Dynamics of the Debates on the Chinese Question in *The Chinese Must Go*  

Hsin-yun Ou  
National University of Kaohsiung  

**Abstract**  
Scholars tend to regard the anti-Chinese movement as the mainstream reaction to Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth century, and neglect other distinctive attitudes toward Chinese labor. In Henry Grimm’s *The Chinese Must Go*, however, part of the characterization and dialogue evoke diverse voices. To place the play within the larger context of other representations of the Chinese during the period immediately preceding exclusion, this essay discusses contentions pertaining to the Chinese Question publicized in contemporaneous newspapers, magazines and legal documents. Through a reading of the play in relation to its historical background, this essay argues that, while Grimm’s play appeals to white workingmen and the middle class by staging the Chinese as job competitors, slave-sellers, opium smokers, and potential seducers of white women, it is an ironic reminder of several misconceptions about circumstances surrounding Chinese immigrants, which pro-Chinese Americans had endeavored to rectify.  

**Keywords:** the Chinese Question, immigration, ethnicity, labor, the Chinese Exclusion Act
In 1877, The Times reported that, in a testimony concerning the influx of Chinese into California, a Congressional committee stated that “the Pacific Coast has been a great gainer by Chinese labour, and owes its rapid development to this cause” (“Chinese Immigrants in California” 8). While people who employed Chinese laborers spoke highly of the advantages of doing so, they were nonetheless fearful of immoral effects. Missionaries favored Americans’ employment of Chinese labor because it offered an opportunity to convert the Chinese, whereas the working classes endeavored to restrict it, fearing that it might deprive the whites of employment. Others criticized the influx of Chinese laborers because “each Chinaman whose term of service has expired leaves this country with the money he has made” and because the Chinese women were “sold as slaves for prostitution” (8). The Committee concluded that Chinese immigration threatened Republican institutions and Christian civilization, since “free institutions can only exist on the basis of adequately paid labour, families, and the education of children, and all these are wanting in the Chinese” (8). These allegations, later exploited by Congress to justify Chinese exclusion, epitomized what James Amaziah Whitney called “the Chinese Question.” In The Chinese, and the Chinese Question (1880), Whitney states that the Chinese problem is a question of “the migration of races; of the overflow of redundant populations upon comparatively unsettled regions” and that “Chinese immigration is full of danger to our country, to our institutions, and to our people” (1).

In view of the Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress in 1882, scholars tend to regard the anti-Chinese movement as a mainstream reaction to Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth century, and neglect other distinctive attitudes toward Chinese labor during that period. In Henry Grimm’s The Chinese Must Go, however, even though most scenes satirize Chinese or pro-Chinese characters, part of the characterization and dialogue evoke dynamics of diverse debates on the Chinese Question. To place Grimm’s play within the larger context of other representations of the Chinese during the period immediately preceding exclusion, this essay discusses contemporary contentions pertaining to the Chinese Question publicized in contemporary newspapers, magazines, and legal documents. Through a reading of the play in relation to its historical background, this essay argues that Grimm’s renditions of both anti- and pro-Chinese views reflect dynamics of the debates on the Chinese Question. While Grimm’s play appeals to white workingmen and the middle class by staging the Chinese as job competitors, slave-sellers, opium smokers, and potential seducers of white women, it is an ironic reminder of misapprehensions about circumstances surrounding Chinese immigrants, which facilitated the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.
In *The Chinese Must Go*, most of the white characters demonize the Chinese, employing various racist accusations as white Americans did during the anti-Chinese movement. The play depicts the Blaine family in San Francisco, in which William, a tailor, describes the Chinese immigrants as an inferior race and blames them for ruining his family life. In a dispute between William and his wife Dora over the Chinese Question, William admits that he is an egoist, but he also endeavors to justify himself: “We can't live on air. Nature itself is an egoist; it takes everything back again” (111). William’s egoistic proclamation points toward white American nationality, which racially discriminates against other ethnic groups. He questions Dora’s tolerance of the Chinese, and attempts to prove the Chinese’s unassimilability by resorting to the prevailing American fear of interracial marriage between the whites and an inferior race. When William asks Lizzie: “Would you like to marry a Chinaman?” Lizzie is amazed by this question and replies: “What an idea, papa!” William hence asserts, “That settles the question. Oil and water won't mix; the lighter material will always be on top, and any one who believes that it will mix is a fool” (112). He jumps to the conclusion that, since white people cannot assimilate the Chinese, the Chinese should simply go away. These statements, stressing the dangers of racial intermingling, resemble those of contemporaneous Social Darwinists who argued against immigrant communities (Buxton 21-22; Hofstadter 185). They rejected cooperation between different races, since, according to their interpretation of Herbert Spencer’s philosophy of Social Darwinism in *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (1857), competition among all individuals, groups, nations, or ideas drives social evolution in human societies (Johnson 492). Many Americans of the period, such as M. J. Dee, regarded the Chinese as “a most formidable rival for ultimate survival of the fittest” (524).

Under these circumstances, white Americans did not welcome the Chinese. To convince his wife, William relates two parables to illustrate the current economic warfare between Euro-Americans and Chinese, an issue central to the Chinese Question. He first tells how he once shared a blanket with two fellow travelers, but on the fourth night they took the blanket away. The moral lesson he learns from this experience is that “I will never divide my blanket with two men again” (112). Complaining that his wife allows weeds to grow in their vegetable garden to the utter ruin of the vegetables, William tells Dora a fable about how weeds eventually displace the corn in a field:

> It once happened that a strong wind blew a few grains of corn into a field of sagebrush. The corn found a fertile soil; it prospered, but ruined the sagebrush. Afterwards,
another wind came from a different direction and blew the seeds of the weeds among
the corn. The weeds increased very fast, and the corn disappeared. (113)

Condemning Chinese immigrants as a social illness threatening the American
economy, William believes that the Chinese and whites can never benefit each
other, and that, for the benefit of white men in America, the Chinese must leave
the U.S.: “I have a stomach; on weeds I cannot live; therefore, they must go”
(113). William’s conviction that whites should defend their self-interest is similar
to Atwell Whitney’s view as stated in his Almond-Eyed (1878), a novel which fo-
cuses on the evil of Chinese labor. In the novel, the protagonist Job Stearns claims,
“It’s all right to teach them how to be Christians, but we can’t afford to give our
daily bread for it” (Whitney 19). These statements allude to contemporary Ameri-
cans’ racist assumption of their cultural dominance over non-white minority groups,
while they feared that an inferior race might dominate the West. Some Americans
even viewed the Chinese as colonizers. For instance, Charles Frederick Holder
asserted that the question of unrestricted pouring in of the Chinese “has assumed
grave importance, especially in California, where almost every political contest
during the past twenty years has had some bearing upon the so-called coloniza-
tion of the Chinese in America and their usurpation of the industrial field of the
American citizen” (288). Holder regarded the Chinese in America as “a constant
menace to law, order, and morality,” and condemned the trafficking of Chinese
women to the United States by the Chinese “criminal or slave-dealing class” (289),
who might also enslave Americans.

Another anti-Chinese argument in The Chinese Must Go comes from William’s
son Frank. Frank attempts to justify the fraud he inflicted on the Chinese by
emphasizing their latent hazards. When Frank tries to persuade his friend Jack
Flint to rob Sam Gin, he tells Jack, “The Chinese are nobody; notwithstanding,
they get the best of us in a terrible manner. How much money do you think those
pigtails suck out of this state every year? . . . Five million dollars” (117). Through
an allegorical depiction, Frank indicates that the Chinese will soon destroy America,
“And suppose those Chinese parasites should suck as much blood out of every
State in the Union, destroying Uncle Sam’s sinews and muscles, how many years
do you think it would take to put him in his grave?” (117). Akin to contemporary
political cartoonists who portrayed the Chinese as heathens polluting Anglo-Saxon
blood,1 Frank believes that the Chinese pose a great threat to white America. By
describing the Chinese as “parasites” attacking the body of “Uncle Sam,” that is,
exhausting America’s wealth and energies, Frank stresses the damaging effects of

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1 See, for example, the cartoon that depicts the Chinese as a bloodsucking vampire in The Wasp Maga-
zine 30 (January-June 1893): 10-11.
the Chinese invasion, to the extent that Chinese men could force white workers into poverty. Many contemporary American writers used similar metaphors to portray Chinese immigrants as threats to the welfare of the U.S. For example, Arthur B. Stout’s *Chinese Immigration and the Physiological Cause of Decay of a Nation* (1862) portrayed the Chinese as diseased and a threat to American racial integrity, and warned that introducing the Chinese and blacks into American society was like a cancer in biological, social, religious, and political systems.

In addition to the recession of the 1870s, anti-Chinese representations in cartoons, advertising and songs also pressed many Americans to protest cheap Chinese labor as the cause of economic failure. Cartoons associated the Chinese with rats because the hairstyle, the queue, generated connotations of cultural degeneration (Tchen 216); advertisements for starch celebrated unemployed Chinese launderers (Matsukawa 200-17); and songs like “John Chinaman” (1855) claimed the Chinese as threats to white Americans due to their dishonesty, cultural attachment, and avarice to claim American resources.

I thought you’d open wide your ports . . . .
I thought you’d cut your queue off, John . . . .
But I find you’ll lie and steal too . . . .
For our gold is all you’re after, John. (qtd. in Moon 36-37)

Yellowface minstrelsy constructed Chinese racial difference as a danger to morality, by focusing on the Chinese hairstyle, a diet of rats and puppies, and language in particular. Chinese pidgin English used to be a trade language dating back to early English-Chinese relations in the late seventeenth century, but in the nineteenth century the use of pidgin was viewed as subverting the hegemonic power of standard English and demonstrating Chinese immigrants’ inability to assimilate. In the refrain to “The Heathen Chinee,” for instance, nonsense words combined with pidgin to infantilize the yellowface singer.

Hi! Hi! Hi! Ching! Ching! Ching!
Chow, Chow, wellie good, me likie him.
Makie plenty sing song, savie by and bye.
China man a wille man, laugh hi! Hi! (qtd. in Lee 37)

In a similar vein, the major white characters in Grimm’s play denounce Chinese immigration, and further condemn American sympathizers of Chinese workers, such as Julius Turtlesnap, a rich captain, and the Reverend Howard Sneaker, a pro-Chinese Christian minister. Frank disguises himself as his sister Lizzie, to steal from these suitors, and he shows them equal violence as he has earlier shown to the Chinese (111). His father William criticizes colleges for producing fools (113), and his friend Jack Flint mocks Congress (117). These
episodes demonstrate the play’s intent to appeal to white working class audience, most of whom strongly opposed Chinese immigration and defied pro-Chinese capitalist or missionary support.

The play also appeals to the middle class by contrasting Chinese and Euro-American treatment of women, to demonstrate Chinese cultural inferiority. The Chinese characters are depicted as treating women as commodities or slaves. For instance, Slim Chunk Pin suggests adding a Chinese girl to Sam Gin’s new washhouse to attract customers: “Sam, if you start a washhouse you will need a nice-looking China girl; white people like to see them” (103). Sam Gin decides to buy a twelve-year-old girl for $200, whom Slim Chunk Pin will deliver in a box. Then the play sarcastically stages Slim Chunk Pin reading a bill of goods from the Hong Kong Company of “Wholesale and Retail Dealers in Females,” which states, “We will ship them by the next outgoing steamer, dressed as formerly in men’s clothes” (103). These Chinese girls had to be dressed in men’s clothes for them to sneak into the U.S., since the U.S. prohibited Chinese women from immigration under the Page Law of 1875. Slim Chunk Pin claims that he is experienced in importing Chinese girls “in a box.” “I bought a fine lot of girls at Hongkong. I always pack my girls in a box when I deliver them, to prevent other Chinamen from running away with them” (103). Therefore, Frank calls Slim Chunk Pin a “slave-dealer” (104).

The play’s portrayal of the Chinese characters’ enslavement of Chinese women mirrors the American impression that the Chinese treated women as objects to buy and sell. In 1876, the New York Times reported that C. P. O’Neil, a policeman, testified before the Senate commission appointed to investigate the Chinese question in Sacramento, “to having been a witness to the sale of a Chinese woman for $450. The woman soon after committed suicide, not liking the man to whom she had been sold” (“Chinese Immigration” 2). In 1877, a Congressional committee reported that Chinese women were “sold as slaves for prostitution,” and were treated “worse than dogs” (“Chinese Immigrants in California” 8). Contemporary Americans were probably unaware of Chinese social conventions, in which the family of the bride charged a sum of money as a gift to the family, and in return they also gave gifts to the bridegroom’s family. Regarding the charge as evidence of a sale, Americans prided themselves on their better treatment of women, and scorned Chinese patriarchy. Nineteenth-century American drama rarely portrayed a Chinese marriage or family, partly because Chinese stayed in the U.S. only on a temporary basis without seeking to establish a family, and partly because the portrayal would endow the Chinese with humanity. Even when the Chinese were married, contemporary Americans regarded their marriages as a slave purchase. Thomas J. Vivian wrote about the Chinese in an 1876 article published
in *Scribners Monthly*, “It is known that women are sold and bought every day in San Francisco, and that sales of these poor creatures take place on the arrival of nearly every steamer” (871). Therefore he was worried about California, in which “[a] hundred thousand slave-holding, prostituting heathen will threaten to become the labor power of that State to the exclusion of so many European immigrants, who would, as fathers and brothers, become the bulwarks of its stability” (871).

Even worse, frequent allegations claimed that Chinese immigrants seduced white women. Grimm’s play dramatized the white workingmen’s anxiety about their own masculinity when confronted with Chinese labor competition. For many Americans, masculine competitors won not only land but also access to women as a reward for their victory. Asserting their power by proclaiming special access to white women, they prohibited such access to non-whites. In particular, anti-Chinese immigration laws in the second half of the nineteenth century testified to a nationwide white nativist fear of racial pollution through miscegenation. Grimm depicted the fear by staging Chinese characters as opium smokers and potential seducers of white women. At the very beginning of the play, when Ah Coy demands that the Blaine family pay him for his domestic services, he is smoking his opium pipe. Lizzie enters and complains about her tenseness, and Ah Coy supplies her with opium to relax. William is furious when he catches his daughter “again smoking that nasty Chinaman’s pipe” (100). Snatching the pipe from his daughter, he drives Ah Coy from the house with it. The American stage during this period often portrayed Chinese as smoking opium, hence evoking scorn and fear. Numerous newspaper reports from East Coast periodicals contained stories of white girls lured into opium dens and the back rooms of laundries (Miller 184-85). *The Chinese Must Go* exhibited all these anti-Chinese assertions to argue against pro-Chinese advocates, who were probably very powerful rivals of anti-Chinese agitators.

**Pro-Chinese Arguments**

As a yellowface melodrama, Grimm’s play is extraordinary because it presents debates from different perspectives on the Chinese Question. In the play, William’s wife Dora disputes his anti-Chinese contentions and disagrees with William about Chinese competition by commenting, “If the vegetables can’t compete with the weeds, they deserve to be ruined” (113). For Dora, “if the weeds destroyed the corn, it was the will of the creator who created them both; and if the Chinamen drive us out, it is His will, and we ought to submit to it” (113). To
support her own argument, Dora resorts to a lecture by Reverend Sneaker: “Did you forget what Mr. Sneaker said in his lecture yesterday? Instead of discouraging the coming of the Chinese, we ought to encourage them, and divide with them the blessings of our country” (112).

Dora’s contention resembles those expressed by contemporary Christian clergymen who offered support for Chinese immigration. For instance, when Rev. Otis Gibson argued against Father Buchard (a Catholic father who opposed Chinese immigration because they were cheap labor), he defended the Chinese by emphasizing that the Chinese were doing things the white laborers were unwilling to do:

In California, almost every year, fields of wheat are left unharvested and vast quantities of fruit rot on the ground, simply because labor cannot be obtained to harvest the wheat or to gather the fruit at paying rates . . . there are hundreds, if not thousands of families in this city and country with small incomes, feeble mothers, helpless children, daily suffering for the want of domestic help which, at present prices, they are unable to command. (Gibson 11)

According to Gibson, the Chinese on the West coast, “by the multiplication and development of industries, have caused a demand for more white skilled labor than otherwise could have found employment” (11). Gibson did not regard the Chinese workers as cheap labor, as he observed that “[a] Chinaman, able to cook and wash for a family, readily commands from $5 to $8 per week. In our Eastern cities the same kind and amount of labor can be obtained for less money” (8). Grimm’s play discloses that skilled Chinese workers did not all perform cheap labor. In the play, the laundryman Lam Woo brings washing and tells William: “Your wife owe me sixteen dollars. You no got money, I keepee washee.” William is surprised at the high fees charged: “Sixteen dollars for washing” (101). In nineteenth-century America, some Chinese workers were initially willing to work temporarily for lower wages, partly because they regarded some of the work as training for higher skilled and better-paid jobs. Another pro-Chinese missionary, Rev. Lyman Abbott stated in The American Missionary (published by the American Missionary Association) that the Americans have no right to exclude the Chinese, because “The earth is the Lord’s. . . . We have a right to say that if they come they shall come subordinate to the laws and the institutions that have been established here; . . . but we have no right to build a wall of adamant around the land and say, ‘Keep out’” (“The Two Methods” 372-75). An 1878 article published in The American Missionary claimed that the Chinese were assimilable, because “more than a hundred [Chinese] in our schools [of the American Missionary Association] alone are now giving convincing evidence that they are Christian men” (“Chinese Notes” 9-10). Compared to the white working class, these Christian missionaries
in general were more positive about the benign presence and contributions of Chinese labor to U.S. society.

In the meantime, contemporary capitalists welcomed Chinese labor. According to a reviewer in Manufacturer and Builder, owners of factories advocated: “Come along, John Chinaman. The new world wants you. Its natives are getting above work, and there are sights of work to be done” (“Chinese Labor” 308-09). Professor Henry N. Day wrote in an 1870 issue of New Englander and Yale Review that Chinese labor was most welcome among workers of all ethnicities: “Quiet, patient, docile, courteous, they are yet cheerful and quick to take a joke. . . . With less of muscle, they are lithe, and ready, and persistent, and so are acceptable and profitable as laborers beyond most others” (Day 6). In particular, entrepreneur and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) defended the Chinese on behalf of capitalists when he wrote in October 1878:

I met the owner of a quicksilver mine. . . . The mine yields a lean ore, and did not pay when worked by white labor costing 2 to $2.50 per day. He contracted with a Chinaman to furnish 170 men at one-half these rates. They work well, doing as much per man as the white man can do in this climate. He has no trouble with them—no fights, no sprees, no strikes. The difference in the cost enables him to work at a profit a mine which otherwise would be idle. . . . Our free American citizens . . . find a rival beating them in the face, and instead of taking the lesson to heart and practicing the virtues which cause the Chinaman to excel, they mount the rostrum and proclaim that this is a “white man’s country.” (Carnegie 18)

In an 1870 issue of The Atlantic Monthly, Sidney Andrews also credited the Chinese with “patient and untiring industry”:

They were neither street vagabonds nor idle Micawbers; each one of them had a “mission,” and in every case it was a mission to labor after some fashion. Loaferism is one of the curses of a new community, but there are no Chinese loafers in these new towns along the western end of the great railway. (Andrews 224)

It is not surprising, then, that the Chinese were able to monopolize many branches of industry, and, in San Francisco particularly, drive out the whites from these branches by their “wonderful manual skill, their highly-developed and intelligent imitative faculties, their tireless industry, and their abnormal frugality,” as M. J. Dee remarked in an 1878 issue of the North American Review (524).

However, some white characters in Grimm’s play interpret these positive features of the Chinese workers as pecuniary covetousness. Before the play begins, William and his wife Dora owe their Chinese servant Ah Coy his six-dollar wage for the previous month’s work. Then, the laundryman Lam Woo enters to demand sixteen dollars for his work, and threatens to keep the family’s clothes as a pledge. Driven out by William, Ah Coy can only turn to the Chinese Six
Companies for help. He returns with an agent, Slim Chunk Pin, who upbraids Ah Coy for failing to collect his money from the Blaines: “If we had all such chickens as you, the importation of coolies would be a bad speculation. You have not half paid your passage money yet. We didn’t import you to lose money” (102).

Notwithstanding Grimm’s intention to depict Chinese avarice, this episode brings to mind success stories of contemporary Chinese immigrants facilitated by the Chinese Six Companies, which established regulations and managed affairs for the Chinese community. The Six Companies paid for the immigrants’ ship fares from China to the U.S., and assisted them in finding initial employment and accommodation. These immigrants worked to pay back their passage money (Vivian 864). In Grimm’s play, the agent Slim Chunk Pin praises another Chinese servant Sam Gin, since the latter “fulfills his contracts with the Company like a man, and saves money besides” (102). Slim Chunk Pin’s phrase “like a man,” however, accentuates the manhood Chinese immigrants were able to obtain despite their low wages. Although manhood means different things at different times to different people, and depends on one’s class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and region of the country (Kimmel 5), most Chinese immigrants considered their masculinity obtainable through diligent labor and thrift. Since Sam Gin saved three hundred dollars, Slim Chunk Pin offers him the chance to open a wash-house, so that he can promote himself from a domestic servant to a self-employed shop-owner. By perseverance and assistance of the Six Companies, some Chinese immigrants found their niche in American society by establishing successful laundries and restaurants (To 7). For instance, the Wash-House Company, which managed the guild of laundymen, laid down the rule that “ten numbers must intervene on every block between every two wash-houses,” and this arrangement had “the salutary effect of spreading laundries all over San Francisco” (Vivian 864). Although Chinese laborers’ working and living conditions were deplorable at the early stage of their immigration, many made successful careers for themselves. They even developed the laundry into a job that required professional skills and knowledge to become a “paid” job, not a domestic job of an unpaid housewife. By establishing commercial laundries and professionally laundring men’s shirts, Chinese laundymen transformed feminized laundry work into a professional skill and a relatively high income (Wang 58-99).

Thus, Grimm’s play suggests that, even though emasculated because of their work, Chinese immigrants, as white labor’s competitive rivals, can be threatening (Moy 44), especially when helped by the Six Companies. A representative from the Companies, Slim Chunk Pin speaks good English, even though pidgin English was often used to represent inferior ethnic speech by Chinese characters.
in the American minstrel tradition. By cooperating with his fellow countrymen, he endeavors to help them obtain wages they worked for. Grimm depicts him as assuming a legitimate power when he threatens Dora for not paying her debts: “Madam, I am an agent of the powerful Six Companies, and I herewith order you to pay this Chinaman for his washing, and this Chinaman for his services; and mark you, if you don’t, your life won’t be safe a minute” (102). Dora subsequently rushes out to pawn her gold watch and chain. Both William and his son Frank blame Chinese labor for their financial tribulations, and, like contemporaneous unemployed white laborers, they fear that the Chinese will drive Caucasians from competition into poverty. Also, William and Frank deploy the Workingmen’s Party’s construction of Chinese ethnicity in their anti-Chinese movement, which argues that, if Chinese immigration is unchecked, either California will be bereft of white labor, or latent hostility will occur and lead to a collision between races arising from an employment struggle. By depicting William and Frank denouncing Chinese virtues of diligence and thrift as jeopardizing American social stability, Grimm’s play reflects the severity of contemporary conflicts between anti-Chinese agitators and pro-Chinese missionaries and capitalists.

The Chinese Exclusion

The Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress in 1882 later resolved partially the conflicts between anti-Chinese and pro-Chinese agitators. Grimm’s play, however, is a reminder of misconceptions about Chinese immigrants that facilitated passage of the Act. Although the Chinese and Euro-American characters in the play actively seek money, the major white characters condemn Chinese laborers’ servitude, because the latter work hard without contributing much of their income to the American market. The final scene shows Sam Gin’s distress at his expenditure. Before handing over his $200 in exchange for the girl from China, he laments: “My good money; my fine money. Me no likee part with money” (119). These depictions echo Thomas J. Vivian’s complaint about the Chinaman: “John is certainly gifted with unusual activity, enterprise, and endurance . . . , but he earns largely to hold and to keep, or else to send to China. . . . He gains his living in the white man’s employ, and trades solely with his copper-colored brethren” (Vivian 871). Indeed, no matter how high or low their income, most Chinese workers managed to save part of their earnings to send home. Most

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contemporary Chinese immigrants had no family in the U.S. to support, were accustomed to a lower standard of living, and therefore were able to underbid and displace white labor from the job market. Although many other causes, including a financial depression in 1873, precipitated an increase in unemployment in the late nineteenth century, many contemporary Americans blamed their job loss on alleged unfair Chinese competition.

Ironically, Chinese immigrants had difficulty in establishing a family partially due to Euro-American fear of interracial marriage, and partially due to discouraged importation of Chinese women into the U.S. Americans have long stereotyped nineteenth-century Chinese immigrant women as prostitutes. As Lucie Cheng estimated, the proportion of prostitutes among the Chinese female population in San Francisco was 85 percent in 1860 and 71 percent in 1870, and these striking statistics resulted in enactment of the Page Act of 1875 (Leong 9). Passed to limit entry of Chinese and Asian prostitutes, criminals and contract laborers, the law barred even those Chinese women who had a right to enter the United States, thus having a harmful effect against the formation of Chinese American families (Ng v). As a result, the Chinese bachelor society was used against the Chinese as evidence of their unassimilability. Yet, with the hostility toward them, the cause-and-effect relationship developed simultaneously (Wu 15), becoming unsolvable dilemmas for the Chinese.

While the Chinese characters in Grimm’s play allegedly engage in illegal sales, some of the white characters’ reactions against them should also be regarded as cowardly behavior. As yellowface cross-dressing, like racist blackface, made fun of the socially subservient class by parodying it (Solomon 145-46), Frank’s disguise as a Chinese woman satirizes the feminization of Chinese male workers. Yet, Frank’s behavior also “feminizes” him. Informed of Sam Gin’s plan to import a young Chinese woman for his washhouse, Frank says he will have Slim Chunk Pin arrested, but then finds this a good chance to swindle the Chinese out of some money. In the final scene, Frank disguises himself as a Chinese woman in a box. Having conspired with his friend Jack Flint, he binds Sam Gin and escapes with his $200. Frank’s behavior, however, should be described as a crime of fraud, in contrast to the laborious strategy the Chinese employ to survive by taking up jobs initially for women. Although a reviewer in the Daily Tombstone wrote: “The play is full of laughable incidents and the author is entitled to a niche in the temple of humor with Mark Twain, Bob Burdette, et al.” (9 March 1886), the play discloses contemporary anxiety about American workers’ illicit reactions to their failure to compete with the Chinese.

Some of the white characters’ unreasonable behavior in Grimm’s play is reminiscent of the irrationality of some anti-Chinese agitators. In particular, the way
Frank deals with the Chinese problems reduces to violence and deception, tricks, and disguise. This situation is as illogical as Frank’s use of the catch phrase “The Chinese must go!” in the play. Frank speaks of this sentence several times at inappropriate moments, in ways that do not make any sense in the context of the play. After Frank dresses up as his sister to seduce and rob Captain Julius Turtlesnap, he exclaims, “Hurrah! The Chinese must go” (106). The reason for Frank’s use of this illogical phrase is probably that he attributes his financial difficulties to the Chinese Question. Later, when Frank attempts to steal money from Turtlesnap, he also makes a toast to the latter out of “The Chinese must go” (110). The phrase seems to suggest Frank’s belief that, by punishing pro-Chinese Americans, he will be able to drive away the Chinese and make profit. The abruptness of this catch phrase points to the irrational attributes of contemporary white labor in blasting the Chinese with every accusation. The course of the late-nineteenth century witnessed Chinese Americans killed, injured, and driven out of their places of employment and denied the opportunity to vote, testify in state court, or immigrate freely. Several contemporary writers pointed out the unreasonable treatment of the Chinese by white labor and the U.S. government. Also, in 1878, the New York Times reported that Senator Oliver P. Morton (1823-1877) believed that much of the prejudice against the Chinese was “unreasonable,” because there was a wide division as to the alleged injury to industries by Chinese cheap labor, and because of the enormously exaggerated social and moral dangers arising from Chinese immigration (“Senator Morton and the Chinese” 4). Although Grimm may have intended his play to amuse the white working class by punishing Chinese or pro-Chinese characters, the irrationality of Frank’s behavior may also remind the audience of the irrationality of some anti-Chinese agitators.

Conclusion

The major white characters in Grimm’s play, William and his son Frank, blame Chinese immigrants for ruining their lives, much as contemporary unemployed white laborers condemned the Chinese for the whites’ financial downturn. They attempt to justify their ill treatment of the Chinese by describing the Chinese characters as deserving of punishment. William endeavors to prove Chinese unassimilability by appealing to Social Darwinism and the Euro-American fear of interracial marriage. Frank tries to justify his fraud inflicted on the Chinese by emphasizing the ruinous effects of Chinese economic competition. These characters deride not only the Chinese, but also the American sympathizers of the Chinese, such as capitalists and Christian ministers. The play intends to appeal not only to
white workingmen, but also to the middle class by contrasting Chinese and Euro-American treatment of women. The play warns about the dangers of the Chinese by presenting them as opium smokers and potential seducers of white women. On the other hand, William’s wife Dora disputes his anti-Chinese contentions. By stressing the contributions of Chinese labor, Dora’s statement resembles those of contemporary missionaries and capitalists. These disputes reflect the severity of contemporary conflicts between anti-Chinese agitators and pro-Chinese advocates. Although the conflicts were later partially resolved by the Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress in 1882, Grimm’s play is a reminder of several misconceptions about the circumstances surrounding Chinese immigrants, which pro-Chinese advocates (including politicians, missionaries, and capitalists) had endeavored to rectify.

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亨利葛林的《中國人必須離開》
有關中國問題的正反辯論

摘要

學者常以為排華運動是十九世紀末期美國針對華人移民的主流運動，而忽略其他對華人勞工的不同觀點。然而，在亨利葛林的《中國人必須離開》，部分人物刻劃與對話觸及當時某些人迥然不同的心聲。本文審視排華法案通
過前夕對華人迥異的描述，討論當時各報章雜誌與法規檔案中對中國問題的
辯論。透過歷史背景研讀該劇，本文論證：雖然葛林此劇將華人詮釋為工作
競爭者、販奴、抽鴉片與誘引白人女性，采取視中下階層觀眾，但全劇卻反
而提醒我們一些有關華人移民的錯誤觀念，這些正是支持華人的美國人士努
力要修正的觀念。

關鍵字：中國問題，移民，族群，勞工，排華法案