

# Chinese abolitionism: the Chinese Educational Mission in Connecticut, Cuba, and Peru\*

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## Abstract

*This article explores a little known facet of transnational opposition to forced labour through the earliest case of ‘Chinese abolitionism’. It analyses the transnational formation of the first Sino-American actor network in the United States and its deployment in the 1874 investigations of coolie conditions in the forced labour regimes of Cuba and Peru. At the core of this actor network was the Chinese Educational Mission and its milieu of sociability, which served as a crucible of transnational cooperation between the first Chinese America experts and their US supporters. The flows of information, cosmopolitan ideas, and personnel across this network led to an unprecedented reinterpretation of the global coolie trade as a key concern in Qing foreign relations and a serious international problem that paralleled the problem of slavery. Two Qing interventions harnessed the actor network’s social capital, framing coolie abuse as an international atrocity, accelerating the abolition of the coolie trade, and signalling the need for a Chinese Foreign Service in Western countries for the protection of Chinese overseas.*

**Keywords** Chinese Educational Mission, coolie trade, Cuba, Peru, US–China relations

## Introduction: the Pacific empires of the coolie trade

The British consul T. H. Layton reported from the Chinese treaty port of Amoy (present-day Xiamen) in July 1848 that ‘It should be known and remembered that Mr. Tait’s shipment of 430 Coolies to the Havannah [*sic*] in March 1847 is a hateful topic amongst the Chinese of Amoy.’<sup>1</sup> Twelve months after the incident, local controversy had barely subsided.

\* I wish to thank Simone Müller and Heather Ellis, the participants of the SIAS seminar on ‘Cultural encounters’ at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, the Harvard Seminar on History and Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, the workshop ‘L’environnement des travailleurs au XXe siècle’ at EHESS in Paris, the Rothermere American Institute at the University of Oxford, and particularly Jacqueline Bhabha, Alejandro de la Fuente, Liana DeMarco, Paul Kennedy, Harry Liebersohn, Emily Rosenberg, Jay Sexton, Cristina Soriano, Moshik Temkin, the *Journal’s* editors and the anonymous reviewers for inspiration and criticism.

1 T. H. Layton to S. G. Bonham, 17 July 1848, in ‘Papers relative to emigration: part I, Australian colonies’, *Accounts and Papers*, 38, 1849, p. 101.

Chinese anger persisted not only because transactions of this kind between European business in Asia and the Cuban plantation complex recurred. The Chinese denotation of this commerce in human flesh as ‘selling piglets’ (*mai zhuzai*) signalled its public opprobrium, even more than the derogatory English term ‘coolie’. Indeed, the commodification of Chinese labourers owed much to the fact that it was embedded in imperial, transoceanic business across a range of sectors. Far beyond the Amoy–Havana connection, the coolie trade supported gold and tin mining in Australia and Malaya, the guano and cotton market in Peru, and the sugar plantation industry in Cuba.<sup>2</sup> Straddling the maritime spheres of influence of Britain, Spain, and Portugal across East Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, an estimated 150,000 Chinese labourers were exported between the 1840s and 1870s.<sup>3</sup> There was no dearth of early warnings that traffic on this scale risked long-term Chinese hostility. As Layton warned Samuel George Bonham, the third Governor of Hong Kong, the Chinese trust on which the maintenance of British authority depended was seriously jeopardized by the popular Chinese belief that ‘the English enticed Chinese children from their homes by money, conveyed them on board a ship, and carried them off to our distant colonies without the hope or possibility of return’.<sup>4</sup> But, despite Layton’s early critique of the coolie business as ethically and politically unsustainable, the trade survived until its consequences were identified through the investigation of the rampant and violent abuse of Chinese in Cuba and Peru.

This article argues that the two Sino-American investigations of coolie abuse in 1874 not only laid the basis for the coolie trade’s first effective proscription in international law but also represented the first articulation of Chinese victimization overseas as an interregional problem in world politics. The focus is on the transnational decisions to identify, document, and expose coolie abuse as a fundamental precondition for contesting the coolie trade. In this context, the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM) yields insight into the specific social setting that allowed a Chinese and American actor network of non-governmental investigators to be deployed for diplomatic purposes. An actor network may be broadly defined as an informal collectivity with the specific ability to induce cultural, social, or political change, here in the relations between two countries. As the launching pad for both investigations in Cuba and Peru, the CEM circle proved less constrained than the incipient criticism of the coolie trade in Asian settings, which had failed to achieve policy change. This article shows that the CEM broke with preceding protests by recruiting a Chinese-sponsored, US-based, transnational ‘actor network’. It argues that the CEM’s interventions and the resulting abolition of Cuban and Peruvian coolie trading produced a new international and transnational focus on Chinese overseas abuse that went beyond the Qing investigations themselves.

Existing scholarship is under no illusions that Cuban and Peruvian contract labour presented a false fiction of indenture without any realistic prospect of earning freedom.

- 2 Francis Loh Kok Wah, *Beyond the tin mines: coolies, squatters and new villagers in the Kinta Valley, Malaysia, c. 1880–1980*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988; Margaret Slocomb, *Among Australia’s pioneers: Chinese indentured pastoral workers on the northern frontier, 1848 to c.1880*, Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2014; also Marina Carter and James Ng Foong Kwong, *Abacus and Mah Jong: Sino-Mauritian settlement and economic consolidation*, Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- 3 Robert L. Irick, *Ch’ing policy toward the coolie trade, 1847–1878*, Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1982; Arnold J. Meagher, *The coolie trade: the traffic in Chinese laborers to Latin America, 1847–1874*, Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2008; Watt Stewart, *Chinese bondage in Peru: a history of the Chinese coolie in Peru, 1849–1874*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1951. For global comparisons, see Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker, eds., *Many middle passages: forced migration and the making of the modern world*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.
- 4 Layton to Bonham, 17 July 1848.

Oral promises and written guarantees of Chinese repatriation were rarely if ever enforced and were more closely connected to deceptive recruitment tactics in China than to any legal practices at the destination.<sup>5</sup> After the coolies arrived in Cuba or Peru, their social vulnerability virtually erased any chances for release after the fulfilment of the first contract.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these findings in social and legal analyses, local testimonies by coolies themselves, as conveyed by the *Cuba Commission Report*, have revealed tropes and strategies of self-perception and self-expression that were characteristic of quasi-slavery status, including the dilemmas of bottom-up negotiations and repertoires of resistance explained in a different context by Rebecca Scott.<sup>7</sup>

However, highlighting the local uniqueness of Cuban slavery and emancipation, as in histories of Chinese migratory life, has compelled most interpretations to explain forms of subaltern self-identification, settlement, and integration in virtual exclusiveness, obscuring the interregional ties between local examples. Efforts to restore the marginalized experiences and perspectives of ethnic minorities and exploited labour groups have brought into relief narratives of ‘Chineseness’ in foreign cultures. But they have rarely accounted for transnational patterns of Chinese–foreign collaboration that helped triangulate the sociopolitical control exerted by the beneficiaries of forced labour, as was the case in the transnational investigations of 1874.<sup>8</sup> At the other end, histories that focus on the Asian scene have highlighted the role of multilateral, China-based coolie diplomacy, yielding more evidence of international discord than of consensus. The condemnations by the *Cuba Commission Report* in 1874 and an occasional reference to similar findings in Peru are commonly identified as a political result that appeared at the stroke of a Qing brush. However, the social, transnational conditions that shaped the attitudes of the teams who formulated those results in the first place are rarely investigated in depth.<sup>9</sup> Little attention has been given to the fact that the Cuba and Peru investigations were part of the same global Qing project, or to the ways in which the commission members themselves related to this project and why their platform of transnational mobilization succeeded so brilliantly in its international political purpose.

Before assessing the proscription of the coolie trade as a political achievement, a legal innovation, and an unexpected adjudication of international ethics, we need to reconstruct the

5 *Report of the Commission sent by China to ascertain the condition of Chinese coolies in Cuba*, Shanghai: Imperial Maritime Customs Press, 1876 (hereafter *Cuba Commission Report*), p. 22. Chen Lanbin, *Guba huagong diaocha lu (Survey of Chinese labourers in Cuba)*, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2014.

6 *Cuba Commission Report*, pp. 11–12. For repatriation in the Peking Convention of 1866 and the 1877 Convention (Art. 12), abrogating Art. 10 of the Treaty of Tianjin (10 October 1864), see *Relatorio e documentos sobre a abolição da emigração de chinas contratados em Macau: apresentado ás cortes na sessão legislativa de 1874 pelo Ministro e Secretario d’Estado dos Negocios de Marinha e Ultramar*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1874, p. 24. For the phrasings in Spanish, English, and Chinese, see ‘Convention of Peking respecting Chinese emigration to Cuba, 1877’, in China, Imperial Maritime Customs, III, Miscellaneous Series, no. 30, *Treaties, conventions, etc. between China and foreign states, vol. 2*, Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1908, pp. 1122, 1472. Non-coolies, like ship doctors, were deprived of a return passage: see Lisa Yun, *The coolie speaks: Chinese indentured laborers and African slaves in Cuba*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008, pp. 69, 114. On perpetual labour exactions to ‘earn’ the ‘freedom paper’ which promised return passage home, see *ibid.*, pp. 97, 126, 129.

7 Yun, *The coolie speaks*; Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave emancipation in Cuba: the transition to free labor, 1860–1899*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.

8 Sing-wu Wang, *The organization of Chinese emigration, 1848–1888, with special reference to Chinese emigration to Australia*, San Francisco, CA: China Materials Center, 1978; Meagher, *The coolie trade*; Adam McKeown, *Chinese migrant networks and cultural change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawai’i*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

9 Rudolph Ng, ‘The Chinese Commission to Cuba (1874): reexamining international relations in the nineteenth century from a transcultural perspective’, *Transcultural Studies*, 2, 2014, pp. 39–62.

reasons for its long-standing durability and apparent legitimacy. After the Chinese coolie trade commenced in 1847, it quickly became clear that it would expand beyond a temporary business opportunity. Indeed, the successive abolition of segments of the African slave trade became an early impetus for contract labour as part of a global political economy. As such, it attracted considerable managerial, political, and economic support. Post-abolitionist Peru, with its labour-intensive guano harvests, came to rely predominantly on Chinese coolies.<sup>10</sup> Coolie labour was equally integral to Cuba's development, bringing its path of economic growth closer to parallel experiences in East Asia than to neo-European models of capital-intensive development.<sup>11</sup> In terms of financial strategy, the coolie trade undercut slave trading. It has been estimated that the price of Asian labourers bound for Hispanic America averaged half the median slave prices, an indicator if not a guarantee of the trade's strength. Given these institutionalized, financial, and imperial interests at the intersection of private enterprise and governmental sanction, it was by no means evident whether or why the coolie trade would ever come to an end.<sup>12</sup>

Despite intermittent objections, opposition lagged far behind the emerging legacy of Atlantic abolitionism. The Cuban and Peruvian branches of the coolie trade were spurred by the demands of export industries. In Cuba, the Real Junta de Fomento y Colonización (Royal Board of Development and Colonization) acted as the protector of plantation interests and oversaw indenture. At its helm, the London-based Zulueta cousins, Pedro and Julián, managed the trade, tying it to one of the most successful merchant houses of the Spanish and British empires.<sup>13</sup> Managerial responsibility also illustrated a genealogical link between the slave and the coolie trade. Pedro Juan Zulueta de Ceballos, the father of Pedro Zulueta (who was accused but acquitted of slave trading in 1843), had himself achieved fame and fortune through slave trading.<sup>14</sup> In turn, the coolie trade's pedigree in slavery stretched across a broad range of commonalities, from economic strategy to logistical lessons and social costs. Like its predecessor, the coolie trade effectively eviscerated the personhood of the labourer. What constituted on paper an official relationship of employment turned in practice into the economic fact of dehumanized property.

Social protest in coolie ports such as Amoy, Fuzhou, Huangpu, Hong Kong, and Macao, while visible to foreign diplomats, did not translate into political pressure. The social, commercial, and political hierarchies at the China coast prevented such volatilities. After all, Macao had represented Portugal's major commercial asset in Asia since the First Opium War,

10 Peter Blanchard, *Slavery and abolition in early republican Peru*, Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1992; Charles F. Walker, *Smoldering ashes: Cuzco and the creation of republican Peru, 1780–1840*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

11 Kaoru Sugihara, 'Labour-intensive industrialization in global history: an interpretation of East Asian experiences', in Gareth Austin and Kaoru Sugihara, eds., *Labour-intensive industrialization in global history*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 20–64.

12 Yun, *The coolie speaks*, p. 17.

13 Félix Erenchun, 'Capítulo VI: esfuerzos de la Junta de Fomento para estimular la formación de empresas colonizadoras. Proyectos y ensayos', *Anales de la isla de Cuba. Diccionario administrativo, económico, estadístico y legislativo*, Aguacate, Cuba: La Antilla, 1858, p. 1042.

14 Lisa Yun, 'Chinese freedom fighters in Cuba: from bondage to liberation, 1847–1898', in Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *Afro Asia: revolutionary political and cultural connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008, p. 39. On the elder Zulueta, see Diego Caro Cancela, ed., *Diccionario biográfico de parlamentarios de Andalucía, 1810–1869*, Seville: Fundación Pública Andaluza Centro de Estudios Andaluces, 2010, pp. 641–5; José G. Cayuela Fernández, 'Transferencia de capitales antillanos a Europa: los patrimonios de Pedro Juan de Zulueta y Ceballos y de Pedro José de Zulueta (1823–1877)', *Estudios de Historia Social*, 44–47, 1988, pp. 191–211.

while the coolie trade brought fortunes unrivalled across the Portuguese empire.<sup>15</sup> Portuguese, Spanish, Cuban, and Peruvian companies in Macao outrivalled competing coolie recruiters from Jamaica, Guyana, and Costa Rica in the use of force, fraud, and promises of money in order to lure Chinese labourers, prisoners, and bankrupted individuals into coolie service. As a result, by the mid nineteenth century the recruitment of Chinese labour by Hispanic American recruiters, distributors, and colonists outranked global supplies of labourers from France, Germany, Britain, Sardinia, and the United States.<sup>16</sup> In the Caribbean, and in Central and Latin America, debt peonage and Chinese coolie abuse demonstrated how state development based on agricultural economies grew on the backs of labourers suffering arguably worse treatment than any other group in Asian–Western relations. Meanwhile, in Cuba and Peru, harsh, ‘post-abolitionist’ labour regimes extended beyond the Chinese. Mexican planters in the Yucatán’s *henequen* zone, the lumber camps of Chiapas/Tabasco, and the tobacco fields of the Valle Nacional operated highly coercive systems. Through ‘duped debt peons’, where debts justified bondage, regimes trapped Chinese coolies, deported prisoners, and indentured Koreans and Yaqui Indian prisoners-of-war.<sup>17</sup> Across Hispanic America, the mass production of sugar, guano, timber, *henequen*, and rubber carried a human price tag.

What accounts for the failure of Atlantic abolitionists to redirect their opposition to the coolie trade as the closest analogue globally to the slave trade?<sup>18</sup> In the case of Britain, political support was more conspicuous than abolitionist sentiment. Well-established firms such as Syme, Muir and Company, and James Tait integrated the coolie trade into the multi-imperial and hence global system of free trade, which was tied to investment portfolios in the overlapping tea, banking, and insurance sectors of China, Taiwan, and Japan.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, instead of championing international opposition to the coolie trade, the world’s two most avowedly abolitionist nations, Britain and the United States, often found themselves pilloried by Asia’s international press.

Anglo-American political indifference prompted many journalists to articulate a comparative ethics of imperial privilege and humanitarian performance. The *Messenger*, sailing under the American flag, was exposed as a ‘Cuban slave ship’ when a mutiny resulted in more than one hundred coolies being shot dead, news of which caught immediate attention on

15 Gervase Clarence-Smith, ‘The Portuguese contribution to the Cuban slave and coolie trades in the nineteenth century’, *Slavery and abolition*, 5, 1, 1984, p. 30; Gervase Clarence-Smith, *The third Portuguese empire, 1825–1975: a study in economic imperialism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984; Denise Helly, *Idéologie et ethnicité. Les Chinois Macao à Cuba, 1847–1886*, Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1979, ch. 5.

16 Robert B. Kent, ‘A diaspora of Chinese settlement in Latin America and the Caribbean’, in Laurence J. C. Ma and Carolyn Cartier, eds., *The Chinese diaspora: space, place, mobility, and identity*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 117–38; Lisa Yun and Ricardo Rene Laremont, ‘Chinese coolies and African slaves in Cuba, 1847–74’, *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 4, 2, 2001, pp. 99–122. For a direct comparison, see Evelyn Hu-Dehart, ‘Coolies, shopkeepers, pioneers: the Chinese in Mexico and Peru (1849–1930)’, *Amerasia*, 15, 2, 1989, pp. 91–116; James L. Huesmann, ‘The Chinese in Costa Rica, 1855–1897’, *The Historian*, 53, 4, Summer 1991, pp. 711–21.

17 Alan Knight, ‘Debt bondage in Latin America’, in Léonie J. Archer, ed., *Slavery and other forms of unfree labour*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 112. On Koreans, see Moisés González Navarro, *Raza y tierra. La guerra de castas y el henequén*, México: El Colegio de México, 1970, pp. 231–8.

18 Compare Markus Rediker, *The slave ship: a human history*, New York: Viking, 2007; Neil Roberts, *Freedom as marronage*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015; Rosemarijn Hoefte, ‘A passage to Suriname? The migration of modes of resistance by Asian contract laborers’, *International Migration and Working-Class History*, 54 (‘Migration, labor movements, and the working class’), 1998, pp. 19–39.

19 Peter Borscheid, ‘Global insurance networks’, in Harold James, Peter Borscheid, David Gugerli, and Tobias Straumann, eds., *The value of risk: Swiss Re and the history of reinsurance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 41–3.

American consular desks: 'Every American ship that has taken coolies to Havana this season has been the arena for one of these tragedies', whereas 'every British ship that has taken Chinese to Demarara has been entirely exempt from them'. Even the US Minister in China, John E. Ward, was attacked for making himself 'a complete tool' of a 'wholesale kidnapper', a certain Mr Vargas, so that 'the protection of the United States flag could no longer defend nor conceal' how he had 'prostituted the prestige of his country'.<sup>20</sup> In a different case, a US investor, Minor Keith, saw the fatalities among 'his' Peruvian coolie total 6,000 lives owing to insufficient healthcare, accidents, and labour abuse. The scale of the disaster still failed to generate a political response. It seemed as if Keith's marriage to the daughter of the Costa Rican president elevated him above reproach.<sup>21</sup>

Global comparisons of Chinese labour emigration did little to exonerate the growing notoriety of Cuban and Peruvian coolie demand. Chinese themselves chose destinations based on comparative risk assessments. Hong Kong and Australian papers reported that Chinese labourers happily left for Asian destinations: 'Upwards of 1500 Chinese' gladly boarded a Siamese 900-ton ship. The decks were so crowded that 'lying down was out of the question'; sailors had to 'work the ship on the rail' and cooking for the master officers had to be done 'in the cabin'. If Havana and Callao repelled by fear, Bangkok acted as a magnet.<sup>22</sup>

Thus coolies themselves were able to evaluate the relative prospects of overseas emigration, to gauge threats to their very survival, and to fashion their choices accordingly.<sup>23</sup> Coolie recruiters responded to this predicament by announcing false destinations, such as Annam or Singapore, in coolie contracts for Havana.<sup>24</sup> At the bottom of the emerging hierarchy of global labour markets, Cuba's 'barbarian regions' were increasingly perceived as open-air prisons where coolies were 'day and night ... impelled to labor, without intervals even for sleep'.<sup>25</sup> As recent research has shown, insufficient Chinese knowledge of Spanish further exacerbated coolie vulnerability.<sup>26</sup>

International press scandals reporting coolie abuse had implications beyond the representation of Chinese as hapless victims of predatory Westerners, initially both British and Spanish.<sup>27</sup> Politicized perceptions of the coolie trade reversed conventional characterizations on both sides of the 'global colour line': Chinese abuse contradicted epistemes of commercial virtuousness such as white settler imperialism and reversed the crass assignments of social

20 'The coolie slave trade', *Moreton Bay Courier*, 31 May 1860, p. 4.

21 Walter LaFeber, *The new Cambridge history of American foreign relations, vol. 2: the American search for opportunity, 1865–1913*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 66.

22 For Chinese assimilation in Siam, see G. William Skinner, *Chinese society in Thailand: an analytic history*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957, pp. 153–4.

23 Ibid; Tin-Yuke Char, comp., *The Sandalwood Mountains: readings and stories of the early Chinese in Hawai'i*, Honolulu, HI: University Hawai'i Press, 1975, pp. 275–9. On non-isolationism, see Frederic E. Wakeman, 'Voyages', in *Telling Chinese history: a selection of essays*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009, pp. 8–9.

24 *Cuba Commission Report*, p. 11.

25 Elliot Young, *Alien nation: Chinese migration in the Americas from the coolie era through World War II*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014, pp. 37–8; G. Trentin, 'Il dramma dei coolies in occidente: il caso cubano', in M. Scarpari and T. Lippiello, eds., *Caro Maestro ... Scritti in onore di Lionello Lanciotti per l'ottantesimo compleanno*, Venice: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, 2005, pp. 1201–5.

26 Don E. Walicek, 'Chinese Spanish in 19th-century Cuba: documenting sociohistorical context', in Magnus Huber and Viveka Velupillai, eds., *Synchronic and diachronic perspectives on contact languages*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007, pp. 297–324.

27 For the numerically greater British participation in Chinese labour trading, see Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and cane: race, labor, and sugar in the age of emancipation*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006; Walton Look Lai, *Indentured labor, Caribbean sugar: Chinese and Indian migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

responsibility in anti-Chinese racism and demonization.<sup>28</sup> The superiority of Western civilization and Chinese cultural depravity came into question. Nonetheless, Anglo-American policy analyses refrained from emulating the furor of the press, commonly arguing instead that the ‘wants of those countries which have heretofore looked to Africa for laborers may be fully supplied’ by China.<sup>29</sup> The strategic reasoning within a global political economy, a framework so familiar to the commercially oriented diplomats of economic imperialism, prevented the potential of ethical criticism from becoming a new policy paradigm.

Journalist indictments, too, had their pitfalls. They suffered, most significantly, from assuming a nation’s unitary agency. Market-oriented statements of de-politicization, both official and journalistic, failed to capture the full scope of American complicity in coolie trading. An analytic perspective beyond US–China relations and US–Peru relations in their conventional settings reveals that US private business empires and their territorial ambitions were fuelled by US participation in the Peruvian coolie trade. At the premier coolie destination in the Pacific, Hawai’i, Alfred G. Benson, a shipping tycoon from Brooklyn and guano trader in Peru, secretly made a bid to buy the Hawaiian kingdom for US\$5 million. Even in the absence of governmental authorization, the flag followed the trade. While the US Commissioner in Hawai’i, David Gregg, noted his disgust at Peruvian coolie abuse in the mid 1850s, it did not prevent him from associating with active coolie dealers in the islands.<sup>30</sup> Representatives of the Royal Agricultural Society, the Wohang Company of Hong Kong, and the Commissioner of Immigration in Honolulu all signed coolie contracts without any inhibitions and reportedly enforced labour regimes far beyond contract terms.<sup>31</sup> US–Peruvian diplomacy, meanwhile, did not lean towards coolie protection either. As late as 1870, the US Legation in Lima condemned a violent coolie mutiny on the estates of Pativilea, not on diplomatic grounds but for coolies’ excessive retaliation against their treatment. The US Congress likewise legislated against Peruvian coolie imports, without making a case for an American investigation of coolie abuses. ‘Atrocities’ and ‘barbarity’ were terms to describe the actions of insurrectionist coolies, not the acts committed by their owners against them.<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, the transnational convolution of responsible parties had served to shield the trade from political threats to its existence. In total, an estimated 142,000 were shipped off to Cuba, about 90,000 to Peru.<sup>33</sup> The political calculus only changed when local Chinese investigations of labour conditions in Cuba and Peru maintained that coolie abuse was not merely a radical fringe phenomenon of the trade; the trade itself represented abuse.

28 Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line: white men’s countries and the international challenge of racial equality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

29 Lord John Russell to Lord Lyons, 11 July 1860, ‘Copy of slip’, attached to Mr Anthon, Jr, to Mr Cass, 8 May 1860, ‘Cuban company for emigration to Havana’, in *Asiatic coolie trade: message from the President of the United States in answer to a resolution of the House of 13th July last, in relation to the ‘Asiatic coolie trade’*, 37th Congress, 2nd session, December 1861, pp. 14–17.

30 Bob Dye, *Merchant prince of the Sandalwood Mountains: Afong and the Chinese in Hawai’i*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997, pp. 46–7, 51.

31 Char, *Sandalwood Mountains*, pp. 275–9; Chauncey C. Bennett, *Lecture and sketches of life on the Sandwich Islands and Hawaiian travel and scenery*, San Francisco, CA: Bancroft, 1893, pp. 22–3.

32 Alvin P. Hovey to Hamilton Fish, 14 September 1870, in *Executive documents printed by the order of the House of Representatives*, 3rd session, 41st Congress, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1871, p. 510.

33 Kim Ma Chan, ‘Mandarins in America: the early Chinese ministers to the United States, 1878–1907’, PhD thesis, University of Hawai’i, 1981, p. 37.

## Transnational trumps imperial: the CEM network

Why did the Chinese interventions of 1874 develop such potent opposition, in contrast to earlier protests in Asia and despite the trade's continuing commercial profitability? The potential for action stemmed from the specific setting of the Qing-sponsored Chinese Educational Mission (CEM). The CEM school was established in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1872 with the blessings of and a budget from the Qing government. The Qing endowment of 1,200,000 taels, earmarked for the 120 CEM Chinese students from 1872 to 1881, was sufficient institutional support.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the distance from the sociocultural milieu of imperial treaty ports in China allowed for a fresh orientation of China-US relations. As the first Qing institution in the West, the CEM's official agenda was to raise a new generation of US-trained Chinese students as future pioneers of China's domestic modernization: in railway construction, national industrialization, militarization, and diplomacy. The CEM was to ensure the students' livelihood and social support, and to foster communication with American host families and dutiful immersion in Western science and engineering while maintaining Chinese language and cultural skills.

Despite the young age of the institution, the CEM officers developed American ties quickly, largely uninhibited by Qing directives. In addition to CEM school operations, its officers cultivated numerous US friendships in private, interspersed with a careful staging of their public celebrations.<sup>35</sup> Participation in American courtesy calls, letter-writing, receptions, outings, press interviews, local festivals, and other cultural activities allowed the Chinese to navigate effectively around prevailing nineteenth-century hierarchies that pitted white, industrial, and refined America against oriental, sluggish, and corrupt China. The strategic expansion of transnational sociability made CEM pioneers more than stationary representatives of a distant civilization in the United States. As the first Chinese experts of American society, culture, and politics, they performed at least two crucial functions: they compensated for the lack of competent Chinese individuals with the foreign knowledge required for the establishment of a Chinese Foreign Service, and they identified common denominators of Sino-American cooperation that could later be upgraded into official, political priorities. At least since the Bin Chun Mission to Europe in 1866, the Foreign Ministry in Beijing had lamented the absence of suitable personnel and had pointed to the lack of specific Chinese policy interests. Without anyone equipped with what we would today call transnational knowledge, both foreign and domestic calls for diplomatic representation abroad fell on deaf ears. With the establishment of the CEM, however, the situation changed in both respects.<sup>36</sup> Qing hesitance to implement calls for foreign representation was overcome.

34 Chan, 'Mandarins in America', p. 26. 1 tael approximated 1.327 ounces or 37.62 grams of silver. For much of the 1870s, the East India Company's official estimate was 1 tael = 6s. 8d., although tael prices fluctuated in China, as did dollar prices in London. See *The banker's magazine, and statistical register*, 28, March 1874, p. 716; Alexander George Findlay, *A directory for the navigation of the Indian Archipelago, China, and Japan, from the Straits of Malacca and Sunda, and the passages East of Java*, London: Richard Holmes Laurie, 1878, pp. 1266–7. For Chinese-US conversions, see Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The great enterprise: the Manchu reconstruction of the imperial order in seventeenth-century China*, vol. 1, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985, p. xiii.

35 William A. Maloney, Graham Smith, and Gerry Stoker, 'Social capital and associational life', in Stephen Baron, John Field, and Tom Schuller, eds., *Social capital: critical perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 212–25; Robert Bianchi, *Unruly corporatism: associational life in twentieth-century Egypt*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Frank J. Schwartz and Susan J. Pharr, eds., *The state of civil society in Japan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

36 Knight Biggerstaff, 'The establishment of permanent Chinese diplomatic missions abroad', *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, 20, 1936–37, pp. 1–41.



Buttressed by Beijing's ambition for international recognition of its 'civilized' status, the CEM became the first experiment in Chinese residence overseas and its affiliation with a well-connected coterie of East Coast Americans.

No other Qing initiative had ever established itself overseas, and the CEM became the sole transnational front of the Self-Strengthening Movement at home.<sup>37</sup> However, no categorization of the Chinese overseas diaspora in the Americas yet existed. Private, intra-diasporic communication remained sparse, and the CEM did not automatically link the interests of Chinese in Connecticut, Cuba, and Peru.<sup>38</sup> Transnational cooperation materialized first among the CEM initiators, guardians, and officers as they assumed quasi-political functions prior to attaining the CEM's ultimate purpose, the graduation and return of CEM students. Yung Wing, born in Guangdong and the first US-educated Chinese, was the school's mastermind. East Coast public opinion celebrated him as a graduate of the Yale College Class of 1854. As a 'Chinese Mandarin', Yung electrified the American cultural imagination, even touring the iron works of Philadelphia to study anthracite and bituminous coal production – the dawn, as he put it, of China's 'era of industrial development'.<sup>39</sup> Chen Lanbin, although he was the CEM manager and a figurehead in the US local and national press, lacked English proficiency and thus depended on Yung's American affinities.

Many of Yung's contacts revolved around Yale, his alma mater, as he reported in his English autobiography, still the most detailed account of his life in any language.<sup>40</sup> At Yung's wedding to Mary L. Kellogg, his friend and fellow alumnus Rev. Joseph Hopkins Twichell officiated.<sup>41</sup> Twichell's unabashedly romantic Sinophilia occurred at a time when an American–Chinese marriage still evoked more doubt than confidence among both Americans and Chinese.<sup>42</sup> Orientalism or an aggressive multiculturalism had little to do with it – other Twichell-made marriages included his daughter Harmony's marriage to the composer Charles Ives and Mark Twain's marriage to Olivia Langdon in 1870.<sup>43</sup> But the network dynamic mattered. Twain, although not as outspoken a critic of US southern slavery as he could have been, responded favourably and publicly to Twichell's call to join the anti-coolie cause, lobbying in turn David Hawly, the city missionary in Hartford.<sup>44</sup>

37 Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Stepping forth into the world: the Chinese Educational Mission to the United States, 1872–81*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011.

38 Scott, *Slave emancipation in Cuba*, p. 90, Table 13, 'Chinese Population, 1861–1877'.

39 *Van Nostrand's Eclectic Engineering Magazine*, 8, January–June 1873, p. 570.

40 Yung Wing, *My life in China and America*, New York: Henry Holt, 1909, also published as Yung Wing, *Wo zai Zhongguo he Meiguo de shenghuo: Rong Hong huiyi lu (My life in China and America)*, Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2006; Yung Wing, *Xixue dongjian ji (Records on the dissemination of Western learning)*, Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1973; Yung Wing, *Seigaku tōzenki: Yun Win jiden (Records of Western learning in the East: the autobiography of Yung Wing)*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1969.

41 On Twichell, see Leah A. Strong, *Joseph Hopkins Twichell: Mark Twain's friend and pastor*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1966; Steve Courtney, *Joseph Hopkins Twichell: the life and times of Mark Twain's closest friend*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008; Peter B. Messent and Steve Courtney, eds., *The Civil War letters of Joseph Hopkins Twichell: a chaplain's story*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006.

42 Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (henceforth YCAL), MSS 755, Twichell Papers, Joseph Hopkins Twichell, 'Journal, vol. 1: 1874 October 5–1875 December 30', 24 February 1875; Twichell Papers; Anne M. Hamilton, 'From China to Hartford, a historic connection', *Hartford Courant*, 14 June 2009.

43 Emma Teng, *Eurasian: mixed identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842–1943*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013. For the Chinese immigrant experience in California, see Mae N. Ngai, *The lucky ones: one family and the extraordinary invention of Chinese America*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010.

44 R. J. Ellis, 'Mark Twain and the ideology of southern slavery', in Archer, *Slavery and other forms of unfree labour*, pp. 157–75. Samuel Langhorne Clemens to Joseph H. Sprague and Others, Hartford, Connecticut,

The Yung–Twichell connection merged into wider American support for the CEM. The attention of the local press to venues such as the Kent Club of Yale Law School made Yung the ‘hero of the story’. His pre-CEM life became part of his fame, ‘an old story of men with great ideas – long years waiting without a chance to work, long years of working without result’, until ‘sudden reverses’ propelled him to stardom in the United States. The *New York Tribune* and the Philadelphia-based *Friends Intelligencer* hastened to reaffirm this social Sino-American rapprochement: ‘J. H. Twichell is right in calling this one of the most remarkable institutions of the age’; Yung was ‘one of the most significant characters of modern civilization’.<sup>45</sup> Through the Boston-based *Evangelical Christendom*, even German readers of the *Missionstaube* journal, edited by the Evangelical International Synodic Conference of North America and printed in German in St Louis, Missouri, praised the successful, cross-cultural, Asian–American experiment, despite the absence of active German participation. Reports of Yung’s ‘great courage’ in Peru later enhanced his global reputation.<sup>46</sup>

That Yung voluntarily embraced the Christian faith reflected on the American acculturation of his milieu. He named his first son ‘Morrison’ after the China missionary and Sinologue Robert Morrison, and his second son ‘Bartlett’, after David and Fannie Bartlett, the hosts to several CEM students.<sup>47</sup> Defying the orientalist intrusiveness of imperial anthropology in Asia and Asian exhibitions in the West, journals such as *The Gilded Age* respected the privacy of the ‘leading lights’ of that ‘small coterie of men’: Yung, Twichell, Twain, Charles Dudley Warner, J. Hammond Trumbull, and others. Perceived cultural benefits flowed both ways. The local librarian in Hartford believed that the authors of a flurry of Chinese bons mots and quotations – cultural products that became part of Hartford’s private vernacular – were Yung and ‘a certain Mr. Kwong’, agents of cosmopolitan creativity ‘attached to the Chinese Embassy School here’.<sup>48</sup> Where Chinese–American conviviality flourished, it infused the CEM experiment and American society around it with a new, cross-cultural quality and meaning of its own.<sup>49</sup>

As political and legal challenges tested the stability of these transnationally intimate encounters, the connections expanded into a joint Sino-American commitment to political cooperation. When Beijing demanded the extradition of an act-alone Chinese revolutionary named Wong Ching Fook (Wang Yanping), it was the CEM leaders who conveyed a press account of Wong’s subversive overseas plotting to the chief Qing foreign policy expert, Prince Gong. The prince responded by invoking the Connecticut paper *Hartford Courant*, together with Article 18 of the Tianjin Treaty of 1858, to press his demand.<sup>50</sup>

21 February 1875 (misdated), n. 2, <http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL01196.xml;style=letterletter;brand=mtp#an2> (accessed 14 April 2015).

45 ‘A Chinese school in America’, *Friends Intelligencer*, 1879–80, p. 95.

46 ‘Ein christlicher Mandarin’, *Die Missionstaube. Nachrichten aus dem Missionsgebiet der Heimath und des Auslands*, 1, 1879, p. 131, reprinting the *Leipziger Missionsblatt* and quoting the *Evangelische Kirchen-Chronik*.

47 Andrew Leitch, ‘Will celebrate 100th anniversary of Avon Church (30 Aug., 1919)’, in *Mark Twain’s Perforated Interleaved Scrap Book. Vol. 44 (10 July, 1919–15 Nov., 1919)*, New York: Daniel Slote, 1919; Connecticut Historical Society Collection, Hartford, CT, Mary Morris Social Scrapbooks.

48 Frank B. Gay of the Watkinson Library in Hartford, Connecticut, quoted in Mary Teresa Roades, ‘Was Mark Twain influenced by the Prolog to “Don Quixote”?’ *Mark Twain Quarterly*, 9, 2, Winter 1952, pp. 4–6.

49 Jürgen Osterhammel, ‘Wirtschaftliche Elitenkulturen im Neuzeitlichen China: eine Skizze’, in Miriam Gebhardt, Katja Patzel-Mattern, and Stefan Zahlmann, eds., *Das integrative Potential von Elitenkulturen. Festschrift für Clemens Wischermann*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013, pp. 195–210.

50 Charles Desnoyers, ‘The thin edge of the wedge: the Chinese Educational Mission and diplomatic representation in the Americas, 1872–1875’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 61, 2, 1992, pp. 251–3.

Quotidian improvisation and intercultural accommodation held greater sway in steering CEM social life than international treaty terms. Casual infractions included Article 6 of the Burlingame Treaty against Chinese naturalization. Yung had acquired American citizenship in 1852, two years before his graduation, itself a testament to his public standing in the United States. The fact that his previous application in Hong Kong for naturalization as a British citizen was unsuccessful illustrates how the US setting contrasted with British recalcitrance.<sup>51</sup> The Burlingame Treaty of 1868, commonly considered the US–China framework par excellence at the time, prescribed religious tolerance in Article 4. Nevertheless, social visits and interviews with CEM students ended in prayer, with Qing subjects kneeling alongside their American hosts.<sup>52</sup> Thus Christian practices were part of secular sociability, more easily incorporated into Sino-American events along the US East Coast than in more culturally alert settings in China.

Whether the Chinese students in question had in fact converted remains unknown, but the great American enthusiasm about conversions makes it likely that every conversion would have been mentioned explicitly. Looking back in 1879, the Monson Congregational Church boasted not only of having bridged the gender gap to include a ‘Female Praying Circle’, but also of ‘the intimate relation ... to the academy’, having attracted a Greek, Chinese, and Japanese ‘audience’. These developments complemented the church’s historically more prominent missionary work in Persia, China, Japan and India, the Sandwich Islands, and among Native Americans.<sup>53</sup>

The political consequences of this intercultural realignment were critical. CEM supporters rejected the idea of the ‘yellow peril’ as a cultural polarization that divided the American republic. It should be noted, however, that in 1894, three Harvard graduates founded the Immigration Restriction League in 1894, which was aimed at excluding non-Anglo Saxon Europeans. The Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924, the Asiatic Barred Zone, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 followed, until the grand strategy of exclusionary immigration was abandoned in 1965.<sup>54</sup> But the central tenet of anti-Chinese lobbying in California – that cheap ‘coolie’ labour was depriving Americans of their jobs while endangering White American society morally and socially – did not find much support at the East Coast in the 1870s. According to East Coast perceptions, the Chinese of California were not coolies, they were simply Chinese.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese associated with the CEM, more highly skilled than migrants to California, conveyed an entirely different image of Chinese social qualities, projecting impressions of intercultural versatility, transnational openness, and cosmopolitan knowledge. Reference to ‘coolies’, then, cannot be treated as a uniform category of racial semantics. In California, where ‘coolies’ referred to Californian Chinese, the term helped to justify Sinophobia. By contrast, on the East Coast, the same term in

51 Carl T. Smith, *Chinese Christians: elites, middlemen, and the church in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, pp. 157–8.

52 YCAL, MSS 755, Twichell Papers, Box 12, Scrapbooks 1874–1901, entry for 28 January 1878.

53 Rev. Charles D. Sumner, ‘Churches: the Monson Congregational Church’, in *History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts*, 2 vols. Philadelphia, PA: Louis H. Everts, 1879, vol. 2, pp. 1021–2.

54 Immigration Restriction League, *Constitution of the Immigration Restriction League* [n.p., n.d.]; Neil Gotanda, ‘Exclusion and inclusion: immigration and American orientalism’, in Evelyn Hu-Dehart, ed., *Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and globalization*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999, p. 137; Patrick Weil, ‘Races at the gate: a century of racial distinctions in American immigration policy (1865–1965)’, *Georgetown International Law Journal*, 15, 2001, pp. 625–48.

55 For a different, transnational perspective on comparative racisms towards the Chinese, see Mae M. Ngai, ‘Chinese gold miners and the “Chinese Question” in nineteenth-century California and Victoria’, *Journal of American History*, 101, 4, 2015, pp. 1082–1105.

reference to Cuban and Peruvian Chinese inspired an unprecedented Sinophilia as the foundational commitment of the CEM network and the core perception that necessitated international political cooperation against coolie abuse. Whereas the term *per se* was synonymous across different social settings, its uses, meanings, and purposes were not.

Connecticut politicians such as Senator Joseph R. Hawley, a confidant of Yung, and the citizens of Hartford and the Connecticut Board of Trade fought openly against Sinophobia and for the political legitimacy of their social friends, later pressing for a repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in the 1890s. Hawley had been pushed by Joseph Twichell, the scribe of the Peruvian investigation, to use the *Hartford Courant* newspaper for public opposition to the exclusion acts.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, vocal opposition to exclusion stretched from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania and Missouri.<sup>57</sup> In Connecticut, dozens of supposed ‘Fu Manchus’ had willingly cut off their queues, mastered Western table manners, begun singing American folk songs, and treated ladies with courtesy.<sup>58</sup> In California, by contrast, journalistic and political hostility to the CEM project owed much to inaccurate information and rumour-mongering, making the transnational familiarity between certain circles in Connecticut and official circles associated with the Qing Foreign Ministry in Beijing greater than the familiarity between Sinophile Americans on the East Coast and Sinophobic Americans on the West Coast.

At the same time, however, any hint at a realignment of US–China perceptions caused alarm. The affirmation of America’s most favoured nation status in China appeared much more palatable than any realignment of the political position of Chinese in the United States. The American advance into China was far more welcome in American eyes than a synchronous Chinese advance into America. The Chinese Six Companies that stabilized Chinese immigrant communities were commonly decried in California as nests of Chinese corruption. In their defence, the attorney, Colonel F. A. Bee, explained to the two houses of Congress that ‘we are breaking down their [Chinese] exclusiveness, and our colleges are filling with their young men’.<sup>59</sup>

Bee’s information on the CEM, however, remained tenuous:

In one college in Connecticut I think there are about sixty Chinese students. They are scattered all through the different colleges of the East. They have a superintendent, one

56 Henry S. Cohn, ‘Mark Twain and Joseph Roswell Hawley’, *Mark Twain Journal*, 53, 2, 2015, p. 72; Hery S. Cohn and Harvey Gee, ‘“No, no, no, no!”: three sons of Connecticut who opposed the Chinese Exclusion Acts’, *Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal*, 3, 2003, pp. 1–100.

57 *US Congressional Record: containing the proceedings and debates of the Fifty-Second Congress, second session, vol. 24*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893, pp. 846, 900, 928, 1659. For other opposition, see pp. 73, 727, 918, 1720, 1829, 2252, 2262, 2367.

58 Jenny Clegg, *Fu Manchu and the yellow peril: the making of a racist myth*, London: Trentham Books, 1994; Ruth Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu: the Chinese supervillain and the spread of the yellow peril ideology*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013; Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die gelbe Gefahr. Geschichte eines Schlagworts. Studien zum imperialistischen Denken*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962; Diana L. Ahmad, *The opium debate and Chinese exclusion laws in the nineteenth-century American West*, Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2007; Scott Alan Carson, ‘Chinese sojourn labor and the American transcontinental railroad’, *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics/Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, 161, 1, 2005, pp. 80–102; Christopher W. Merritt, Gary Weisz, and Kelly J. Dixon, ‘“Verily the road was built with Chinaman’s bones”: an archaeology of Chinese line camps in Montana’, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 16, 4, 2012, pp. 666–97; George T. Renner, ‘Chinese influence in the development of western United States’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 152, November 1930, pp. 356–69. On a new American myth of Asian assimilated immigrants, see Ellen D. Wu, *The color of success: Asian Americans and the origins of the model minority*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

59 ‘Chinese immigration’, in *Report of the Joint Special Committee to investigate Chinese Immigration*, 44th Congress, 2nd session, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1877, p. 42. The Chinese population was estimated at 450 million (*ibid.*, p. 32).

of their own countrymen .... We will show you the mission schools, where there are hundreds of converts to Christianity. Here is a field for those Christian men, the place for them to exercise their calling.

Exaggerated claims that American Christians ‘have made more converts here in the last five years than have been made in China in the last twenty’ testify to an escalation of US enthusiasm.<sup>60</sup> In Philadelphia the educator B. G. Northrop even argued that the ‘deeply seated prejudice towards the semi-civilized nations of the world, which does them injustice and lessens our power to promote their progress and our own commercial growth’, had led Americans to ‘realize and magnify their deficiencies’ at the expense of recognizing ‘their good qualities’. Tackling intercultural misperceptions, Northrop identified ‘two chief sources of such prejudice: the superficial nature of the reports on which our information is founded, coming to us originally through the geography of the schoolroom’. And he chided Sinophobic American citizens for following ‘the unfair characterization of a whole nation from the ill-conditioned emigrants who reach our shores’, at the expense of ‘those points in which they deserve our respect’. No project exemplified more programmatically the superior aspects of Chinese as people capable of cultural adaptation, internationalist engagement, and even the diplomacy of investigative missions than the CEM circle. As in every public relations campaign, launching new China perceptions in public settings had its consciously self-fulfilling aspects: the more visibility that Sino-American cooperation could gain, the greater its claim to social and political significance.<sup>61</sup>

International ripple effects of the intercultural CEM rapprochement followed. Until 1873, when reports of the coolie controversy reached the CEM through Prince Gong’s lobbying of Emperor Tongzhi, the circle had been spared Sinophobic attacks.<sup>62</sup> Twichell’s political lobbying included opposition to anti-Chinese bills in Congress but remained confined to the United States.<sup>63</sup> The Sino-American exchange of social credentials created a unique, cultural melange between New York’s cosmopolitan glamour and squalor and Boston’s China merchant circles as well as the Chinatown communities of both cities.<sup>64</sup> Just as Chinese student life in Connecticut society, complete with football, rowing, motorized cruises, singing of American patriotic tunes, and college hymns at picnics, and, outrageously, American girls, had grown beyond the social and cultural confines of Qing imperial control, so CEM leaders enjoyed considerable freedom in the cultivation of American sympathies and support. Buttressed by successful intercultural accommodation, the Chinese–American network deviated from the prerogatives, the purview, and the reach of the Forbidden City, fashioning a radical alternative to anti-Chinese populism and politics in the United States.

## Interventionist debut: Cuba

Abolitionism has commonly been interpreted as an Atlantic affair, disregarding Pacific components. According to current historiographic inclinations, one might expect an

60 Ibid., p. 42.

61 ‘Report of the Secretary to the Board of Education of the State of Connecticut’, in *Annual report of the Board of Education of the State of Connecticut, presented to the General Assembly, January Session, 1877, together with the Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*, New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor, 1877, p. 26.

62 Ng, ‘Chinese mission to Cuba’, p. 49.

63 John O. Stark, ‘Mark Twain and the Chinese’, *Mark Twain Journal*, 24, 2, 1986, p. 36.

64 Chan, ‘Mandarins in America’, p. 22. John V. A. Macmurray, ed., *Treaties and agreements with and concerning China, 1894–1919*, 2 vols., New York: Oxford University Press, 1921.

intervention for the defence of coolies to emanate from Western actors with an established dominance in the Atlantic world and on the China coast, where Western policy capacities loomed larger than anywhere else.<sup>65</sup> But, surprisingly, no US delegate was present at the foundational meeting in the Russian embassy in Beijing where a Qing investigation was first discussed. The arrangement ‘to advise and instruct the Chinese delegates’ materialized with a reversed Sino-American hierarchy. Chinese investigators took the lead, Western colleagues assisted.<sup>66</sup> Washington’s hegemonic ambitions in the finance, commerce, and territory of the Caribbean and Latin America did not transform into abolitionist leadership there.

In contrast to Anglo-American limitations, in 1874 the Qing Foreign Ministry (Zongli Yamen, established in 1861) instructed the CEM leader, Chen Lanbin, a former official of the Qing Board of Punishments, to proceed to Cuba.<sup>67</sup> Chen’s small cadre of assistant commissioners included the American A. Macpherson and the Frenchman A. Huber. Both had been transferred on the same day by the director of the Chinese Maritime Customs in Shanghai, Sir Robert Hart: Macpherson from Hankou to Fuzhou, Huber to Tianjin. Hitherto subordinate officers of the Western diplomatic corps in China, they now became Qing China’s non-governmental, investigative commissioners on the spot.<sup>68</sup> Thanks to this multinational roster, translations of the Chinese *Cuba Commission Report* later attracted international Anglophone and Francophone public opinion.

Chen’s team further included H. L. Northrop, an American from Connecticut who would serve as the Spanish interpreter and who made Chen *presidente de la comisión china* (president of the Chinese commission), a title designed to earn him respect with Cuban politicians and planters. As Chinese assistants, Chen recruited Ye Shudong, a language teacher later to be recommended as Chinese envoy to the United States, Spain, and Peru, and then appointed secretary of the first Chinese embassy to these three countries; Chan Lun, a Hartford student; H. T. Terry, a Hartford citizen; and Zeng Laishun.<sup>69</sup> Across the Sino-American actor network, careers were similar. Born in Shanghai and raised in Singapore, Zeng had become the CEM’s official interpreter and later took the same position in the US consulate in Zhenjiang. Reflecting the intimacy of Sino-American socialization, his wedding to a young lady hailed as China’s first female student was conducted by the prominent American essayist and educational pioneer in China, W. A. P. Martin.<sup>70</sup>

Harnessing the sociability of the CEM setting for a quasi-diplomatic investigation team, the Cuba Commission received the highest political sanction from the Qing court in Beijing and

65 An exception is the work of Michael Hunt, especially *The making of a special relationship: the United States and China to 1914*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

66 Irick, *Ch’ing policy*, p. 294.

67 Ibid., p. 297; Biying Liang, *Chen Lanbin yu wan Qing waijiao (Chen Lanbin and the foreign relations of the late Qing)*, Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2011. For an overview of the Cuban dimension, see Evelyn Hu-Dehart, ‘Chinese coolie labor in Cuba in the nineteenth century: free labor of neoslavery’, *Contributions in Black Studies: A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies*, 12, 1994, pp. 1–17.

68 Sir Robert Hart to James Duncan Campbell, 20 June 1873, in John K. Fairbank, Katherine Frost Bruner, and Elizabeth MacLeod Matheson, eds., *The I. G. in Peking: letters of Robert Hart, Chinese maritime customs, 1868–1907*, vol. 1, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 113.

69 Irick, *Ch’ing policy*, p. 298; Yun, *The coolie speaks*, p. 40.

70 Mamie F. Glassburner, ‘China’s missionary centennial’, *Epworth Herald*, 18, 5, 29 June 1907, p. 106. Another CEM translator from 1875 to 1881, Kwong Ki Chiu was the author (with the support of the Eigaku Shinshi sha) of Kwang Ki-Chaou, *A dictionary of English phrases with illustrative sentences*, Tokyo: n.p., 1905. See Ruthanne Lum McCunn, *Chinese American portraits: personal histories, 1828–1988*, San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1988, p. 21.

from the White House, through a presidential reception in February 1874 en route to New Orleans and Havana.<sup>71</sup> Countering Spanish efforts to treat the Cuban coolie case as an extension of its China-based, diplomatic superiority, the Cuba Commission intervened on site. Although no commissioner held full diplomatic credentials or gubernatorial or ministerial office in China, their overseas residence counted as political expertise, allowing them to function as official representatives of the Qing state. The absence of extensive diplomatic relations between China and either Cuba or Peru may even have enhanced China's leverage. Unlike the United States or Britain, China had little to lose in a radical exposure of Cuban and Peruvian coolie abuse, while the issue could not easily be turned into a *quid pro quo* for the benefit of other bilateral interdependencies.

Upon arrival in Cuba, the Commission was welcomed exuberantly by the Havana press, who accorded local prominence to their political credentials. China's domestic press added a second layer of transnational excitement, reporting on the minutiae of the Commission's arrival in Havana's Hotel Telegrafo, where Chen Lanbin openly denounced coolie abuse. Hundreds of Chinese attended the first mass meeting in Cuba, which would have been inconceivable to stage at the Cuban periphery, where the Cuban Civil War raged, with Chinese coolie refugees supporting, perhaps unsurprisingly, the rebels.<sup>72</sup>

The contrast between public support for the Commission and the opposition of coolie plantation managers could not have been starker. The Cuban government responded to the Chinese Commission's advance requests for coolie interviewees on plantations and in mines, hospitals, prisons, and labour camps – sites which the Commission Report labelled 'dépôts' and which the Cuban historian Mário Duarte described as 'concentration camps' – with red tape and attempted delays.<sup>73</sup> As in any transnational investigation, the Commission's persistence alone did not guarantee open access. At least one planter tried to prevent interviews altogether. To compensate for Cuban withholding of information, the commissioners began consulting spontaneously with non-indentured Chinese on the streets of Havana.<sup>74</sup>

By 1874, more than 50,000 coolies were toiling under the scorching sun, with insufficient nutrition and virtually no recourse to legal self-defence. The coolie trade or, with even more obvious racist connotations, *la trata amarilla* ('the yellow trade'), was not unknown to Beijing, but its details had remained obscured by haphazard hearsay and mediated rather than direct communications. Now, for the first time, Chinese officials confronted Chinese boys in their early teens and barely older than their Connecticut peers, lured into promises of higher pay and a better life in the Caribbean, only to be forcibly deprived of their contract papers. Oppression, however, had its costs. The bureaucratic obstinacy of Spanish plantation managers to prolong bondage indefinitely commonly led to coolie sabotage.

The economic primacy of coolie trading and Cuba's dependence explained not only the labour relations between owners and coolies on which the historiography has tended to focus, but also the fraught relations between coolie owners and members of the Cuba Commission. Just as coolies tried to undermine managerial oppression, managers sabotaged the investigations. On the 'Armonia' plantation in the Matanzas jurisdiction, the 'administrator'

71 Irick, *Ch'ing policy*, p. 298.

72 *Jiaohui xinbao* (*Church news*), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 298; Mario Duarte, *Eça de Queiroz, Cônsul, al servicio de la patria y de la humanidad*, Santiago, Chile: Editorial Nascimento, 1959, p. 11.

73 Duarte, *Eça de Queiroz*, pp. 11–12; José I. Suárez, 'Eça de Queiroz: defender of the Chinese coolie in Cuba', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 52, 1, 2015, pp. 61–76.

74 Irick, *Ch'ing policy*, p. 299.

interrupted the investigative session after only one-third of the interviewees had reported their experiences, dispersing the remaining two-thirds 'with blows and kicks'. Coercion and intimidation were on open display. 'Ordinarily, too, the administrators and overseers stood by whip in hand', the Commissioners reported. Punishment of coolies was frequently reserved for the aftermath of the interview sessions.<sup>75</sup> Maximizing information-gathering within the time limit dictated by Spanish overseers therefore required that commissioner and coolie bridge the social disparity of their Chinese backgrounds as swiftly in the social precariousness of the interview moment. Conversing predominantly in Cantonese and Hokkien, coolies showed clear signs of intimidation and scars of torture. Outside regular plantation inspections, Chen received smuggled reports on scraps of paper from coolies whom the plantation managers regarded as too dangerous to be interviewed.

The results were impressive. The commissioners conducted 2,841 interviews with coolies in Cuba, received a total of 1,176 depositions, 85 petitions, and 1,665 signatures. The accumulated public international pressure that sprang from the overwhelming evidence of mistreatment emboldened Qing diplomats. The recruitment of coolie labour in southern China was banned, and was followed in 1877 by a treaty between Spain and China, the termination of all coolie contracts in Cuba, and the appointment of the first Chinese diplomatic representatives in the Atlantic world, giving specific attention to the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States, and Spain.

## The Peruvian intervention

With the Peruvian investigation in the same year, 1874, Qing interventionism to oppose the continuation of the large-scale business of forced labour deportation and employment entered a second round. The CEM remained the social launch pad. After the commissioners' return from Cuba, their harrowing reports were presented to the teenage CEM students in Hartford and became the subject of heated discussions. Yung served as the host and guardian of one of the students, Alung, whose Hawai'i-based father, Afung, had been a classmate in Hong Kong. For decades, Yung and Afung had used their Pacific travels to maintain contact, disregarding the fact that Achuck, Afung's commercial partner, was a coolie trader in Hawai'i.<sup>76</sup> Stirred by the Cuba reports, young Alung joined the anti-coolie cause prior to his Yale graduation. For decades, he and other CEM alumni would highlight anti-Chinese violence overseas as a top policy priority, with a focus on three issues: physical abuse, ideological discrimination, and diplomatic protection. Alung himself did not have to wait long for his transnational political debut. The CEM was the only nodal point worldwide where the Cuban and the Peruvian interventions were directly linked.

The transnational profile of both investigations also meant that diplomatic information-sharing lagged behind. The US Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish, received only tenuous reports about the Peruvian denial of an impending coolie transfer from Peru to Cuba. Unnoticed by US diplomats, the denial was false.<sup>77</sup> In Hong Kong, George Seward, the new US minister in China

75 *Cuba Commission Report*, pp. 120–1.

76 Dye, *Merchant prince*, pp. 80–1, 94–7.

77 Francis Thomas to Hamilton Fish, 18 January 1875, in *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1875*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1875, pp. 999–1000; Chan, 'Mandarins in America', p. 37.



and an architect of the Chinese Exclusion Act (but later impeached for embezzlement and a prostitution scandal), expressed suspicion regarding the Peruvian investigation. He warned Fish that ‘the ministers of China who have been appointed to visit Peru shall not unduly embarrass the republic by sending to their own government reports of an overstrained character’. He argued repeatedly that coolies should be ‘left to decide for themselves whether they can better their condition by the exchange of residence’. Since ‘the disposition exists with certain Chinese statesmen to make capital out of the alleged abuses practiced upon their countrymen abroad, a belief which they are naturally prone to take up’, it was ‘our part ... in the interest of our relations with the empire, to dispute all unjust allegations of the sort’.<sup>78</sup> Seward’s ignorance stemmed partly from his marginal position in relation to the investigation, which was under the aegis of the CEM circle. The Peru commissioners were not Chinese ‘ministers’ or ‘statesmen’ but a non-diplomatic CEM officer and an American citizen, while the nature of Peruvian abuses hardly needed to be ‘overstrained’ in order to shock.

With Qing sanction, the Peru Commission, like its Cuban predecessor, was formed in private. And it is in the intimate privacy of Twichell’s diary that we can glean the most detailed account of a global experience which has remained virtually invisible in Chinese and US official records:

My valued friend Yung Wing returning from China in July 1874 invited me to go with him on a trip to Peru S. A. whither he had been ordered by his Government to look into the condition of the coolies there. He also offered to defray my expenses. I accepted his invitation joyfully, and, with Dr. Kellogg of Hartford, who had been employed to go as medical attendant, we sailed from New York in the Pacific Steamer ‘Colon’, Aug 15<sup>th</sup> 1874.<sup>79</sup>

The trio was already close from Connecticut days. Dr Edward Wilberforce Kellogg’s American credentials were impeccable, since he claimed descent through his mother from no less than twelve of the Mayflower Pilgrims. The marriage of his sister Mary Kellogg to Yung in 1876 also made the two men brothers-in-law.<sup>80</sup> Aside from his clerkship at the Ecclesiastical Society of Avon Church, Kellogg’s missionary launches into India and outreach to Italian American immigrant communities strengthened his transnational credentials. Few of his Italian acquaintances, however, would have known of Ligurian participation in the international coolie trade.<sup>81</sup> As a Chinese interpreter, the investigative committee of Chinese delegates (who were already fluent in the dialects of Canton, Shantou, and Xiamen, the major coolie languages) chose Tan Qianchu, who would become Chinese consul general in Cuba in the 1900s and support the new Chung Wah Casino – by then a proud symbol of Chinese gentrification in the Cuban Republic.<sup>82</sup>

78 Kevin H. Siepel, *Rebel: the life and times of John Singleton Mosby*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983, pp. 210–11; J. Robert Moskin, *American statecraft: the story of the US Foreign Service*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013, pp. 187–9; George Seward to Hamilton Fish, 21 March 1876, in *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1876*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1876, p. 49.

79 YCAL, MSS 755, Twichell Papers, Twichell, Travel diaries, ‘Trip to Peru with Young Wing’ (folder 1 of 2), 1874.

80 Richard Herndon, *Men of progress: biographical sketches and portraits of leaders in business and professional life in and of the State of Connecticut*, Boston, MA: New England Magazine, 1898, p. 42.

81 Leitch, ‘Will celebrate 100th anniversary of Avon Church’, Connecticut Historical Society Collection, Hartford, CT, Mary Morris Social Scrapbooks; Davide Maldarelle, ‘The Italian involvement in the Macau coolie trade: the role of the Genoese commercial diaspora in Peru and the Pacific Rim, c.1847–1874’, Laurea magistrale thesis, Università degli studi di Pisa, 2014.

82 Kathleen López, *Chinese Cubans: a transnational history*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013, p. 111; Tan Qianchu, *Guba za ji (Miscellaneous notes on Cuba)*, n.p., 1887.

Curiously, Chinese official records and the collected works of Li Hongzhang do not contain the full text of the Peru investigation report.<sup>83</sup> Twichell's diary provides the only extant and detailed record of the Commission's investigation in Peru, the notes on which the report was based.<sup>84</sup> On the morning after their midnight arrival in the Hotel Comercio on 1 September, Yung and Twichell called on the US consuls and were received 'very courteously', with expressions of 'strong sympathy'. The vice-consul immediately arranged for a meeting with a Chinese merchant who acted as an intermediary and brought Yung to a meeting with Chinese residents in Callao. The diary record of subsequent encounters offers almost psychological details of the commission's local interactions with coolies themselves. As in Havana, an urban, non-indentured Chinese population offered uninhibited insights into local coolie resistance: 'W. + K. with some of the Chinese went out to see a placard', which, they were told, contained a 'complaint of some Chinese whose term of contract had expired yet who were still held to labor, and asking the aid of their Countrymen'. Kellogg did not miss the opportunity to gather this material evidence of coolie plight and 'loosened the placard off the wall with his penknife'. As Twichell wrote, 'the operation drew a crowd of Chinese around (it was in a Chinese alley) who showed excitement, but were quieted by Wing who explained somewhat the object'. The vagueness of Twichell's words did not necessarily reflect a lack of concern or Yung's own imprecision: Twichell was unfamiliar with the Chinese language. The urge for Callao's Chinese to consult Yung was as immediate as it was unremitting: 'A number of Chinese merchants from Lima came down to see Mr. Wing – went with them to their ... home. Long conversation – tea + other refreshments. To bed tired.'<sup>85</sup>

Two days later, on 3 September 1874, Twichell noted in his diary: 'Went to see Wing. A room full of coolies taking down their statements.' Coolies, who were 'panic struck at our appearance' took them 'to be Peruvian', so 'Wing had to explain at length that we were friends. Wing in a state of deep feeling over what [he] had heard.'<sup>86</sup> Two days after that, Yung, no stranger to novel confrontations, said 'he had cried for the miseries of his people. The more he hears the deeper he feels and the louder he hears his call to act.' Twichell knew him well enough from Connecticut days to rely on Yung's capacity for heroism. 'He is great enough to take a great burden', adding that 'tho [*sic*] far from wanting to fly he goes at the giant', referring to the biblical battle of David against the giant Goliath. If the investigation had Twichell as its scribe, Yung was its bard; the diary leaves little doubt that it was Yung's sentiments, above all, that gave the inquiry a human face.

On the same day, Yung and Twichell paid their first official visits: 'After breakfast called Am. minister and excused us from being in to receive his call at 12. Wing came at 11.30 with an interpreter – we all went to home of Sr. Garcia and thence to the Palazzo where we were presented to the Minister of the Interior, with whom Wing had a talk.' They were promised

83 *Qingjii waijiao shiliao (Historical sources of Qing foreign relations)*, Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1963; *Li Wen Zhong gong quan ji (The complete works of Li Hongzhang)*, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1921; *Chouban yiwu shimo (A complete account of the management of barbarian affairs)*, Beijing: Gugong bowuyuan, 1929–30; Ching-hwang Yen, 'Ch'ing changing images of the overseas Chinese (1644–1912)', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 2, 1981, p. 281.

84 For Chinese labour in the context of the plantation complex, see Vincent C. Peloso, *Peasants on plantations: subaltern strategies of labor and resistance in the Pisco valley, Peru*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, pp. 27, 37–53.

85 Twichell, 'Trip to Peru with Young Wing' (folder 2 of 2).

86 Ibid.

‘some sort of letters by him to obtain access to haciendas’. The reference to Garcia proved that they had been granted access to the most relevant officials in the administration.<sup>87</sup>

The Peruvian intervention gave time and reason for wider reflections on human brutality and its history. In lieu of a frontispiece, Twichell’s tiny, handwritten travel diary presents a small, shrivelled piece of cloth whose original grey has long faded into yellow. A note identifies the trophy as a ‘fragment of the shroud of Pizarro, obtained at the Cathedral, Lima, Sept 4 1874’.<sup>88</sup> Francisco Pizarro was killed in Lima by assassins in 1541, and, although devoid of stains of blood, the piece symbolically evokes the material presence of past brutalities, an effect only attenuated by its colour. Twichell’s extensive comments on the physical and symbolic brutality of a live bullfight and his culturalist generalizations reflect his sensitivity to bloodshed and violence. Little did he suspect that the cloth did not in fact stem from Pizarro but, as forensic scientists have recently discovered, from another unidentified victim of Peruvian history.<sup>89</sup>

More than an emblematic memento, the Spanish colonial relic conveys the emotional immediacy of the encounter with abused coolies in perpetual indenture. Exhibiting all the characteristics of Chinese slavery, the scenarios of Cuba and Peru warranted two unprecedented Qing investigations in Hispanic America. To counter the management, legitimacy, and existence of these labour regimes was an exercise in ‘contentious politics’, an activity ‘making claims that bear on someone else’s interests’, with governments fulfilling the function of ‘targets, initiators of claims, or third parties’.<sup>90</sup> By assuming these roles, the CEM-based actor network did the spadework for China’s continuing countering of international discrimination and inequality, efforts that would be just as alive overseas as they were at home.

At the same time, Qing China’s investigations represented a very early, if not the first, large-scale project of Asian abolitionism as an international initiative. It contrasted sharply with the 1872 scandal concerning the Peruvian ship *Maria Luz*, the most notable consequence of which was Japanese domestic legislation for greater gender and labour regulation rather than an internationalization of Asian abolitionism.<sup>91</sup> This points to the potential for examining comparative divergences in histories of forced labour in Hispanic America, a historiographic terrain which crosses not only the race and origin of labourers but also the race and origin of abolitionist actor networks.

The tenacity of Cuba’s resistance to the abolition of the coolie trade parallels abolitionist latecomers such as Brazil in 1888.<sup>92</sup> Within Cuba, the end of forced labour was delayed by the First War of Independence (1868–78), which saw slave recruitment on both sides, although the Spanish Cortes passed the Moret Law as early as 1870, declaring that children of slaves were born free.<sup>93</sup>

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87 Ibid

88 Ibid.

89 William R. Maples, B. P. Gatliff, H. Ludeña, R. Benfer, and W. Goza, ‘The death and mortal remains of Francisco Pizarro’, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 34, 3, 1989, pp. 1021–36.

90 Charles Tilly, *Contentious performances*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 5.

91 Daniel V. Botsman, ‘Freedom without slavery? “Coolies,” prostitutes, and outcasts in Meiji Japan’s “emancipation moment”’, *American Historical Review*, 116, 5, 2011, pp. 1323–47; Martin Dusinger, ‘Writing the on-board: Meiji Japan in transit and transition’, *Journal of Global History*, 11, 2, 2016, pp. 271–94.

92 Rebecca Scott, ‘Reclaiming Gregoria’s mule: the meaning of freedom in the Arimao and Caunao Valleys, Cienfuegos, Cuba, 1880–1899’, *Past & Present*, 170, 2001, pp. 181–216.

93 Tulio Halperin Donghi, ‘Economy and society in post-independence Spanish America’, in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 3: *from independence to c.1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 341.

A further comparison with the plight of Chinese labourers in North America demonstrates that the two CEM investigations witnessed discrimination and abuse on a far more dramatic scale than elsewhere in the Americas. Globally, Cuba and Peru became the very first sites where Chinese victimization assumed a physical materiality.

As for the Chinese protagonists themselves, their future career paths revealed that the investigations became formative in the institutionalization of Chinese diplomatic representation overseas. After his return, Yung spent most of his life in the United States, much of it in diplomatic functions. Chen Lanbin stayed until 28 December 1881 and was fittingly rewarded by becoming China's first 'Minister to the United States, Spain and Peru', a deliberate designation. Before the Peruvian intervention was being wrapped up, China's foreign ministry had already decided to assign to Chen the establishment of China's first consulate in Washington, DC, followed by San Francisco.

Itinerant CEM careers only highlighted the global dimensions of Chinese discrimination. In San Francisco, hundreds of 'low classes of Irish', in Prince Gong's words, had assaulted the Chinese mission to the Centennial Exhibition, according to a press report, 'with mud and stones', inflicting 'wounds and bruises ... innumerable'. It was hardly a fitting reception for the 846 invited cultural ambassadors of a civilization who reportedly brought with them 1,557 packages of tea, 721 packages of silk, and 25,512 packages of miscellaneous cargo.<sup>94</sup> For the Qing foreign ministry, reports of Chinese abuse constituted the foremost reason for abandoning its reluctance towards institutionalizing China's first foreign service. Henceforth, Chinese international political representation was to be aimed at protecting Chinese overseas. 'The latter point', Seward wrote to Fish from Hong Kong, 'they reiterated, not unpleasantly, several times.'<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, on 10 August 1875, the Qing throne received a memorial from Li Hongzhang concluding that the oppression and unspeakable suffering of Peru's 'more than a hundred thousand Chinese labourers' made diplomatic representation (*alias* protection) a necessity. Yung had secured the freedom of eighty Chinese labourers who had fulfilled their contracts, signalling that the physical presence of even one Chinese investigator could tilt the power balance in favour of the Chinese. By the end of the year, Chen and Yung were appointed as the first full-fledged Chinese diplomats in the United States, Spain, and Peru. This preceded the more well-known establishment of Chinese diplomatic representations in France and Great Britain that emerged out of imperialist pressure for official Chinese apologies.<sup>96</sup> British and Portuguese imperial consequences of these transnational investigations followed suit and made Cuba and Peru a reference point in slavery debates and international law: in 1879, Sir John Smale, Hong Kong's chief justice, expressed his views regarding the local custom of *mui tsai*, domestic female servants: 'Has Cuba or has Peru ever exhibited more palpable, more public evidence of the existence of generally recognised slavery in these hotbeds of slavery than in Hong Kong?'<sup>97</sup>

94 'Newspaper extract', enclosure in letter of Prince Kung to Seward, 29 June 1876, in *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1876*, pp. 58–9.

95 'Eastern exchange of diplomatic courtesies', *Los Angeles Herald*, 16, 106, 24 December 1881; Prince Kung to Seward, 29 June 1876, in *Foreign relations of the United States, 1876*, p. 58; Seward to Fish, 29 June 1876, in *ibid.*, p. 57.

96 Biggerstaff, 'Establishment', pp. 32–4.

97 'Declaration by the chief justice that slavery in every form in Hong Kong is illegal, and must be put down', in *Correspondence respecting the alleged existence of Chinese slavery in Hong Kong*, London: HMSO, 1882, p. 5; David Lambert and Philipp Howell, 'John Pope Hennessy and the translation of "slavery" between late

Thus less than thirty years after the conservative British response that reduced political will in the Amoy riots to a half-hearted pacification of Chinese popular sentiment, new directives in international law criminalized the politics and the practice of coolie trading and delegitimized long-established policy positions. After the coolie trade was abolished in the 1870s, calls for coolie protection resulted in official state commitments, as demonstrated in Governor Januario's move to end the Portuguese trade from Macao on 27 March 1874. As Chinese migration to and from Peru itself spread in the early 1880s, Peruvian Chinese moved north to Ecuador and south to Chile, complementing emigration to Bolivia and from Cuba, Panama, and Mexico to Central America. Guatemala and Venezuela, according to Sen-Dou Chang, continued to introduce contract labourers directly from China.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

The coolie trade did not merely 'end' in the 1870s. Rather, it was abolished by two bi-national investigative commissions that scored a decisive victory over the political recalcitrance of plantation interests. US participants in these Sino-American interventions played subordinate roles, and the US administration remained largely aloof even in the aftermath of the interventions. In 1875, correspondence from the US Legation in Lima to the US Secretary of State stated laconically that 'there is nothing of importance to report politically' except the Islay affair, a skirmish incited by some sixty rebels under the leadership of Bustamante and Arévalo, a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>99</sup> Even in retrospect, abolitionist ideology, although so prominent in the Atlantic slavery cause, did not respond to the Pacific counterpart with anything paralleling the deep-held convictions and soaring rhetoric against slavery. But the international political and ethical significance of the Cuban and Peruvian interventions in Asian Pacific history reaches beyond the case study at hand. Social transnationalism became the direct precondition for a modern actor network that was capable of assuming global diplomatic functions for which no political institutions existed. The deployment of this Sino-American network spoke to the potential of international policy change by means of transnational cooperation, blurring the boundaries between state and non-state realms of activity. Behind and beyond international legal change, the two Chinese interventions made physical injury and loss of life a foundational concern of China's diplomacy of international law. New requirements of international legitimacy scrutinized Chinese labour treatment wherever the eyes of Beijing's servants could see.

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nineteenth-century Barbados and Hong Kong', *History Workshop Journal*, 55, Spring 2003, p. 16; Susan Pedersen, 'The maternalist moment in British colonial policy: the controversy over "child slavery" in Hong Kong, 1917–1941', *Past & Present*, 171, 2001, pp. 161–202.

98 Sen-Dou Chang, 'The distribution and occupations of overseas Chinese', *Geographical Review*, 58, 1, 1968, pp. 94–5.

99 Richard Gibbs to Hamilton Fish, 20 July 1875, in *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States*, 1875, pp. 1001–2.