market can have more than two competing factions. Interethnic working class politics could be an insightful premise for future research in this area. This thesis has predominantly investigated the Euro-American perception of Chinese labor. To better understand the dynamics of a split labor market, it would be helpful to investigate the interactions between labor movements of different marginalized groups and gain insight into the potential for conflict and cooperation between these groups. Another interesting project would be a Split Labor Market Theory analysis of an immigrant population like Irish or Italian Americans, where an initial conflict did not eventually result in exclusion or segregation, but integration. A comparative perspective between an integrated and an excluded group has the potential to reveal underlying structural differences.

The advantage of a systematic frame of analysis like Split Labor Market Theory is that it can be applied to a multitude of labor conflicts. Learning about discrimination against Chinese Californians in the 19th century can help us predict and counteract the development of discrimination against other groups in the future. The specific case studied in this thesis teaches two important lessons: Firstly, equal wages for equal work are essential to prevent wage undercutting. Much of the resentment that the white working class harbored was based on the fear that immigrants could replace them by offering the same labor for a lower price. Minimum wage laws and pay equity laws can cushion this effect by providing job security for the higher paid group and preventing the exploitation of the lower paid group. Secondly, intercultural contact is a prerequisite for working class solidarity across different demographics. Chinese migrants had limited contact with white workers. The two essentially existed in parallel societies. The reasons for this division are plentiful. They are partly self-imposed because temporary migrants had little interest in integrating into a



society that they would leave a short time later; they were partly structural, since migrants lived in ethnically distinct Chinatowns and were often segregated in their employment; and they were to a significant degree dictated by the white working class's refusal to cooperate with Chinese migrants, as is evident in the banning of Chinese workers from white unions.

The *Placer Herald* hints at this cultural divide. The editors frequently talk *about* Chinese, but rarely *to* them. This othering stands in the way of cooperation and is emblematic of the perspective of California's dominant worker movements, which characterized Chinese labor as a threat, rather than an ally. Split Labor Market Theory is a useful tool, since it makes abstract market forces palpable that contribute to the development of a divide between Chinese and white workers. However, the analysis of anti-Chinese materials has also showcased that the economic division between the groups is exacerbated by an underlying degree of hostility driven by racial and gendered stereotypes. To create effective policies that help all workers across ethnicities, it is essential to overcome the boundaries that drive groups apart and forge cooperation through mutual understanding.

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Hiermit versichere ich an Eides statt, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig und ohne die Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe.

Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus veröffentlichten und nicht veröffentlichten Schriften entnommen wurden, sind als solche unter Angabe der Quelle kenntlich gemacht.

Diese Arbeit ist in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form im Rahmen einer anderen Prüfung noch nicht vorgelegt.

Köln, den 30.12.2023

Unterschrift

