

# Inhibiting Missions to Chinese Immigrants in California before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

Professor Frederick Hale,  
North-West University  
halef@hope.ac.uk

Abstract: Scholarly analysis of hostility to Chinese immigrants in the United States of America began well over a century ago but has advanced on an uneven front. Little of a scholarly nature has been published about specifically Christian involvement in the conflicting efforts to evangelise these newcomers and halt their further immigration. The present article takes steps towards filling that *lacuna*. It discusses efforts by various Protestant denominations and, subsequently, the Roman Catholic Church to evangelise and conduct educational ministries among the Chinese in California, especially in and near San Francisco during a period of ascending public hostility to those immigrants which led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The primary focus is on the Methodist pastor Otis Gibson and Archbishop José Sadoc Alemany as key promoters of such missionary endeavours who incurred the wrath of many other churchmen in their own and other denominations. It will be argued that both enthusiasm for missions to Chinese in California and criticism of those efforts as futile could be found in Protestant denominations and in the San Francisco Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church.

Keywords: Chinese immigrants, California, San Francisco, evangelisation, literacy ministry, anti-Chinese agitation, Otis Gibson, José Sadoc Alemany, Denis Kearney

Sammendrag: Vitenskapelige studier av fiendtlighet mot kinesiske immigranter i USA begynte for godt over et århundre siden, men har utviklet seg ujevnt. Lite av vitenskapelig karakter har blitt publisert om spesifikk kristen involvering i de motstridende innsatsene for å evangelisere disse nykommerne og stoppe deres videre immigrasjon. Denne artikkelen er et bidrag til dette tomrommet i forskningen. Den diskuterer innsats fra ulike protestantiske kirkesamfunn og, senere, den romersk-katolske kirken for å evangelisere og drive utdanningsarbeid blant kineserne i California, spesielt i og nær San Francisco, i en periode med økende offentlig fiendtlighet mot denne immigrantgruppen som førte til *the Chinese Exclusion Act* av 1882. Hovedfokuset er på metodistpastor Otis Gibson og erkebiskop José Sadoc Alemany som to nøkkelpersoner i misjonsbestrebelse som pådro seg vrede fra mange kirkefolk i egne og andre kirkesamfunn. Det vil bli argumentert at både entusiasme for misjon blant kineserne i California og kritikk av denne innsatsen som fåfengt kunne finnes i protestantiske kirkesamfunn og i San Francisco erkebispedømme av den romersk-katolske kirken.

Nøkkelord: kinesiske immigranter, California, San Francisco, evangelisering, leseferdighetsarbeid, anti-kinesisk agitasjon, Otis Gibson, José Sadoc Alemany, Denis Kearney

## Introduction

Broadly speaking, the history of the movement to halt the immigration of Chinese people into the United States of America – and even deport those who had already arrived in that country – has been an established field of research for more than a century. The pioneering efforts by Californian academics like Mary Roberts Coolidge<sup>1</sup> and Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer<sup>2</sup> early in the twentieth century provided springboards for future generations of historians who explored various facets of this sordid chapter of American ethnic and political history. Consequently, a wealth of published material awaits any serious reader in search of enlightenment about the xenophobic campaigns which gained momentum in California in the 1870s, rolled across the USA to become a national political issue, and culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>3</sup>

Far less scholarly attention, however, has been paid to the origins of various Christian agencies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, to undertake missionary

1 Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909).

2 Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939).

3 Two of the most noteworthy studies are Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1971), and Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

endeavours among Chinese immigrants in California and in many cases directly oppose the exclusionist campaigns. Nor, for that matter, has Christian support of exclusion received its due. Indicative of the state of published research on this topic is Yong Chen's useful though inconsistent survey, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community*.<sup>4</sup> In his chapter on "Collective Identity", Chen included disjointed snatches of information about Protestant missionary outreach to the Chinese in that city and beyond its boundaries. He mentioned briefly such dedicated figures as William Speer, A.W. Loomis, and Otis Gibson but overlooked men like the German Lutheran Wilhelm Lobscheid's hostility to the Chinese. Ironically, Roman Catholic endeavours are entirely absent, so there is no mention of *e.g.* Archbishop José Sadoc Alemany's promotion of them in the San Francisco Archdiocese and the ministries of such priests as Thomas Cian, John Valentini, and Gregorio Antonucci there. Nor is the spirited and publicised opposition of Father James Bouchard to such evangelisation cited.

A Paulist priest, Ricky Manalo, wrote in 2009 about the history of Roman Catholicism among Chinese immigrants in San Francisco in an article that was anthologised in *Asian American Christianity Reader*. He acknowledged that the efforts of men like Cian, Valentini (whom he erroneously called "Valenti"), and Antonucci did not endure. Manalo attributed their impermanence to the supposed fact that they were all diocesan priests (although not all were) and thus primarily responsible to the archbishop of the archdiocese. To Manalo, the ultimate effectiveness came when members of his own religious community arrived in San Francisco and in 1904 undertook missionary work among the city's Chinese.<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, scholarly analysis of hostility to Chinese immigrants has been dominated by historians and others whose concerns were primarily about labour history and intimately related matters, and it was often done from decidedly secular perspectives that allowed little room for the treatment of religious dimensions of the topic. Andrew Gyory's commendable study of the politics of the exclusion movement illustrates the point. It reached into many of its corners of history but seldom touched on the activities of Euro-American churchmen either to contribute to or oppose that campaign as it impeded efforts to evangelise the Chinese in their midst. Gyory commented on the involvement of Isaac Kalloch, an erstwhile Baptist minister who served as mayor of San Francisco from 1879 until 1881, but dwelt exclusively on the man's demagoguery while ignoring his participation in Baptists' internal debate about engaging with the

4 Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

5 Ricky Manalo, "A History of Chinese Catholics in San Francisco and the Bay Area", in Viji Nakka-Cammauf and Timothy Tseng (eds.), *Asian American Christianity Reader* (Castro Valley, California: Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity, 2009), 75-82.

Chinese on explicitly Christian grounds.<sup>6</sup>

In the present article I shall take steps towards filling this broad *lacuna* in missions history by focussing on an interdenominational sample of Protestant efforts as well as those by Roman Catholics to evangelise and provide educational opportunities for Chinese immigrants. Discussed are the outreach of men like Speer, Gibson, and Antonucci, as well as the opposition of such individuals as Kalloch and Lobscheid. Regarding Catholic responses to Chinese immigrants, attention is also paid to the defence by such priests as Archbishop Alemany and William King and hostile agitation by James Bouchard. In some cases, this branch of domestic evangelisation (often in tandem with literacy and other language instruction) was a natural sequel to both Protestant and Roman Catholic foreign missionary endeavours which had grown exponentially in China during the nineteenth century and in California was conducted by Chinese and non-Chinese men who had previously been active in the province of Guangdong or elsewhere in the Middle Kingdom.

Our multid denominational consideration of this chapter in American domestic missions history reveals how and why Protestants' efforts met with an appreciable measure of success from an early period, despite encountering hostility from some quarters. It also illuminates how Roman Catholics in the San Francisco area, emerging from an ethnically diverse but predominantly Irish-American religious population, experienced significantly less progress and had to overcome a greater degree of hostility on the part of working-class immigrants from Ireland who were competing with Chinese newcomers for employment during times of economic downturn which fuelled movements to halt immigration from China and indeed deport the sons of the Middle Kingdom who were already in California.

## **The Growing Chinese Presence in California**

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, people who had emigrated from China to the United States of America were very thin on the ground. News that gold had been discovered in northern California, a region of the Mexican province of Alta California until its *de facto* annexation by the United States in 1846 which was formalised two years later, spread rapidly around much of the globe, and Chinese would-be Argonauts joined the streams of people who rushed to what in Cantonese dialects they called *Gam San* (Golden Mountain) in search of instant wealth. Most of these young men did not become prospectors but remained in and near San Francisco, where they found employment in many sectors of its burgeoning economy and became the nucleus of the Chinese component of the polyglot regional population.<sup>7</sup>

In May 1850 numerous American newspapers announced that the Chinese emperor

6 Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*, 173.

7 Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community*, remains a useful survey.

had banned emigration of his subjects to California.<sup>8</sup> This did not prevent thousands of them from travelling either overland or down the Pearl River to the British crown colony of Hong Kong and boarding wooden sailing vessels to undertake the perilous crossing to San Francisco. The imperial ban was not lifted until the Burlingame-Seward Treaty between the USA and China was ratified by the former country in November 1868 and by China the following year. That agreement also ensured equal treatment before the law in American courts, a provision which Chinese immigrants in California and historians of them often believed was honoured more in the breach than the observance.

In the meantime, the number of people from China residing in the young state of California, which had been formally admitted to the Union in 1850, rose dramatically, and this trend continued. Early demographic statistics are sketchy, but by 1870 the United States Census counted 12,022 “Chinese” residents of the county of San Francisco.<sup>9</sup> Many others lived elsewhere in the Golden State by that time, and their vital role in constructing the first transcontinental railroad, chiefly over and through the Sierra Nevada and across Nevada into Utah, received extensive journalistic and other attention. In 1880, California had no fewer than 75,132 Chinese in its utterly multiracial and polyglot population, 21,213 of them living in San Francisco. The entire United States of America then had a Chinese population of 105,465. For comparative purposes, Oregon had the second largest contingent with 9,510 and Nevada the third with 5,416.<sup>10</sup>

The city of San Francisco was California’s principal Chinese stronghold. In 1870, *i.e.* a relatively early point in the agitation against immigrants from China, that municipality had a total foreign-born population of 73,719. Of these residents, 25,864 had entered the world in Ireland, while 11,703 hailed from China.<sup>11</sup>

### **William Speer: A Pioneering Presbyterian Defender of the Chinese**

Among the first American-born missionaries to China during the third quarter of the nineteenth century who subsequently conducted outreach in California was William Speer, a Pennsylvanian who had served in China for four years before being assigned by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to head his denomination’s timely endeavours among the Chinese in and near San Francisco in 1852. He led this ministry and served as an advocate of the people whom he was evangelizing until declining

8 See, for example, “Foreign Items”, *The Evening Post* (New York), 11 May 1850, p. 1.

9 “*Ninth Census of the United States. Statistics of Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 91.

10 *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 3, 539.

11 *The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 387, 389.

health compelled him to resign and leave the field in 1857. A year before his departure, Speer wrote a densely worded brochure in response to arguments that the Chinese in California be deported. He disagreed ardently and pleaded that it was both morally imperative and, secondarily, in the state's self-interest that they be allowed to remain.<sup>12</sup>

Speer squarely addressed persistent accusations that the Chinese in California had abysmally low moral standards. "Can a heathen people outshine a Christian people?" asked this Presbyterian minister rhetorically before answering it affirmatively. After all, Speer noted, "licentiousness and vices" existed in abundance among other ethnic groups in San Francisco, so it seemed "doubtful" that merely eliminating the Chinese presence would elevate public ethical standards significantly. While tacitly acknowledging the existence of houses of prostitution among the Cantonese of the city, he pointed to an element of hypocrisy in accusations of ethnic moral inferiority in the anti-immigrant rhetoric, since "their most infamous places are sustained to some extent by abandoned whites."<sup>13</sup>

### **William Kip's Denigration of the Chinese in San Francisco**

Beginning in the 1850s and antedating Speer's defence of Chinese immigrants from the abuse they were suffering, Protestant clerical voices were heard denigrating these newcomers. One was that of William Ingraham Kip, the Episcopal bishop of California from 1853 until 1893. This New Yorker lacked Speer's experience in China, but he held a Yale degree and had gained pastoral experience before being sent to the Golden State to lead the Episcopal churches there.

In late 1854 or early 1855, Kip contributed an article titled "The Chinese in California" to one of his denomination's periodicals, *The Spirit of Missions*. He stressed the need for evangelistic outreach to these newcomers and underscored that it would be a difficult ministry. Kip's overall portrayal of the Chinese emphasized their cultural difference and moral turpitude. He began by stating that a visitor to San Francisco's Chinatown could imagine that he was "in the lowest parts of Canton or Hong-Kong" (which he had never visited), for one saw only Chinese residents and heard "nothing but the sound of their harsh and discordant language, or the noise of their still more discordant music". The inhabitants of that quarter, Kip declared, were "determined to remain strangers", and to him their inability to assimilate seemed deeply ingrained. Between the "Mongolian and Anglo-Saxon races, there is a 'deep gulf,' as impassable as that which at the South separates the white and [African-American] slave popula-

12 William Speer, *An Humble Plea, Addressed to the Legislature of California, in Behalf of the Immigrants from the Empire of China in This State* (San Francisco: Office of the Oriental, 1856), 4-5.

13 Speer, *An Humble Plea, Addressed to the Legislature of California, in Behalf of the Immigrants from the Empire of China in This State*, 29.

tion”<sup>14</sup>.

Moreover, Kip perceived a moral deficit among the Chinese in San Francisco, whom he generalised were “with very few exceptions, ... the vilest offscouring of China”. Most of the relatively few women among them, Kip lamented, were prostitutes, and the men, who had either opened shops in the city or become miners, were “imitating the vices, but not emulating the virtues of the whites”. Many of them spent “their time entirely in gambling” which struck him as being “an absorbing passion” of the Chinese. Other dependencies which he noted were their consumption of “large quantities of liquor and opium, when they can afford it [*sic*]”. Among the group’s alleged shortcomings, Kip also cited a lack of personal and group hygiene, violent feuds transplanted from China, and a proclivity to perjure themselves while under oath.<sup>15</sup> There was nothing unique in his severe assessment of the Cantonese in San Francisco and elsewhere in California; every point he raised in his article reverberated in regional anti-Chinese rhetoric for decades. Bishop Kip evinced only scant interest in undertaking missionary work among these ostensibly benighted souls.

Kip employed significantly more benign rhetoric while unveiling the abiding critical dimension in his ethnic perception when writing his memoirs of his first six years in San Francisco. He made only scant mention of the Chinese in California and eschewed comment on their moral standards. However, in a section about the local climate, Kip defended the much-maligned chilly breezes along the Pacific coast, which he found preferable to “the heat of our Atlantic States”. In California, the atmosphere was thus renewed every twenty-four hours. Without that displacement, Kip feared, “there would be danger of the plague amid the filth and crowd of the Chinese quarter.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Seminal Missionary Ministry of Otis Gibson**

Although Otis Gibson was not the first churchman of any denomination to develop an evangelistic and educational ministry among Chinese immigrants after California became a state in 1850, with ample justification he is credited with being the first long-serving Protestant missionary (in contrast to Speer’s relatively brief efforts) whose planting of the Gospel yielded permanent fruit. Considered historically, his case richly illustrates the challenges faced by those who sought to minister to these Asians in an increasingly hostile environment. This Methodist farmer’s son was a native of the village of Moira near the Canadian border in New York. Gibson was ordained to the pastoral ministry in 1854 and sailed with his wife to Shanghai the following year. They

14 William Ingraham Kip, “The Chinese in California”, *The Spirit of Missions* 20 (March 1855), 85-86.

15 Kip, “The Chinese in California”, 86.

16 Wm. Ingraham Kip, *The Early Days of My Episcopate* (New York: Thomas Whitaker, 1892), 83.

remained in the southeastern coastal province of Fuzhou for a decade but returned to New York in 1865. Three years later, the Gibsons arrived in San Francisco, having been commissioned by Bishop Thomson to resume his outreach to Chinese people, this time on the eastern shore of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>17</sup> In September, the California Methodist Episcopal Conference appointed its personnel to pastoral and other positions in five districts and also commissioned “Otis Gibson, Missionary to the Chinese of the Pacific Coast”.<sup>18</sup>

It was announced in the press before Christmas that Gibson was organising a network of schools “in different parts of the state” where Chinese immigrants would be instructed in “our language, laws, and Christian religion”.<sup>19</sup> In pursuit of this vision, for approximately two years Gibson travelled widely in California to organise Sunday schools among chiefly young Chinese men and stimulate public awareness of this ministry. His efforts were later said to have prompted not only Methodists but also adherents of various other Protestant denominations to open similar Sunday schools where attendees would acquire not only literacy in English but also a basic knowledge of Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, Gibson’s programme received sympathetic coverage in the secular daily press. In San Francisco the *Chronicle*, for example, reported in January 1869 that Sunday schools for Chinese had been opened in several of the city’s churches and also in Santa Clara, Stockton, and Sacramento as well as at the Pioneer Woolen Mills in northernmost San Francisco, where the school had forty pupils. Readers were assured that according to one of Gibson’s colleagues in pastoral ministry, N.J. Bird of the Powell Street Church in San Francisco, the Chinese pupils in the Sunday schools were “in no degree behind the average of the Anglo-Saxon race in point of mental capacity and quickness of perception”.<sup>21</sup>

One cannot understand the depth of Gibson’s commitment to his task of evangelism coupled with cultural bridging and assimilation without an awareness that he believed he was responding to a divine force working in history. Speaking to the California State Sunday School convention in October 1869, he declared that “the hand of God” was directing the flow of emigrant Chinese to American shores, and accordingly no human power could halt it. This conviction would lead Gibson into a diametrical clash with advocates of Chinese exclusion, as will be seen below. By that time the Methodist network of Sunday schools in California had grown to sixteen,

17 “Passengers for California”, *The Daily Examiner* (San Francisco), 20 July 1868, 3.

18 “Conference Appointments”, *The Daily Morning Chronicle* (San Francisco), 23 September 1868, 1.

19 “By State Telegraph”, *Daily Evening Herald* (Stockton), 21 December 1868, 2.

20 “Rev. Dr. Otis Graham” (obituary), *The Daily Examiner* (San Francisco), 27 January 1889, 5.

21 “The Chinese Sunday-Schools”, *The Daily Morning Chronicle*, 14 January 1869, 3.



which engaged approximately 200 teachers and enrolled 600 pupils. This was even reported in the British press.<sup>22</sup>

The evangelistic dimension of Gibson's ministry among the Chinese also expanded, owing to the arrival of a pastor originally from China, Hew Sing Me, who joined the Methodist pastoral staff in January 1871 as an assistant to Gibson in the mission on Washington Street. The *Chronicle* stated that he was said to possess "a good English education" and had resided for several years in New York, where he had become familiar with "the customs and manners of the Americans in the Eastern States".<sup>23</sup> This was an early instance of hiring ordained Chinese colleagues to serve in ministry alongside the Euro-American pastors and other personnel.

At times the educational efforts by Methodists and other Protestants were met with sarcasm and derision. In early February 1869 an anonymous correspondent of the *Chronicle* attempted to describe humorously a teaching session he had witnessed at the Methodist church in San José. "The hardest knot (or nut) down in these parts is the recently agitated question of educating the Chinese," he began. This would-be satirist recounted a scene on the previous Sunday with "about fifty Chinamen all talking at once". They could not be interrupted until "they had their 'say' about the way the church was built and 'Melican' [*i.e.* American] Josh-houses in general, from a Chinese stand-point." Only after that throng had become more "docile" could the "pious teachers" instruct them in the alphabet.<sup>24</sup>

Gibson tactfully exploited this occasion to publicise his mission. He responded from San Francisco with civility in a letter to the *Chronicle* which illuminated his vision, his culturally patronising but protective attitude towards the Chinese, and the severity of popular hostility at that early stage of his mission. He described his project as "a great enterprize [*sic*], lately inaugurated in this city and on this coast, for the uplifting and blessing of a long-neglected and much-abused race among us". It encompassed a system of language tuition at Sunday and evening schools and foresaw the creation of "a Central School or College" in San Francisco. By way of illustration, Gibson recounted how less than a week earlier a "young lad lately from China" had arrived at the school of the Central Methodist Church in Mission Street, his face bloodied and his forehead bearing a large gash inflicted by what this pastor assumed was "a Christian (?) boy". He added that "dozens" of other Chinese in San Francisco had been deterred from attending because of similar mistreatment.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, this dimension remained at the heart of the Methodist mission to Chinese immigrants, much to the consternation of their detractors.

22 "Religious Intelligence", *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* (Truro), 23 October 1869, 6.

23 "The China Steamer", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 January 1871, 3.

24 "Letter from San Jose", *The Daily Morning Chronicle*, 4 February 1869, 3.

25 Otis Gibson (San Francisco) to *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 February 1869, in *The Daily Morning Chronicle*, 6 February 1869, 3.

The outspoken Gibson remained a primary target of the latter's wrath, especially as the local economy deteriorated owing to the protracted depression that struck the American economy beginning in the early 1870s. The expression of their hatred reached its apogee in November 1876 shortly after a Congressional committee held hearings in San Francisco on the hotly debated issue of Chinese immigration. Several workers' organisations co-operated to arrange a massive protest parade in which thousands of men reportedly representing a wide spectrum of trades and social classes marched to the Mechanics' Pavilion, where more than 6,000 assembled to hear numerous speakers, among them Mayor Andrew Jackson Bryant of San Francisco, address them. Many items that had been carried in the procession were brought to the Pavilion, among them an effigy of Gibson suspended by the neck from a pole, which was then burned. "Derisive cheering and much hearty laughter greeted the dangling figure," reported *The Daily Examiner*.<sup>26</sup> The Methodist clergy passed a resolution condemning this "grievous insult to the whole cloth", the complicity of Mayor Bryant in the occasion, and the failure of the press to condemn the action.<sup>27</sup> Their protest was fruitless, but Gibson continued in his key missionary position until ill health forced him to retire in 1884. Besides being hanged and burned in effigy, he had witnessed his mission compound attacked twice and had been compelled to stand guard on many nights to prevent it from being incinerated.<sup>28</sup>

### **Wilhelm Lobscheid: A Lutheran Immigrant Foe of Chinese Immigration**

At no point during the decades leading up to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 were there noteworthy Lutheran efforts to evangelise or otherwise minister to Chinese immigrants in California. This is perhaps not surprising, because in the Golden State most adherents of that Reformation faith were themselves immigrants, chiefly from numerous German principalities but to a much lesser degree the Scandinavian lands. Arguably the most ardent Lutheran newcomer in the debate over the desirability of the Chinese was not only an immigrant but also an erstwhile missionary in China. Wilhelm Lobscheid had been called to the pulpit of a Germanophone parish, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, in San Francisco after many years in Hong Kong, where he not only propagated Christianity but also toiled as a school inspector and Chinese-English lexicographer. In his new professional home, this cleric entered the verbal fray in 1873 with a short book titled *The Chinese: What They Are, And What They Are Doing*. Part of his text, however, focussed on what they were *not* doing, namely assimilating. He signalled its critical tenor in prefatory remarks: "I advanced the same principle more than fifteen years ago. I have, in private and public, expressed the same sentiments to well meaning [*sic*] Chinese merchants of this town; have urged

26 "The Demonstration", *The Daily Examiner* (San Francisco), 16 November 1876, 3.

27 "Rev. Gibson's Effigy", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 November 1876, 2.

28 "Rev. Dr. Otis Gibson", 5.

them to forsake their antiquated customs, and to begin a new life—a life of honor and civilization.” He underscored his hope that the newcomers from China would “reflect on the course they are pursuing, and alter their *modus operandi* before it is too late”.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Lobscheid seems to have thought it virtually axiomatic that members of certain ethnic groups were inherently incompatible. “There is observed a peculiar spirit of antagonism between the Indo-Germanic and Mongolian races,” he generalised. “Wherever they meet, there is hostility. Whether they meet in the forests of America, in Asia, or on the islands of the Pacific, only a short time suffices to kindle the fire of hostility; and once kindled, it rages until one of the parties is expelled, exterminated, or thoroughly subdued.” How his Christian faith related to such perceived incompatibility this Lutheran pastor did not state. Instead, Lobscheid averred that the Chinese were “barbarians, and the civilization of Europe and America affects them as little as the man in the moon.”<sup>30</sup>

Turning to moral and civic issues closer to home, Lobscheid identified “the lack of public spirit” as a “very grave complaint” raised against the Chinese in California. He acknowledged that numerous other Caucasians in San Francisco, including some of his fellow clergymen, had denied this. Lobscheid identified the Presbyterian missionary Speer in this regard but asserted incorrectly that even that pioneering advocate of the Chinese immigrants had “left at last, disgusted with the men for whom he entered the breach”. Lobscheid faulted Chinese ingrates for what he apparently regarded as the general failure of Speer’s redoubtable efforts to aid their cause and asked rhetorically: “Why did not the wealthy Chinese come forward and place at his disposal an amount of money for educational purposes sufficient to silence all opposition?”<sup>31</sup>

### **Examples of Early Disgust with Anti-Chinese Agitation**

By the early 1870s numerous ministers who were not directly involved in missions to Chinese immigrants had begun to express their disgust with the anti-Chinese agitation, as had people in secular vocations. A typical pastoral voice in this response was that of T.K. Noble, who had left a pulpit in Cleveland, Ohio, to take that of the Taylor Street Congregational Church in San Francisco in October 1872.<sup>32</sup> Eight months later he preached a jeremiad titled “The Chinese Question from a Christian Standpoint”. By then, according to a newspaper that paraphrased his homily at great length, “The Chinese question is one which is agitating the minds of all classes. It is discussed in the parlor, in the pulpit, and on the street, and the views upon it, which are advanced, are many and various.” In his “eloquent exordium”, Noble reportedly

29 W. Lobscheid, *The Chinese: What They Are, And What They Are Doing* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft & Co., 1873), unpaginated Preface.

30 Lobscheid, *The Chinese: What They Are, And What They Are Doing*, 7-8.

31 Lobscheid, *The Chinese: What They Are, And What They Are Doing*, 8.

32 “Local Brevities”, *The Daily Examiner* (San Francisco), 3 October 1872, 3.

remarked that “scarcely a week had passed, since he had come to this Coast that in some parts of this city he had not seen the Chinamen stoned and mistreated”. Such ethnic violence, he thundered, was “a shame to our civilization”. The abuse was manifold, spanning much of a spectrum from “all manner of indignity” through being beaten and stoned to being murdered in the streets. Noble believed that the Chinese who had sailed to California’s shores had not done so of their own volition but had been driven by economic necessity to cross the Pacific. This placed responsibility on Americans’ shoulders, and he encouraged them to bear it in a Christian spirit. He also reminded them that the Burlingame-Seward Treaty of 1868 mandated equal rights and privileges for Chinese immigrants in the United States of America. But even without its contractual terms, there was a national spiritual obligation at play. “The real mission of Christianity was to reach out a helping hand to those who are below us,” Noble remarked with unveiled condescension, and lift them up, if we could to our own plane; to raise them that were bound down; and to teach the ignorant.” This man of the cloth defended the educational endeavours of men like Otis Gibson who were imparting Christianity through pedagogy. “If this religion was anything to us – if it has sweetened our life, uplifted us – if it had given us a purer and holier and more attractive civilization,” he reasoned, “we were bound, so far as in us lay, to commend it to all within our reach; we were bound to put into the hands and into the hearts of men of every nation.”<sup>33</sup>

From an artistically different perspective Clay M. Greene, an Episcopalian and native San Franciscan who was enjoying moderate success as a playwright in his hometown before ascending to loftier heights in New York, exploited the local hostility to the Chinese, especially that of Irish immigrants, to write a satirical play about the irony of such opposition. It was initially titled *The Chinese Invasion*, though subsequently it was less provocatively billed as *The Chinese Question*. Himself the son of a man from Ireland, Greene lampooned the illogic of the rhetoric advanced by Irish-Americans in this xenophobic movement. They, too, had been and were still the objects of derision and discrimination. This “farce” opened at San Francisco’s California Theatre in June 1873.<sup>34</sup> Under its new title, it also played in New York in 1877, *i.e.* after the Chinese exclusion movement had spread from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast. Two songs included in the performance, “No Irish Need Apply” and “Larry Malone”, were pithy reminders that immigrants from Ireland had faced ethnic prejudice overlapping with what they were now inflicting on the Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

To the more organised opposition to Chinese immigration and the debates in Christian circles to it, especially involving Roman Catholics, we shall return shortly.

33 “The Chinese Question”, *The Daily Examiner*, 10 June 1873, 3.

34 “Local Brevities”, *The Daily Examiner*, 10 June 1873, 3.

35 Union Square Theatre advertisement, *The New York Herald*, 17 October 1877, 9.

Unfortunately, the script of *The Chinese Question* does not appear to be extant.

## **Abortive Early Catholic Missions to the Chinese in California**

The Roman Catholic presence in the San Francisco area antedated the arrival of its Chinese population by many decades. Much of it stemmed from the establishment of twenty-one Franciscan missions to Native Americans in Alta California between 1769 and 1823. Though eventually secularised, their legacy remained on a small scale, and before the United States annexed in 1846 what four years later became the state of California Spanish-speaking and largely Catholic Mexicans settled in that province. Following hard on the heels of the annexation, the Gold Rush brought tens of thousands of aspiring Argonauts and other people of numerous nationalities (including Chinese) and a rainbow of faiths to the Golden State, and the population of San Francisco rose sharply. Considerable numbers of the European and Mexican newcomers were at least nominally Catholic, especially the large Irish immigrant contingent, which soon formed much of the local labour force and would play a highly visible role in the disputes over Chinese immigrants and Catholic efforts to teach and evangelise them. In response to this broadly defined demographic and religious development, in 1850 Pope Pius IX appointed a young Dominican priest from Catalonia, José Sadoc Alemany, the first bishop of Monterey. Three years later the Archdiocese of San Francisco was created, and Alemany became its first archbishop. Initially it encompassed only three established parishes, but that number rose rapidly in accord with the expansion of the polyglot population. Members of religious orders arrived to staff new parochial schools, and Santa Clara College, the first officially chartered undergraduate institution in California, opened its doors in 1851 on the grounds of the defunct Misión Santa Clara de Asís. The Catholic population and its parishes in the new state rose rapidly. The United States Census of 1870 indicated that the number of Catholic “churches” had been merely eighteen in 1850 but eighty-six a decade later. In 1870 it had risen to 144 “edifices”.<sup>36</sup>

The subsequent Catholic efforts to reach Chinese immigrants – and internal resistance to those seemingly half-hearted endeavours – cannot be understood apart from the working-class movements to ban further immigration from China and even deport Chinese who were already in California. These campaigns were far more organised and eventually more consequential than the earlier piecemeal hostility. In the context of the present article, only a synopsis of this hostility can be presented here. In brief, Euro-American and especially Irish immigrant loathing of Chinese competition in the labour market was a perennial phenomenon, though it gained momentum after the Panic of 1873 thrust the American economy into its “Long Depression” that endured until nearly the end of that decade. Employment opportunities waned; the number of Chinese in the Golden State rose; and immigrants from Ireland felt the resulting pres-

36 *The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, 520. The polysemous noun “edifices” is undefined in this context and may have included buildings that were not primarily worship spaces.

sure. Several leaders of the anti-Chinese crusade emerged, none of them gaining more prominence than the firebrand drayman Denis Kearney. He and his cohort arranged numerous rallies in San Francisco, often at a venue called the “Sandlot”, and called for the expulsion of newcomers from China. They founded the Workingmen’s Party of California in 1877 with bringing down the curtain on further Chinese immigration headlining its programme. Their agitation was largely verbal though intemperate, but it occasionally devolved into violence, most notably in July 1877. At that time three days of rioting against the residents of Chinatown and their property led to the deaths of three Chinese people and extensive property damage. In such a tense environment, these largely Catholic sons of Hibernia were hardly enthusiastic about evangelising immigrants from China. Their movement continued, however, and by the end of the 1870s had gained traction in the eastern United States as well, making immigration reform a national political issue in 1880. Public opinion was severely divided, but the movement was sufficiently strong in Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 over the initial veto of President Chester Arthur. In the meantime, the history of anti-Chinese sentiment and generally small-scale efforts to reach immigrants from China had intersected repeatedly in California.

One of the ethnic ironies in the history of early Catholic efforts to evangelise them is the case of Father Thomas Cian. This young man left Hunan province in central China when still a teenager and went to Rome to study for the Catholic priesthood. After his ordination, he was sent to California in response to a request by Archbishop Alemany for someone to begin outreach to the Chinese in his diocese. Cian attempted to do so, but owing to his inability to communicate with his transplanted compatriots who spoke Cantonese subdialects (with which his own dialect had little mutual intelligibility) and their wide dispersal proved frustrating. After six months in the Golden State, Cian requested that he be transferred to China, where he believed he could be more effective. This was not granted, and he remained in San Francisco for approximately a decade, at times with a particular mandate to minister to Italian immigrants, in whose language he was much more proficient than that of those from southern China.<sup>37</sup> It seems unlikely that Cian conducted any noteworthy ministry among Cantonese immigrants after his abortive efforts in 1854. As John B. McGloin has judged summarily, “all that can be said about the decade which was to ensue for Cian ... is that he served as assistant pastor from 1856-1862 of St. Francis Church ...”<sup>38</sup>

This intercontinental *clericus vagans* left California in 1865 under a cloud after what John B. McGloin described as “various charges of a serious nature were brought to Alemany’s attention concerning Father Thomas.” McGloin could not identify the

37 John B. McGloin, “Thomas Cian, Pioneer Chinese Priest in California”, *California Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII, no. 1 (March 1969), 50.

38 McGloin, “Thomas Cian, Pioneer Chinese Priest in California”, 52.

accusations but noted that the accused was granted permission to return to Naples in 1865, where he administered a theological seminary for missionaries to China until his premature death in 1868.<sup>39</sup>

A second effort, no less effective than the first, was that of Father John Valentini, an Italian priest who had been born at Como in 1840 and ordained to the priesthood there in 1863. After serving less than two years in his native land, however, Valentini was sent to the British crown colony of Hong Kong, where he learned the challenging Cantonese dialect and toiled briefly as the head of a new theological college. Owing to impaired health, he was compelled to leave China and in 1868 sailed to San Francisco, where Archbishop Alemany chose to avail the church of his linguistic skills and familiarity with one regional dimension of Chinese culture by appointing him to minister to immigrants in that city while simultaneously serving at a parish church. As explained candidly in an obituary some forty-eight years later, he soon gave up the Chinese dimension of his ministry after concluding that the people to whom he was seeking to convey the Gospel “were using the mission for financial rather than for spiritual assistance”.<sup>40</sup> In the wake of this disappointment, Catholics did little more to evangelise immigrants from China for many years, choosing instead to concentrate on the development of discrete parishes for the rapidly growing Irish and non-Anglophone European populations in the area.

In an age when strident hostility to the Church of Rome often came to the fore, this negligence caught the attention of some Protestants in San Francisco, among them the editor of the Congregationalist weekly newspaper, *The Pacific*. In 1868 he crowed cautiously that for approximately sixteen years Protestants had supported a small number of preachers, teachers, and other personnel among the region’s Chinese. Qualifying his boast, this denominational editor acknowledged that their efforts had been far from complete, but at least they had borne some fruit in terms of conversions to Christianity. “But what have the Roman Catholics been doing for the Chinese all these years?” he asked rhetorically. His answer was a blunt “Almost nothing.” He singled out the pedagogically inclined Jesuits to illustrate the point. “Have they any schools, colleges, or places for religious instruction for 50,000 of our population? Not one.” This struck him as anomalous, given that in China the Society of Jesus had sought with great vigour to effect conversions and experienced “a measure of success”, not only in terms of “thousands” of conversions but also in the training of Chinese men for the priesthood. The contrast to Catholic aloofness to members of that ethnic group on American shores seemed baffling. “Why do Roman Catholics devote money and life to the establishment of schools and churches in China, and direct their missionaries there to adopt the very dress and mode of living of the Chinese, and here

39 McGloin, “Thomas Cian, Pioneer Chinese Priest in California”, 53.

40 “Father Valentini Greatly Missed”, *Sausalito News*, 15 April 1916, 1; “Father Valentini Passes Away”, *Mill Valley Record*, 8 April 1916, 1.

treat the Chinese population with coldness and neglect?” This critical editor posited possible answers in the form of questions to his provocative query: “Why do they so studiously shun the blacks and the Chinese? Has party policy anything to do with it? Can political bigotry be in the way? Is Irish prejudice stronger than religious zeal? Does Roman Catholicism think it consistent to labor for Chinamen in China, and to do nothing for them in California?”<sup>41</sup>

However, Catholic outreach to Chinese immigrants eventually thrived, albeit on a small scale. Noteworthy progress was made after another Italian immigrant priest, Father Gregorio Antonucci, who had toiled for six years as a missionary in China and whose uncle, Cardinal Antonio Benedetto Antonucci, had served as a principal advisor to Pope Pius IX, undertook work “with great zeal” among Chinese in San Francisco in 1881, *i.e.* a year before Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. In March 1883, it was reported in the San Francisco press that Antonucci’s mission was thriving in Clay Street and had been officially sanctioned by Pope Leo XIII. A Chinese priest, Andreas Ma, would assist Antonucci and, although the curtain on immigration from China had legally descended, four additional priests from that country would arrive shortly to fortify the ranks of the Catholic clergy in San Francisco.<sup>42</sup>

Four years later Archbishop Alemany was sufficiently impressed with the results that he had recently purchased a large tract of land and designated funds with which to construct a church and “other edifices” deemed necessary for a mission on it.<sup>43</sup> Signifying their gratitude to this prominent prelate who had openly resisted anti-Chinese agitation chiefly by Irish immigrant co-religionists, a large party (reportedly but perhaps hyperbolically “from almost every province” in the Middle Kingdom) called on Alemany shortly before he retired to Spain in 1885. He addressed them, his words translated into Mandarin by Father Antonucci and from that tongue into several dialects by native speakers, and received an “address in Chinese beautifully engrossed upon the finest rice paper”.<sup>44</sup> Antonucci served only a few more months in San Francisco, however, before Leo XIII appointed him bishop of what was subsequently the Diocese of Hanzhong.<sup>45</sup>

In 1904, the archdiocesan newspaper *The Monitor* carried a long article recapitulating the gradual expansion of the Catholic ecclesiastical structure in the San Francisco archdiocese. A section headed “National Churches” included brief paragraphs about “The Chinese” in which the failure to develop enduring parishes among them was acknowledged. The dearth or complete lack of effectiveness in this regard by Fathers

41 “Inconsistency” (editorial), *The Pacific*, 5 November 1868, 4.

42 “Chinese Catholic Mission”, *The Daily Examiner* (San Francisco), 29 March 1883, 3.

43 “Chinese Catholics in California”, *The Catholic Columbian* (Columbus, Ohio), 20 June 1885, 3.

44 “Chinese Catholics in California”, 3.

45 “A Chinese Prelate”, *The Daily Examiner*, 7 December 1887, 3.



Cian, Valentini, and Antonucci was attributed to preoccupation of the Chinese with acquiring worldly wealth and their concomitant lack of interest in spiritual matters. Neither the hostility and threats of violence which they encountered at the hands of Irish immigrant Catholics nor criticism by certain priests was mentioned.<sup>46</sup>

### **Continued Specifically Catholic Resistance to and Criticism of Missions**

The eventual willingness of *some* Roman Catholics in the San Francisco area to encourage and defend missionary endeavours among the Chinese in their midst did not evolve quickly. During the 1870s and continuing into the following decade certain priests and two Catholic weekly newspapers, *The Monitor* and *The Catholic Guardian*, staunchly opposed such efforts and criticised other Christians – chiefly Protestants – who engaged in them. This hostility went hand-in-hand with endorsement of political campaigns to bring down the curtain on immigration from China. Despite the highly visible roles of men like Denis Kearney, not all of the naysayers were Irish immigrants. A prominent exception was Father James M. C. Bouchard, a native Louisianan and erstwhile Protestant of French Creole and Delaware Native American extraction. On Tuesday evening, 25 February 1873, this Jesuit cleric ascended the pulpit in the reportedly packed sanctuary of St. Francis Church in San Francisco and harangued against what he thought were the approximately 11,000 Chinese in that city. Bouchard fired a broad fusillade in his assault. In addition to echoing familiar criticism of the threat of their frugality to the efforts of the Euro-American working class to earn living wages, he lamented the unwillingness of the Chinese to assimilate and put down permanent roots in American soil. Father Bouchard even accused them of being careless when using fire, thereby causing major damage to the city. Oddly, he pulled out all the stops and declared their language to be “treasonable” and suggested that any American who was sympathetic to it “deserves to be incarcerated for life as a traitor”.<sup>47</sup>

Turning his rhetorical venom on the endeavours of non-Catholic “religious zealots” in “various churches” to evangelise the Chinese newcomers, Bouchard professed that he did not “condemn” such efforts, but he continued what was becoming a mantra in the critique by arguing that it was largely in vain. In an unveiled dig at Protestant literacy programmes, he referred to the existence of opportunities to learn English “in the Sunday school, as it is called”, over an undefined span of years, where Chinese participants learned weekly to read the Bible, but he questioned the effectiveness of such work. “Have the papers of our city yet heralded the baptism of a single Chinese as a fruit of all this labor?” he asked. Bouchard had no confidence that “any considerable number, if anyone at all”, from the local Chinese population could be expected to convert to Christianity. As an ostensible *coup de grâce*, he concluded, “It is almost

46 “National Churches”, *The Monitor* (San Francisco), 23 January 1904, 22.

47 “White Man or Chinaman – Which?”, *The Catholic Guardian* (San Francisco), 1 March 1873, 302-303.

impossible to convert them even in their own country.”<sup>48</sup> This line of anti-missionary thinking continued to impede Catholic evangelisation until the 1880s and soon entered Protestant and secular rhetoric, as well.

Bouchard’s cynicism did not remain unchallenged. Ripostes came from several Protestants who were either active in or defended missionary endeavours among the Chinese and held no brief for the campaign to rid California of them. Among the most prominent of these adversaries was Otis Gibson. A little more than a fortnight later, this defender of missions delivered a lecture at the city’s Platt’s Hall on 14 March, admission to which cost the not inconsiderable sum of fifty cents at a time when large numbers of employed men earned only a dollar or two a day.<sup>49</sup>

Gibson’s counter to Bouchard emphasised *inter alia* an appeal to the principle of human equality enshrined in the Constitution of the United States of America. However, this failed to convince all auditors. One resident of San Francisco wrote a vitriolic letter to the *San Francisco Chronicle* seeking to undermine that pillar of Gibson’s argument. This malcontent, who signed his letter merely “J.B.” and conceivably was James Bouchard himself, though that cannot be ascertained, insisted that the “revolutionary fathers” of the American nation firmly believed in their racial supremacy and had therefore inserted the word “White” into the Constitution of the United States of America. (In fact “White” does not occur in that document’s first version, only in the much later Fourteenth Amendment to it.) He feared the consequences of what he believed was an unfounded principle of equality, including “the importation into California of the scum of China’s teeming and leprous-blooded humanity, the most cruel, most cunning, most idolatrous, and most debased among the Asiatic races”. Were they not stopped, J.B. opined, the state would soon be on the “verge of having the sun-browned children of the Orient crawling over it as the lice in ancient Egypt”.<sup>50</sup>

### **Archbishop Alemany’s Pastoral Letter**

A quinquennium later, as the Workingmen’s Party attracted more members and grew more vociferous in its public demands to rid California of its Chinese residents, Archbishop Alemany issued a pastoral letter on 5 April 1878 which all priests in charge of parishes in his archdiocese were asked to read to their congregations. Alemany did not mention either Kearney or his party by name, nor did he include the word “Chinese”. Rather, he lamented in general terms the organising of “societies encouraging disregard for the rights of others, uttering wild threats, inciting mobs,

48 “White Man or Chinaman – Which?”, 303.

49 “Chinaman or White Man, Which? Reply to Father Buchar [sic]” (advertisement), *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 March 1873, 4.

50 J.B. (San Francisco) to *The Daily Examiner*, 1 April 1873, in *The Daily Examiner*, 3 April 1873, 1.

and gathering the combustible elements which a little spark may or must naturally fire into a widespread sedition, with its natural attendants – the subversion of peace and social order and the serious destruction of property and life.” Accordingly, the archbishop called on all Catholics to “stay away from all such seditious anti-social and anti-christian activities”.<sup>51</sup>

A storm of resistance to Alemany’s very thinly veiled attack on the beleaguered Workingmen’s Party immediately ensued. Typical was the response of the apparently largely Irish-American First Branch of the Eleventh Ward Workingmen, who met in Humboldt Hall on 10 April to discuss the pastoral letter.

The presiding officer, J. P. Dunn, declared that he had “been bred a Catholic and always had been a Catholic” but would never allow an archbishop to “meddle with his civil liberties”. Dunn was particularly incensed that a fellow immigrant from Ireland, Frank McCoppin, was “the cause” of Alemany’s letter (though what role he had played in the matter was not explained in press reports) and in vituperative hyperbole characteristic of the anti-Chinese movement called that former mayor of San Francisco “the greatest scoundrel that ever lived”. The assembled members passed a resolution read by Secretary W. H. Mulviney, stating that because “the clergy of this city have made common cause with the capitalists, land-grabbers, and political thieves, to break up this movement ... we would suggest to the Reverend Archbishop to look after his spiritual affairs, and not this movement of ours.”<sup>52</sup>

Kearney especially took umbrage and called on the archbishop to urge him to remain aloof of political matters. Their exchange is not recorded as such but was apparently heated and entirely lacking in ecclesiastical civility. As Kearney stated to the press on 9 April, he had spoken to the prelate as he would to a “Dutch uncle” and called him a “d\_\_\_\_\_d old fool”.<sup>53</sup>

However, not all the Irish-Americans in the Bay Area accepted the Workingmen’s Party’s calls to racial violence with equanimity. One prominent exception was Father Michael King. Born in Ireland in 1829, he was educated for the priesthood in Dublin and emigrated to the United States following his ordination in 1853. After serving briefly as a missionary in Nesqually, Oregon, he continued to San Francisco in 1855 and eventually developed the Church of the Immaculate Conception in central Oakland, where he toiled for several decades.<sup>54</sup>

At vespers on 15 April 1878, King read sections of the pastoral letter to the congregation in his packed sanctuary. Citing Hebrews 13:17, he admonished his fellow Catholics to obey those who rule over them, in this case meaning particularly Archbishop Alemany. King insisted that Catholic priests were apolitical but dismissed

51 “A Timely Admonition”, *The Santa Rosa Daily Democrat*, 9 April 1878, 3.

52 “Eleventh Ward Workingmen”, *The Daily Examiner*, 11 April 1878, 3.

53 “Archbishop Alemany’s Letter”, *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, 10 April 1878, 4.

54 “Illustrious Priest Hears Last Summons”, *The San Francisco Call*, 13 December 1904, 6.

suggestions that they should remain silent on public issues and argued that Alemany would have been negligent had he failed to speak out against the Workingmen's Party with regard to abuse of the Chinese.<sup>55</sup>

Father King adamantly defended the pastoral letter against charges that it was "an attack upon the workingmen". He reminded those assembled that their priests' sympathies were inherently with the "poorer classes" from which the majority of them had come, as had Jesus and those of his disciples who were Galilean fishermen. Only when the Workingmen's Party had turned to "communistic and incendiary ideas", King explained, had the priests spoken out against it, precisely as a means of protecting working-class Catholics who had come under its toxic sway. In this regard, he cited the calls for "Hemp! hemp!", *i.e.* code for lynching of Chinese and their Euro-American defenders.<sup>56</sup>

Yet Father King himself was not entirely free of racial bias. In the same sermon, he expressed hope that no-one would accuse him of employing Chinese, "for I never did." The only Chinaman with whom he had ever interacted, he assured the assembled, was one who had entered the premises, addressed him in Latin, and robbed him. Furthermore, King echoed the familiar refrain that there was little hope of converting the Chinese in California. He added having been informed (though by whom he did not reveal) that the sojourners from the Middle Kingdom were "not of the best classes". Consequently, to his mind the consequences were clear: "I could not, therefore, take sides with them, as against my Irish girls and boys, and although I am commanded to love every man, I think that charity begins at home."<sup>57</sup>

Father King did not stand alone in opposing Kearney's demagoguery while continuing to harbour prejudices against Chinese-Americans. The following year, as the exclusionist movement continued to snowball, an anonymous critic writing under the pseudonym "An Irish American" contributed an epistolary essay to the archdiocesan newspaper in which he castigated the "coarse, illiterate and profane" rhetoric of that "half-demented drayman" and "self-constituted prophet and priest" with his incitement to violence. "Irish American" conceded that he, too, believed that "the Chinese must go" but reminded readers that advocacy of extrajudicial means to achieve that end could turn against, for example, Irish and German laborers, should the public call for their expulsion. Instead, he suggested refusing to hire Chinese and instead employ "peaceable, sober, efficient white labor", and in consequence the former "will stay away of themselves" because "no one will employ them in preference to Irish or

55 "Father King, [*sic*] Reads the Archbishop's Pastoral and Discourses Upon Communism", *Oakland Daily Evening Tribune*, 15 April 1878, 3.

56 "Father King, [*sic*] Reads the Archbishop's Pastoral and Discourses Upon Communism", 3.

57 "Father King, [*sic*] Reads the Archbishop's Pastoral and Discourses Upon Communism", 3.

German Laborers.” “This is the way to make the Chinese go, and keep gone too,” Irish American reasoned.<sup>58</sup> Nothing in his letter even hinted at the possibility of conducting missionary work among immigrants from that despised ethnic group.

One could conclude that Kearney’s movement was a victim of its own success. The Workingmen’s Party of California withered away after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, as it had almost no other *raison d’être*. After the demise of that party, followers continued to agitate for the deportation of Chinese already in the USA but had no success in this endeavour.

### **Active Resistance to Christian Outreach: Wong Chin Foo**

Although the efforts of Christians of various denominations to reach Chinese immigrants often yielded meagre responses, this cannot be attributed solely to the indifference of the latter or their preoccupation with pursuing material wealth. At times Chinese newcomers consciously preferred to maintain their own religious traditions rather than adopt Christianity.

A particularly lucid example of this whose intellectual dimension admittedly renders it atypical, was the college-educated activist Wong Chin Foo. Born in China in 1847, he became a Baptist before emigrating to the USA twenty years later. Wong lived not only in San Francisco but also several other parts of the country. A frequent contributor of letters and essays to the Anglophone press, he became an ardent foe of Kearney, whom he even challenged – possibly insincerely – to a duel. In an essay in *The North American Review* titled “Why Am I a Heathen?”, Wong shared snippets of his responses to several kinds of Christianity which he had encountered on one or both sides of the Pacific. The doctrine of predestination as expounded in Presbyterianism, for example, seemed abominable because it posited “a merciless God who long ago foreordained most of the helpless human race to an eternal hell”. The Baptists struck Wong as a conglomeration of disharmonious “sects” preoccupied with bickering with one another over such matters as “the merits of cold-water initiation” and the extent to which communion should be open to Christians from outside this or that denomination. Methodism with its subjective, pietistic strain was to Wong “a thunder-and-lightning religion” which struck certain individuals, causing them to “‘experience’ religion”. The Congregationalists whom he encountered apparently seemed socially elitist “with their starchiness and self-conscious true-goodness, and their desire for high-toned affiliates”, among whom he did not number himself. Wong resented the claims of Roman Catholicism to be “the only true Church”; instead, he

58 An Irish American, “Glowing Rhetoric”, *The Monitor*, 31 May 1879, p. 7.

thought it represented “religious unity, power, and authority with a vengeance”.<sup>59</sup>

To be sure, not all of his fellow immigrants from the Middle Kingdom agreed, and some rejected his criticism as unwarranted. In a rejoinder published in the same periodical, another college-educated Chinese immigrant, Yan Phou Lee, who had converted to Christianity, wrote his reply, “Why I Am Not a Heathen. A Rejoinder to Wong Chin Foo”.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The constriction of the flow of immigrants from China did not, of course, eradicate the purpose for which evangelisation of Chinese people in San Francisco and elsewhere had been undertaken. However, in those Protestant denominations which had sustained missionary work among the Chinese in California, by then much of the emphasis had shifted to the maturation of congregations that had originated before 1882. This was partly successful, as the influx of potential members never completely ceased, although for the next few decades natural attrition of the Chinese population in the USA took its toll. Nevertheless, some of the congregations that originated well before exclusion went into effect remain vibrant today. To cite but two examples, in San Francisco’s Chinatown the Presbyterian church which Speer organised in 1853 continues to worship in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. Also in the same area, the Methodist church gathered by Gibson in 1868 remains alive.

Although the Roman Catholic Church organised a spectrum of ethnic parishes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such entities for Chinese immigrants did not become a high priority. Possibly residual dislike of those people played a role in this, although the small scope of Chinese conversion to Catholicism was undoubtedly long a factor. Not until the above-mentioned evangelisation by Paulist priests got underway did a significant number of Chinese become members of what is now called Old St. Mary’s Church. Inevitably, its location at the juncture of Chinatown and the Financial District in central San Francisco led to outreach to Cantonese-speaking residents of the area. This continues today, as parish life includes efforts to integrate aspects of Chinese culture into the life and worship of the parish.

Presently there are well over 1,000 specifically Chinese churches in the USA, the majority of them dating from the latter half of the twentieth century when, following the abrogation of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the

59 Wong Chin Foo, “Why Am I a Heathen?”, *The North American Review*, 145, no. 369 (August 1887), 170. The standard biography is Scott D. Seligman, *The First Chinese American: The Remarkable Life of Wong Chin Foo* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

60 Yan Phou Lee, “Why I Am Not a Heathen. A Rejoinder to Wong Chin Foo” *The North American Review*, 145, no. 370 (September 1887), 306-312.

People's Republic of China, immigration rose anew. However, large numbers of the churches which worship at least partly in Chinese were established by immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere who did not come from the PRC, though they also attracted many people from that country, not least students at American universities.

The nineteenth-century domestic missionary endeavours we have discussed were thus only the crucial beginnings of a much longer story. Nevertheless, their history illustrates how cross-cultural evangelisation sometimes must proceed in an environment of hostility when efforts to convey the Gospel to people from another civilisation had to compete with such countervailing forces as deeply rooted ethnic prejudice and economic interests in a multiracial, competitive, and sometimes violent society.