

CHINESE PROSTITUTES IN SAN FRANCISCO 1848-1882

by
Christine Chin-yu Chen

War and poverty in China led many Chinese to emigrate to America in the mid-nineteenth century. Discouraged from traveling abroad by cultural mores⁽¹⁾, economic considerations, and anti-Chinese sentiment in the American West, few women were among these early immigrants. The women who did brave the arduous voyage across the Pacific Ocean arrived to face an alien and often hostile environment. Many were brought to America and forced into prostitution, virtual slaves who lived under brutal conditions that few survived. Wives brought over to join their husbands, whether they settled in urban Chinatowns or rural areas, suffered harsh living conditions and discrimination because of their race and sex. Courageous and resilient, these pioneering women blazed a trail for those who followed.

This paper will examine the social history of Chinese prostitution within the context of conditions in mid-nineteenth-century China and the economic institution and on the Chinese prostitute as a particular class of labor, earning direct or indirect profits for a complex web of individuals. Furthermore, it will seek to explicate the double oppression by race and sex and the lethal exploitation of Chinese prostitutes both as part of the working class in America and as sacrificial victims for the maintenance of patriarchy in semifeudal China.



National Chung Hsing University

1. The cultural mores are shackled the Chinese women to the home.

I

Background

Many peasant families in nineteenth-century China lived on the edge of subsistence victimized by population pressure, landlord oppression and foreign imperialism.⁽²⁾ In a number of communities, particularly in Fukien and Kwangtung, where emigration to distant lands was feasible, a large proportion of the male population left home in search of employment.⁽³⁾

In times of natural disaster and war, families often resorted to infanticide, abandonment, mortgaging, or selling of children.⁽⁴⁾ Females were frequently the first victims of extreme poverty. Furthermore, the family raised a girl would not benefit from her labor and she could never carry on the ancestral line in patriarchal and patrilineal Chinese society. Therefore, prostitution was only one remunerative solution for relieving the family of its female members.

The discovery of gold in 1848 along the Sacramento River brought thousands of immigrants from many countries to California.⁽⁵⁾ Mining was an exclusively male activity; few of the men brought families with them because mining involved moving from place to place seeking the most productive site. Among the first female arrivals were prostitutes.⁽⁶⁾ In San Francisco, where miners from nearby sites congregated during the winter and where immigrants gath-

-
2. F. Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate* (Berkeley, California: University of Washington Press, 1966): 117-56; see also K. Hsiao, *Rural China* (Seattle, Washington: University of California Press, 1967): 32.
 3. T. Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940): 74-76.
 4. A. Smith, *Village Life in China* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1899): 258-316; see also P. Ho, *Studies on the Population of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959): 58-62.
 5. J. Borthwick, *The Gold Hunters* (New York: Book League, 1929): 103.
 6. D. Smith, *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1967): 172-77.

ered before they went into the mining areas, prostitution became a lucrative business. It was not uncommon for successful prostitutes to use their earnings to finance the miners or to invest in other pursuits.⁽⁷⁾ The tremendous sexual imbalance (shown in table 1) and the lack of alternative employment made prostitution a major occupation for women.

Table 1
Sex Ratio of Chinese and Total Population In California,
1850-1890

	Chinese*	Total*
1850	39,450+	1,228.6
1860	1,858.1	225.1
1870	1,172.3	165.4
1880	1,832.4	149.3
1890	2,245.4	137.6

SOURCES: Ratio for Chinese from 1850 to 1900 based on California Department of Industrial Relations, Californias of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Ancestry. San Francisco: State Office, 1965.

*Males per 100 females

+These were only two Chinese women in 1850.

The demand for prostitution in San Francisco was partially met by Chinese women from Hong Kong, Canton, and its surrounding areas. Canton, opened up as a treaty port under the guns of Western imperialism, and Hong Kong, ceded to the British after the Opium War, were the first cities where a large prostitutes foreigners arrived, and from them the early Chinese prostitutes came.⁽⁸⁾

Only a few crossed the Pacific on their own in search of better compensation for their labor in prostitution. Usually the family, not the girl, arranged the sale. However reluctantly, girls often accepted their sale, and most of them

7. *Ibid.*

8. U.S. Congress Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration. Report (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1877): 286; see also O. Gibson, *Chinese in America* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock Printers, 1877): 134.

were not in a position to oppose their families' decision.

Chinese prostitution was an integral part of that arrangement. While patriarchy prohibited the emigration of "decent" women, it did not forbid the emigration of prostitutes. The emigration of Chinese prostitutes helped to stabilize and preserve the family because Chinese emigrant males could thereby avoid liaisons which might lead to permanent relationships with foreign women. On the other hand, the earnings of Chinese prostitutes in America helped to support their families in China. One such prostitute sent back as much as \$200 or \$300 after seven months in San Francisco.⁽⁹⁾ Two distinct periods of Chinese prostitution in California corresponded with two types of relations in profit making: first, the initial period of free competition, during which the prostitute was also the owner of her body service; and second, a period of organized trade, during which the prostitute was a semislave and other individuals shared the benefits of her exploitation.

1. Period of Free Competition: 1849-1854

Before 1849, only a few Chinese girls came into America. Afong Moy, reportedly the first Chinese woman to come to America (in 1834), was one of these showpieces. Exhibited as "A Chinese lady in native costume," she showed "New York belles how different ladies look in widely separated regions," according to newspaper advertisements.⁽¹⁰⁾ Pwan Yekoo appeared in Barnum's Chinese Museum as "a genuine self, her curious retinue, and her fairy feet (only two and a half inches long), to an admiring and novelty-loving public."⁽¹¹⁾ Yet, such shows did not add to the American understanding of Chinese women. Instead, they gave rise to the earliest stereotype of Chinese women as exotic curios.

9. Wang Ah-so's letter to her mother in *Orientalism and Their Cultural Adjustment*, ed. from Fisk University Social Science Institute (Nashville, Tenn. : Fisk University Social Science Institute, 1946): 34.

10. *New York Times*, April 21, 1850.

11. Chin-yu Chen, "From Idaho County's Most Romantic Character Polly Bemis to Reflect the Traditional Chinese Women's Characteristics," *Chung-Hsing Journal of History*, no. 2 (March 1992): 231-32.

Until the brief period of free competition (1849-54) was characterized by individual initiative and enterprise. Like their white counterparts, a number of Chinese prostitutes during this period were able to accumulate sufficient capital to leave the profession. Some returned to China as relatively affluent members of the business community. Others remained in America and either continued in prostitution as brothel owners or invested in other businesses.

Marie Seise, the first known Chinese female resident in America, was believed to be a domestic servant who arrived in San Francisco as a member of the Gillespie household in February 1848.⁽¹²⁾ The second arrival was said to be a 20-year-old prostitute, named Ah Toy, who landed in late 1848 or early 1849.

⁽¹³⁾ Most Chinese prostitutes at that time lived and worked as slaves to their owners and usually did not survive more than six years. Yet Ah Toy differed from her sisters of the later period of Chinese prostitution in one important respect: She was her own free agent and succeeded in accumulating enough money to own a brothel within two years.⁽¹⁴⁾

Ah Toy's social background is not known.⁽¹⁵⁾ Judging from the evidence that she could speak some English, had enough money to make the trip from Hong Kong to San Francisco, possessed jewelry and fancy clothes on arrival, and had the know-how to set up a business immediately afterward, it seems that she was already a fairly successful prostitute or even a madam in Hong Kong who catered to the foreign trade. Like her male countrymen, she took advantage of the opportunities provided by news of the discovery of gold.

During the first two years after gold was discovered in California, it was not unusual for a miner to wash or dig up 100 ounces of gold a day. Ah Toy was able to charge one ounce of gold or 16 dollars per visit and still attract a

12. H. H. Bancroft, *History of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1890): 336.

13. Curt Gentry, *Madames of San Francisco* (New York: Doubleday, 1964): 52.

14. *Alta California*, December 14, 1869.

15. However, there is a great deal written about her. For example, Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1933): 24-30; see also Charles Dobie, *San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: Doubleday, 1964); and C.Y. Lee, *Days of the Tong Wars* (New York: Ballantine, 1974). Many of the details in these works are contradictory.

line of waiting customers a block long. This free was not exorbitant; successful European prostitutes were known to have charged much more.⁽¹⁶⁾ Almost all of Ah Toy's customers were non-Chinese. Ah Toy's income must have offset her expenses by a large margin because by 1850, just about two years after her arrival, she had made enough money to make trips to Hong Kong and Canton and to import more Chinese women for her business. In 1852 she moved from her first place of business off Clay Street and opened up a larger house on Pike Street (now Waverly Place).⁽¹⁷⁾

Ah Toy was able to pay her passage to America; other free-agent prostitutes during this initial period emigrated under different circumstances. A popular social novel in the late Ching dynasty contained a supposedly true story of a Cantonese prostitute who was brought to San Francisco by her American paramour when she was eighteen years old. After seven years, she returned to Hong Kong with approximately 16,000 dollars, married a Chinese laborer and opened a store that sold only foreign goods. While the details of this story may be suspect, it seems plausible that some women came to the Gold Hills as prostitutes and made enough money to open up businesses in America or China. The scarcity of women and the affluent condition of the men made it possible for prostitutes of different nationalities to amass a small fortune in a short period of time.

This period of free competition among owner-prostitutes did not last long. Few Chinese prostitutes could afford the transportation expenses or had the business know-how to take advantage of the situation. Still, the affluence of the male residents and the extreme imbalance of the sexes suggested that a considerable sum of money could be made in the business. That prospect attracted Chinese entrepreneurs, who organized various aspects of the business; specialization occurred and a monopoly developed by 1854 under the control of

16. For example, one European prostitute in the West was reported to have charged 1,000 dollars per night in the 1850s. See Dee Brown, *Women of the Wild West* (London: Pan, 1975): 70; see also Gentry's *Madames of San Francisco*, 52.

17. Curt Gentry, *Madames of San Francisco* (New York: Doubleday, 1964): 50-60.

the Chinese secret societies.

2. Period of Organized Trade: 1854-1925

This period of free competition among owner-prostitutes did not last very long, and there were not many free agents, mostly because of the prohibitive cost of passage. In 1852, of the 11,794 Chinese in California, only 7 were women, 2 of these were independent prostitutes and 2 others were known to have been working for Ah Toy.⁽¹⁸⁾ Despite their small numbers, it was clear that a considerable sum of money could be made in the business. That prospect attracted Chinese entrepreneurs, who organized various aspects of the business.

By 1854 Chinese prostitution in San Francisco had become a highly organized institution under the control of Chinese men, and its network extended across the Pacific to Canton and Hong Kong. The demand for Chinese prostitutes in California was primarily due to the shortage of Chinese women and the prohibitions against sexual relations between white women and Chinese men, both of which made it nearly impossible for Chinese men to marry and raise families. An estimated 85 percent of the Chinese women in San Francisco were prostitutes in 1860, 71 percent in 1870, and 21 percent in 1880.⁽¹⁹⁾ Captives of an organized trade, most of these women were kidnapped, lured, or purchased by procurers in China, brought to America by importers, highbinders, policemen, and immigration officials to protect the business. White Chinatown property owners charged these brothel owners exorbitant rents, completing the network of those who profited from the trade.

As California gained its reputation as a fast-growing area, industries developed and labor was in demand. American businessmen had long been aware of the coolie trade that supplied indentured Chinese laborers to Australia, Peru,

18. *Daily Alta California*, August 17, 1852.

19. Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, Vol. 5, no. 1(1979): 23-24.

20. John Charles Walton, "Coolie," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 6(Chicago, 1957): 387. With the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th Century, a demand arose for another form of cheap labor to take its place on the plantations and in the mines. Thus the indentured or contract labor system, commonly called the "coolie" system, was born. This type of labor was mainly of Chinese or Indian origin.

British West Indies, Cuba, and other countries.⁽²⁰⁾ Yet the majority of Chinese immigrants to California during the nineteenth century came not as coolie labor but by means of the credit-ticket system.⁽²¹⁾ With the cooperation of the Chinese Six Companies, large number of Chinese laborers arrived, and when the first transcontinental railway was being built in the 1860s, more than 11,000 Chinese workers were recruited for the project.⁽²²⁾ Although San Francisco remained the county with the largest concentration of Chinese, by 1880 their numbers in all but eight counties increased. While the total Chinese population in California increased from 34,933 in 1860 to 75,132 in 1880, the number of Chinese women only increased from 2,006 to 3,686.⁽²³⁾ The tremendous increase of the Chinese male population without a corresponding increase in female provided a rare opportunity for the Chinese to accumulate money. While some Chinese businessmen set up small factories, shops, and restaurants, others organized as secret societies (tongs), established gambling joints and opium dens and developed the female trade.

A number of women came to San Francisco under a contractual arrangement similar to that described in the Chinese contract coolie system. The contract involved body service for a specified time, and if the prostitute succeeded

-
21. Thomas Chinn, *A History of the Chinese in California* (San Francisco, California: Chinese Historical Society, 1969): 77-89; see also Alexander Machood, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1948): 180-81. Chinese migrating to the Straits Settlements went there by means of a credit-ticket system. However, in this case, the services of the Chinese laborer was sold to an employer upon arrival at port; he then became indebted to the employer and repaid his debt to him. The migrant had no say as to choice of employers. This transaction transferring the immigrant from the broker to the employer is known as "pig business." It is important to distinguish between the two types of credit-ticket system, one as practised in California and the other as practised in British Malaysia. It is obvious that the latter is open to many of the same abuses as the contract labor system and in practice is virtually indistinguishable from the contract labor trade.
 22. *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration* (44th Cong., 2nd Session, 1876-1877): 111.
 23. Unless otherwise noted, all numbers and demographic characteristics concerning Chinese women in California during the nineteenth century are computed from the United States. *Manuscript Population Census for California for 1860, 1870 and 1880*. The 1890 census was destroyed in a fire.

infulfilling the terms of service, she could get out of the business. Families, rather than women themselves, participated in these transactions. Most Chinese women, who could not read or write, could easily be duped into affixing thumbprint to any document by the agent or party who was the beneficiary of the contract.

In the organization of the trade, importation was a separate activity from that of procurement. Importers received the women from the recruiting agents, arranged for their passage, and handed them over to the brothel owners upon arrival in the United States. Although other secret societies were known to have engaged in the traffic of women,⁽²⁴⁾ the Hip-Yee Tong was clearly the predominant importer during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The Hip Yee Tong, the secret society, reportedly started the prostitution traffic in 1852.⁽²⁵⁾ It was estimated that between 1852 and 1873, the Hip-Yee Tong alone imported 6,000 women, or about 87 percent of the total number of Chinese women who arrived during that period.⁽²⁶⁾ The Hip-Yee Tong charged a \$40 fee to each buyer, \$10 of which were said to have gone to white policemen.⁽²⁷⁾ The Hip-Yee netted an estimated \$200,000 between 1852 and 1873 from the import business.⁽²⁸⁾

The traffic in women became more difficult after the passage of the code which allowed the commissioner of immigration to prevent certain classes of people, including "lewd or debauched" women, from immigrating to California,⁽²⁹⁾ and the enactment of the *Page Act* of 1875.⁽³⁰⁾ The immediate effective-

24. R. Park and H. Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1921): 164; see also R. Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, 1960)

25. Richard Dillon, *The Hatchet Men* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972): 159.

26. *Alta California*, June 2, 1874.

27. *Alta California*, December 14, 1869.

28. *Alta California*, August 27, 1873.

29. *Statutes of California and Amendments, 1873-74* (Sacramento, California: State Office, 1875): 114-24.

30. The first federal restriction on immigration prohibits prostitutes and convicts.

ness of these laws in reducing the number of female arrivals is unclear, but the statutes did subject women to close scrutiny both in Hong Kong and San Francisco and eventually made it more expensive to import women.⁽³¹⁾ These added expenses took the form of bribes which to be paid to various United States consulate and customs officials.

The trade was so lucrative, along with gambling and the sale of opium, that rival tongs fought for its control. Violent tong wars in the 1870s and 1880s, sensationalized in the press, often began with disputes over possession of a Chinese prostitute. In 1875, two tongs went to battle after a Suey Sing Tong member was killed by a Kwong Dock Tong member over possession of Kum Ho, a prostitute. Ten men were killed in the street fight before the police intervened.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 allowed only who were native born, married, or born overseas to domiciled merchants to immigrate to the United States. Accordingly, enterprising Chinese developed elaborate arrangements to continue the traffic in women. Chinese agents in the United States instructed agents in China to coach the emigrant women in responding to questions by the immigration authorities. These coaching papers, circulated in Hong Kong and Canton, included eighty-one questions on subjects ranging from standard personal details to the geography of San Francisco.⁽³²⁾ Therefore, each successive law placing additional restrictions on Chinese immigration provided more opportunities for corruption.

An importation became increasingly complex and expensive, the Hip-Yee Tong gradually lost its monopolistic control over the traffic. Because of the increasing complexity and costs of importing prostitutes, the price for their delivery skyrocketed. After 1870, girls who originally sold for \$50 in Canton now brought \$1,000 in San Francisco.⁽³³⁾ Still, the importation of women continued

31. *Alta California*, August 27, 1873.

32. U.S. Senate, *Chinese Exclusion* (Washington, D.C. : Government Printing Office, 1902): 470-72.

33. *U.S. Industrial Commission*, Washington, D.C. : Government Printing Office, 1902, p. 763.

primarily because it provided large profits.

Eventually, faced with the dwindling supply of females in China, ⁽³⁴⁾ costs and difficulties of procurement and importation, and the loss of prostitutes from brothels in San Francisco to other cities and mining towns, the tongs were forced to look for their supply locally. Whereas they were supplementary to overseas recruitment previously, local Chinese women became the major source of new supply after 1882. ⁽³⁵⁾ In February 1898, it was reported that eight women were kidnapped for prostitution. ⁽³⁶⁾

II

The Life and Economics of Chinese Prostitutes in San Francisco

After the women were landed in San Francisco, they were transported to Chinatown and housed in temporary quarters known as the "barracoons," where they were displayed for bids. Also known as the "auction block" or "Queen's Room," the barracoon was a closely guarded room large enough to house fifty to one hundred women. In the barracoon women, like livestock, were put on display for sale. Except for a few women who were brought by the well-to-do Chinese as concubines, the rest ended in brothels of various grades. While a small number recruited to high-class dens where they would serve an exclusively Chinese clientele, the majority found themselves in brothels where, due to their comparatively low fees of 25 to 50 cents, ⁽³⁷⁾ they tended to attract white and Chinese customers. The latter type of prostitutes were often mistreated by their owners as well as by their customers. A few brothel owners occasionally beat some of them to death, and white men often forced them to engage in aberrant sexual acts, or occasionally shot them. ⁽³⁸⁾

34. The establishment of orphanages and children's welfare organizations was partly responsible for the decline.

35. *Alta California*, January 31, 1875; and *San Francisco Bulletin*, March 28, 1876.

36. *Alta California*, February 21, 1898.

37. K. Xie, *Mai-yin zhi-du yu Tai-wan chang-ji wen-ti* (Taipei: Da-feng, 1972): 352.

38. *The Golden Hills News*, July 29, 1854 (In Chinese); see also A. Genhe, *Pictures of Old Chinatown* (New York: Moffat, Inc., 1909): 52; and *Sacramento Bee*, June 5, 1876; and S. Lyman, *Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 1974): 94.

"Fortunate" women were sold to well-to-do Chinese as concubines or mistresser or to the parlor houses to serve upper-class gentlemen. These prostitutes of the highest grade lived in upstairs apartments in Chinatown and had a more or less long-term regular customer or customers. It was not always accurate to characterize these women as prostitutes. Some might have been concubines and others might have lived in polyandry.⁽³⁹⁾ They were often attractive and expensively adorned. While they might have appeared to be well treated, they were nevertheless chattels who could be sold by their masters at will.

Most of the lower-grade prostitutes lived in the street-level compartments usually not large than 4x6 feet and facing some dim alley. They were forced to hawk their trade to poor laborers, teenage boys, sailors, and drunkards for as little as 25 to 50 cents. There were a few articles of furniture—a bamboo chair or two, a washbowl, and hard bunks or shelves covered with matting. The door usually held the only window in the room, and it was always covered with bars or a heavy screen. Behind the door, the women could stand and call to passersby. The women were served two or three meals a day, the evening one usually consisting of a huge mound of rice a stew of pork, mixed with hard-boiled eggs, liver, and kidneys.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The more fortunate ones were sometimes asked to entertain at parties given by tong leaders and Chinese merchants. They did not have regular wages, but instead were allowed to keep the jewelry,

39. Cases of polyandry among the Chinese in San Francisco and California interior towns were reported by Henry K. Sienkiewicz, "The Chinese in California," *California Historical Society Quarterly* vol. 34(1953): 307.

40. Dobie, *San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: Appleton-Century Publishers, 1936): 243.



silk, and cash gifts given by their customers.⁽⁴¹⁾ This is perhaps why some prostitutes were able to send money to their parents in China.⁽⁴²⁾ Although the amount is not known, it seems clear that emigrant communities in Kwangtung received were from prostitutes in California during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁽⁴³⁾

The exploitative relations between the prostitute-worker and the procurer and brothel owner are clear. The managers of the brothels, called "mothers" by the prostitutes, were not always the owners. Tong members who actually owned prostitutes often asked their wives or mistresses or an older prostitute to manage them. Normally half of the earnings of the prostitutes would go to the mothers and half to the owners.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Chinese women entered American brothels under a system of contract mentioned. Although this was on the surface the least exploitative form of Chinese prostitution, it was in fact devised to mask those features which permitted the procurers, importers, and brothel owners to derive considerable profits without any real advantage to the prostitute or indentured worker. The contracts were drawn up in appealing terms: they offered the contract fee passage to America, and advance of over \$400, and a limited period of labor of about

-
41. The lowest grade of prostitutes received twenty-five to fifty cents per customer. According to the literature on prostitution in general, an average full-time prostitute-worker receives four to ten customers per day, and the average career life of such a prostitute is estimated at four to five years. This means that, at an average of thirty-eight cents per customer and seven customers per day, a lower grade prostitute would earn about \$850 per year and \$3,400 after four years. The contracts examined indicate that a prostitute had to work a minimum of 320 days per year. An absence of more than fifteen days would subject her to a penalty of having to work one additional month, and menstruation disorder was limited to one month's rest per year. See W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution* (New York: Eugenics, 1939): 132; and see K. Xie, *Mai-yin zhi-du yu Tai-wan chang-ji wen-ti* (Taipei: Dan feng, 1972): 352.
 42. Wang Ah-so's letter to her mother in *Oriental and Their Cultural Adjustment*, ed. Fisk University, Social Science Institute (Nashville, Tenn.: Fisk University Social Science Institute, 1946): 34.
 43. *Alta California*, April 14, 1870.
 44. J. Kemble, "Andrew Wilson's Jottings on Civil War California," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 32(1953): 209-24; 303-12.

four and a half years. The contract system seemed all the more attractive considering that females were often sold for about \$400 at the time.⁽⁴⁵⁾ However, very few women could read the terms to sign with their thumbprints.

In reality, the contract system offered very little advantage over the outright sale or slave system and was more brutal because it raised false hopes. First, the length of a prostitute's career was about four or five years. Second, the terms of the contract specified that the person must work a minimum of 320 days, failing which the contract period could be extended to one additional year. Third, the contract prostitute would have less incentive to run away because of her limited period of labor. Fourth, her family was discouraged from redeeming her because the repurchase price included an exorbitant interest.⁽⁴⁶⁾ And finally, even after a woman had served out her contract, there were cases in which she continued in servitude and was not released.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The following is a translation of one such contract:⁽⁴⁸⁾

The contractee Xie Jin is indebted to her master or mistress for passage from China to San Francisco and will voluntarily work as a prostitute at Tan Fu's place for four and one-half years for an advance of 1,205 (U.S.\$524) to pay debt.⁽⁴⁹⁾

There shall be no interest on the money, and Xin Jin shall be free to do as she pleases. Until then, she shall first secure the master/mistress' permission if a customer asks to take her out. If she has the four loathsome diseases, she shall be returned within 100 days; beyond that time the procurer has no responsibility. Menstruation disorder is limited to one month's rest only. If Xin Jin becomes sick at any time for more than fifteen days, she shall work one month extra; if

-
45. *Alta California*, April 14, 1870.
 46. G. Leong, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936): 231; see also U.S. Industrial Commission, *Report*, 21 vols (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901): 783.
 47. *Alta California*, April 14, 1870; see also U.S. Senate, *Chinese Exclusion* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902): 99.
 48. C. Lee, *Days of the Tong Wars* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974) : 238; see also Alexander Macheod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1948): 180-81.
 49. Although not specified in the contract, I suspect that the currency used was Mexican-silver dollars. One Mexican dollar was equivalent to approximately U.S.\$0.48 in the mid-nineteenth century.

she becomes pregnant, she shall work one year extra. Should Xin Jin run away before her term is out, she shall pay whatever expense is incurred in finding and returning her to the brothel. This is a contract to be retained by the master/mistress as evidence of the agreement. Receipt of 1,205 yuan (U.S.\$524) by Ah Yo. Thumb print of Xin Jin the contractee. Eighth month eleventh day of the 12th year of Guang-zu(1886)

Thus far, a total of four such contracts have been discovered the earliest dated 1873 and the latest 1899.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Owners of brothels often also owned opium dens and gambling joints. Some prostitutes were addicted to opium or gambled excessively. The owners often loaned them money to feed their habits so that they would not only be dependent on the owners for these services, but they would also become more deeply indebted to them. From the point of view of many prostitutes, opium smoking was probably the only way they could find relief, and gambling they only avenue to an alternative life. Women who were desperate committed suicide by swallowing raw opium or drowning themselves in the bay.

The exploitation of Chinese prostitutes was not limited to sex alone but also included their labor as semiskilled workers. Many sources indicate that in the daytime, when business was slack, women in the brothels sewed buttonholes and pantaloons and worked on shirts, slippers, men's clothing, and women's underwear.⁽⁵¹⁾ The work was farmed out by sweatshops which subcontracted with the manufacturers. Since these female operatives probably did not receive payment for this extra work, the brothel owners and sweatshop owners reaped a handsome profit.⁽⁵²⁾ (Shown in table 2)

50. The other three contracts can be found in *California Senate*, 1877, p.128 and p.135 and U.S. *Industrial Commission*, p.771.

51. *California Senate, Chinese Exclusion* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902): 146, 154; also cited from U.S. Congress Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, *Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1877):211, 1169; and see C. Dobic, *San Francisco's Chinatown*, 243.

52. U.S. Congress Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, *Report*, 1877, 1170.

Table 2
Occupations of Immigrant Chinese Women
In San Francisco
1860 - 1880

1860	1870	1880
Prostitute	Prostitute	Keeping house
Wife or Possible Wife	Keeping house	Prostitute
Laundress	Servant	Seamstress
Miner	Laundress	Servant
Servant	Seamstress	Laundress
Laborer	Miner	Cook
Seamstress	Housekeeper	Needlework
Housekeeper	Fisherman	Entertainer (Actor, theatrical performer)
Cook	Shoe-binder	Laborer
Grandener	Cook	Miner
Ladging house operator	Laborer	Lodging house operator

SOURCES: Compiled from the *Manuscript Population census of California, 1860, 1870, and 1880*

The best thing that could happen to these women was to be redeemed and married. Occasionally a white male fell in love with a brothel inmate and married her after paid the owners.⁽⁵³⁾ However, most of the men who married prostitutes were Chinese laborers. Chinese working people did not attach to prostitution as whites did. The major reason might have been that prostitutes in China were generally not seen as "fallen women" but as daughters who obeyed the arable profession, especially among the gentry, women who were able to get out of it were usually accepted in working-class society. Furthermore, the fact that these was such a shortage of Chinese women in San Francisco during this period would have tended to relax the sex mores that men might have held.

Quite a few women in San Francisco were able to leave the brothels, although not without struggle, and often at tremendous risk. Throughout the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, reports of such instances abound.⁽⁵⁴⁾ For example, one prostitute tried to run away from her owner and

53. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 1, 1877.

54. "Bancroft Scraps," an unpublished collection of newspaper chippings, vols. 6-9 (Berkeley, California: Bancroft Library, University of California): 1862-81.

hide in the Nevada hill. By the time she was found, both her feet had frozen and had to be amputated, and in the end she courted death by refusing to take medicine or food.⁽⁵⁵⁾ In another instance, a popular dance hall girl nicknamed "The Yellow Doll" was found "chopped into pieces" in 1876.⁽⁵⁶⁾ In San Francisco, six Chinese prostitutes committed suicide to escape enslavement.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Most prostitutes did not have the individual or collective means to resist their fate. Refusing to work only brought on beatings and other physical tortures. Cases were reported of prostitutes attempting escape with the help of lovers, but only a few succeeded. Because of the high value placed on prostitutes, owners went to great expense to recover their property, hiring high-binders to retrieve them and paying legal fees to file writs of habeas corpus or criminal charges against the women for grand larceny. Once the women were arrested, the owners would post the required bail, drop the charges, and repossess the women.

Typically, a woman ran away to a mission, the police station, or her lover, with the hired tong soldiers in pursuit. The lengths to which the tongs would go in recapturing a run away prostitute indicated her value to her own. The tongs often kidnapped the escaped woman or even used the American courts to get her back. The tongs also offered rewards for the capture of the prostitute's male accomplice; sometimes such rewards ran into the thousands, depending on the value of the woman.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In order to prevent the woman from escaping, tongs were known to give the local police a retainer fee. Until 1877, a Special Police Force was engaged in a quasi-official capacity as peace officers in Chinatown. They received no set wages but derived their income from the Chinese residents. Normally, the "Chinatown Specials" collected fifty cents a week from each prostitute,⁽⁵⁹⁾ and they admitted that whenever there was a crackdown on prosti-

55. H. H. Bancroft, *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming* (San Francisco, CA, 1890): 292.

56. *Alta California*, February 20, 1876.

57. *Alta California*, May 28, 1876.

58. *California Chinese Chatter* (San Francisco: Dressler, Inc., 1927): 56.

59. *California Senate*, 166.

tution, their income was reduced.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Tongs also made payments to City Hall to secure its agreement not to interfere.⁽⁶¹⁾

However, China Annie and Polly Bemis were exceptional cases. China Annie, a prostitute, belonging to a number of the Yeong Wo Company in Idaho City, she escaped to Boise to marry her lover, Ah Guan. Her owner charged her with grand larceny for stealing herself, and after a four-week search, she was apprehended and taken to court. The judge, sympathetic to her case, dismissed the case and allowed her to return to her husband.⁽⁶²⁾ Another prostitute who won her freedom, Polly Bemis, survived the harsh frontier life to become a legendary figure in her community. Born Lalu Nathoy in northern China in 1853, she grew up in poverty. At an early age she was sold for two bags of seed to banelits. Shipped to America as a slave, Lalu Nathoy was auctioned off to a Chinese saloon keeper in an Idaho mining camp. She later married Charlie Bemis, who won her in a poker game, and the two homesteaded on twenty acres of land along the Salmon River. Twice she saved Charlie's life, and many times she nursed neighbors back to health. She was so well respected that when she died in 1933, members of the Grangeville City Council served as her pallbearers and the creek running through her property was named Polly Creek in her honor.⁽⁶³⁾

When a woman was no longer profitable as a prostitute, she might work as a cook or a laundry woman for the brothel.⁽⁶⁴⁾ If she was hopelessly diseased, she would be left alone to die in the "hospital", a dismal and dark room.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Although the remains of the Chinese male laborers were shipped back to their place of nativity for burial, few cared about the remains of these working women. The *Alta* reported in 1870 that the bodies of Chinese women were

60. *Ibid.*, 158.

61. *Ibid.*, 113.

62. Bancroft, *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming*, 294.

63. Chin-Yu Chen, "From Idaho County's Most Romantic Character Polly Bemis to Reflect the Traditional Chinese Women's Characteristics," *Chung-Hsing Journal of History*, Vol. 2(1992): 231-232.

64. *U. S. Industrial Commission*, 778.

65. *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 5, 1869.

discarded and left on the streets of Chinatown. (66)

Chinese prostitutes were mostly young women between the ages sixteen and twenty-five. There were proportionately more younger prostitutes in 1870 than in either 1860 or 1880.(Shown in table 3)

Table 3
Age and Nativity of Chinese Prostitutes
In San Francisco
1860-1880

	1860			1870			1880		
	Foreign Born	U. S. Born	%	Foreign Born	U. S. Born	%	Foreign Born	U. S. Born	Total %
15-	8	0	1.4	16	1	1.1	18	4	22 5.0
16-20	122	0	21.9	637	0	44.7	125	2	127 29.2
21-25	105	0	18.9	416	0	29.2	129	1	130 29.9
26-30	165	0	29.7	215	0	15.1	86	0	86 19.8
31-35	64	0	11.5	70	0	4.9	32	0	32 7.4
36-40	64	0	11.5	34	0	2.4	20	0	20 4.6
41-45	19	0	3.4	14	0	1.0	8	0	8 1.8
46-50	6	0	1.1	18	0	1.2	8	0	8 1.8
51+	3	0	0.6	5	0	0.3	2	0	2 0.5
Total	556	0	100	1,425	1	100	428	7	435 100

SOURCES: Computed from unpublished census manuscripts for San Francisco for 1860, 1870, and 1880 (available from the National Archives)

Since a great majority of the Chinese prostitutes were of child-bearing age, a natural question arose as to the mobility of their children.

The children of prostitutes, particularly female ones, were likewise exploited by the brothel owners. Table 4 shows (shown as below table) the number of 1860 census that proportionately more children lived in brothels than outside brothels; in 1870, an even number of children lived in brothels and outside ; and finally, in 1880, the situation was reversed with many more children living outside than inside. The overrepresentation of girls over boys in the brothels for all three decades was probably due to the owner's practice of retaining girls to do household chores and his or her intention to recruit them into prostitution. It is probably that native-born children living in brothels were almost invariably the children of prostitutes.

Table 4

Chinese Children in San Francisco by Sex, Nativity,
and Place of Residence 1860-80

	Live in Brothels			Live Outsides		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1860:						
U. S. Born	5	23	28	0	0	0
Foreign Born	3	12	15	7	2	9
Total	8	35	43	7	2	9
1870:						
U. S. Born	98	74	172	71	57	128
Foreign Born	34	48	82	79	34	113
Total	132	122	254	150	91	241
1880:						
U. S. Born	24	26	50	203	198	401
Foreign Born	11	27	38	89	114	203
Total	35	53	88	292	312	604

SOURCES: Computed from unpublished census manuscripts for San Francisco for 1860, 1870 and 1880 (Available from the National Archives)

III

Increasing Number of Chinese Prostitutes in
San Francisco

The exact number of Chinese prostitutes in California and San Francisco during the nineteenth century is not known. However, the recently released manuscript censuses for 1860, 1870 and 1880 contain social and demographic information on individuals which makes it possible to estimate the numbers and to construct a statistical profile of Chinese prostitutes for these decades.

A tabulation of the census schedules of 1860 revealed that there were 2,693 Chinese residents in San Francisco, 654 or 24 percent of whom were women.

66. *Alta California*, October 9, 1870.

Eight of these were laundrymen or washerwomen; five, gardeners; five, fisherwomen; three, laborers; four, storekeepers; two clerks; and one, a tailor; the remainder had no occupation listed. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

A tabulation from the 1870 census schedules yielded 2,018 Chinese women in San Francisco, of whom 1,426 or 71 percent were recorded as prostitutes. ⁽⁶⁸⁾ From these figures, we can see that while the percentage of women in San Francisco engaged in prostitution declined relative to the total Chinese female population, the actual number of prostitutes more than doubled.

Since "prostitution" was used as an occupational category in the 1870 and 1880 census manuscripts, Chinese prostitution became one of the salient issues in the anti-Chinese movement in California.

A tabulation of the manuscript census for San Francisco in 1880 yielded 2,058 Chinese women, of whom 435 or 21 percent were recorded as prostitutes. ⁽⁶⁹⁾

Although this figure was probably an underestimate, other sources suggest that it was not too far afield. The San Francisco police testified in the congressional hearings of 1876 that, as a result of several raids on Chinese prostitution a few months before the hearings, many prostitutes left the city for inland towns. ⁽⁷⁰⁾ Later, in 1885, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors reported that there were 567 professional prostitutes in Chinatown. ⁽⁷¹⁾

From the statistics presented that the dramatic increase in the number of prostitutes between 1860 and 1870, and the dramatic decrease in both the number and percentage of prostitutes between 1870 and 1880. These figures suggest that the heyday of Chinese prostitution in San Francisco was around 1870, and its precipitous decline occurred just before 1880.

Chinese prostitutes were concentrated in a few blocks in Ward Four where

67. *U. S. Congress*, 192.

68. *U. S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Census of the United States*, Bicentennial Ed., United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1975.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *U. S. Congress*, 192.

71. San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *Special Committee Report on Chinatown* (San Francisco, 1885): 9; see also California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 109.

Chinatown was located. Outside of Chinatown, in 1860, some brothels were found in three other wards. However in 1870, Chinese brothels were found in only one other ward. From data shows that the distribution and size of brothels of the years around 1870 were the heyday of organized prostitution. There were more prostitutes, more brothels, and a heavier concentration of brothels in a very small area.

IV

Conclusion

From the statistics presented that the dramatic decline in the number of prostitutes after mid-1870s. There are several factors account for the decline of organized prostitution in San Francisco. First, in South China, the families made less willing to sell or mortgage their daughters and increasing the difficulty of procuring prostitutes. Second, the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* greatly reduced the number of Chinese women immigrants and made their importation harder.⁽⁷²⁾ The skyrocketing value of prostitutes in America and the increase in kidnapping in California after the 1880s also reflect the decline in Chinese women entering the United States for the purpose of prostitution.

Third, after the 1880s, the local conditions in San Francisco and California similarly led to the decline and eventual demise of this organized phase of prostitution. These included the more balanced sex ratio of the California population; the enforcement of codes directed against Chinese prostitution; the availability of other sources of supply; the arrival of white Victorian women and the establishment of white families in California; the increased alternatives for women's labor;⁽⁷³⁾ and the crusade of the white missionaries for the abolition

72. Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1909): 502. From an average of 304.6 between 1854 and 1882 to an average of 107.6 between 1883 and 1904.

of Chinese prostitution.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Fourth, a number of established institutions responded to the plight of Chinese prostitutes. For many years the Chinese Six Companies, the governing body in Chinatown, sought to have prostitutes and their procurers deported and worked with the authorities to eradicate the problem. American newspapers frequently ran stories about the evils of prostitution, but almost always in a sensational vein, using headlines such as "*Story of Girls Show Workings of a Chinese Ring*,"⁽⁷⁵⁾ "*Confessions of a Chinese Slave Dealer*,"⁽⁷⁶⁾ "*Her Back Was Burnt With Irons*,"⁽⁷⁷⁾ and "*Chinese Girl Flees to the Mission From Inhuman Owner*."⁽⁷⁸⁾

Fifth, although prostitutes consisted of no more than 6 percent of the Chinese population in California, they were singled out for attack by the politicians. Chinese prostitution not only threatened the health of white men, but Chinese prostitutes serving as slave labor took away sewing and other jobs from white women.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Between 1866 and 1905 all aimed at restricting the importation of Chinese women for prostitution and the suppression of Chinese brothels. There were specific laws against the Chinese. If caught, these prostitutes were sentenced to a fine of \$25 to \$50 and a jail term of at least five days.⁽⁸⁰⁾

Finally, methodist and Presbyterian missionaries also made it their crusade to rescue Chinese prostitutes. In 1874 the Women's Occidental Board established the Presbyterian Mission Home as a refuge for Chinese girls and young women in San Francisco's Chinatown. The home remained in operation until 1933 when the last major anti-prostitution trial took place. Its directors, Margaret Culbertson and Donaldina Cameron, successfully conducted numerous rescue raids with the help of the police, using the press coverage of the raid to

73. J. Hooks, *Women's Occupations through Seven Decades* (Washington, D.C.: Women's Bureau, 1947): 67.

74. *Alta California*, May 28, 1876.

75. *Alta California*, December 12, 1879.

76. *New York Times*, November 21, 1880.

77. *New York Times*, November 23, 1880.

78. *Alta California*, February 21, 1898.

79. *California Senate*; U. S. Congress; U. S. Senate.

80. *California Senate*, 163.

turn public opinion against Chinese prostitution. Between 1874 and 1908 approximately one thousand mistreated *mui jai* ⁽⁸¹⁾ and prostitutes were rescued, housed, and educated at the home. Some, unaccustomed to the restrictions and austerity of the home, ran away and returned to their former status. Others chose to return to China or stayed and later married Chinese Christians.

In sum, this paper has argued that the social history of Chinese prostitution within the context of conditions in mid-nineteenth-century China and the economic institution; the individual owner-prostitute; on the Chinese prostitute as a particular class of labor; and earning direct or indirect profits for a complex web of individuals. The development of Chinese prostitution as a large enterprise in nineteenth-century San Francisco was related--to both material and ideological conditions in the two countries; to the need for cheap labor in San Francisco and the economic underdevelopment of China; and to white racism and Chinese patriarchy.

81. *Mui Jai* were girls who had been sold into domestic service by poor parents. Their owners were expected to provide them with food and lodging and to find them husbands when they came of age. However, in some cases, they were instead sold to brothels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I . Newspaper, Periodical and Document

- Alta California*. December 14, 1869.
- Alta California*. April 14, 1870.
- Alta California*. October 9, 1870.
- Alta California*. August 27, 1873.
- Alta California*. June 2, 1874.
- Alta California*. January 31, 1875.
- Alta California*. February 20, 1876.
- Alta California*. May 28, 1876.
- Alta California*. December 12, 1877.
- Alta California*. February 21, 1898.
- California Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Biennial Reports*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887- 1888.
- California Chinese Chatter*. San Francisco, California: Dressler, Inc.. 1927.
- California Department of Industrial Relations. *California of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Ancestry*. San Francisco, California: State Office, 1965.
- Chen, Chin-Yu. "From Idaho County's Most Romantic Character Polly Bemis to Reflect the Traditional Chinese Women's Characteristic," *Chung-Hsing Journal of History* 2(1993): 231-244.
- Daily Alta California*. August 17, 1852.
- Golden Hills News*. July 29, 1854 (In Chinese).
- Hirata, Lucie Cheng. "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, Vol. 5, no. 1(1979): 23-24.
- Hooks, J. *Women's Occupations Through Seven Decades*. Washington, D.C.: Women's Bureau, 1947.
- Kemble, J. "Andrew Wilson's Jottings on Civil War California," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 32(1953): 209-312.
- New York Times*. April 21, 1850.
- New York Times*. November 21, 1880.
- New York Times*. November 23, 1880.
- Population Censuses of California*. Washington, D. C. : Government Printing Office,

- 1900.
- Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration.* 44th Cong., 2nd Session, 1876-1877.
- Sacramento Bee.* June 5, 1876.
- San Francisco Board of Supervisors. *Special Committee Report on Chinatown.* San Francisco, 1885.
- San Francisco Chronicle.* December 5, 1869.
- San Francisco Chronicle.* April 1, 1877.
- San Francisco Bulletin.* March 28, 1876.
- Statutes of California and Amendments, 1873-74.* Sacramento, State Office, 1875.
- Sienkiewicz, K. "The Chinese in California," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 34 (1953): 300-310.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Census of the United States, Bicentennial Ed., U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1975.*
- U.S. Congress Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, *Report.* Washington, D.C. : Government Printing Office, 1877.
- U.S. Industrial Commission, *Report.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901.
- U.S. Industrial Commission, *Report.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902.
- U.S. Senate. *Chinese Exclusion.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902.
- Walton, John Charles. "Coolie." *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 6(Chicago 1957): 380-97.

II . General Books

- Asbury, Herbert. *The Barbary Coast.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933.
- Bancroft Scraps* (unpublished collection of newspaper chippings). Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California: University of California. vol.6-9(1962-81).
- Bancroft, H.H. *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming.* San Francisco, 1890.
- Brothwick, J. *The Gold Hunters.* New York: Book League, 1929.
- Brown, Dee. *Women of the Wild West.* London: Pan, 1975.
- Campbell, Persia C. *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries Within the British Empire.* London, 1923.

- Chen, T. *Emigrant Communities in South China*. New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940.
- Chinn, Thomas. *A History of the Chinese in California*. San Francisco, California: Chinese Historical Society, 1969.
- Coolidge, Mary Roberts. *Chinese Immigration*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1909.
- Dillon, Richard. *The Hatchet Men*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1972.
- Dobie, Charles. *San Francisco's Chinatown*. New York: Appleton-Century Publishers, 1936.
- Fisk University. *Oriental and Their Cultural Adjustment*. Nashville, Tenn.: Fisk University Social Science Institute, 1946.
- Genthe, A. *Pictures of Old Chinatown*. New York: Moffat, Inc., 1909.
- Gentry, Curt. *Madames of San Francisco*. New York: Doubleday, 1964.
- Gibson, O. *Chinese in America*. Cincinnati: Hitchcock Printers, 1877.
- Ho, P. *Studies on the Population of China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Hsiao, K. *Rural China*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1967.
- Lee, C.Y. *Days of the Tongs Wars*. New York: Ballantine, 1974.
- Lee, R. *The Chinese in the United States of America*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, 1960.
- Leong, G. *Chinatown Inside Out*. New York: Barrows Mussey, 1936.
- Lyman, S. *Chinese Americans*. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Macheod, Alexander. *Pigtails and Gold Dust*. Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1948.
- Park, R. and Miller, H. *Old World Traits Transplanted*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921.
- Sanger, W. *The History of Prostitution*. New York: Eugenics, 1939.
- Smith, A. *Village Life in China*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1899.
- Smith, D. *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1967.
- Wakeman, F. *Strangers at the Gate*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1966.
- Xie, K. *Mai-yin zhi-du yu Tai-wan chang-ji wen-ti*. Taipei, Taiwan: Da-feng, 1972.

美國舊金山華人娼妓史 1848-1882

中文摘要

陳靜瑜

中文關鍵詞：娼妓；賣淫；妓院；益英堂；契約系統

英文關鍵詞：prostitute; prostitution; brothel; Hip- Yee Tong; contract system

美國加州舊金山于1848年發現金礦後，成千上萬的華工，在清朝政府沒有立法保障的情況下，遠涉重洋，隻身來到異鄉異地，幫忙美國挖掘金礦，也一圓他們作黃金的美夢。就在此時，中國婦女出洋的人數並不多，多半移入美國者，以從事娼妓一職占大部份。而且「娼妓」被視為是一種職業，在1860-1870年間，排在工作欄中高居第一、二位。過去研究婦女史或華僑史的學者，很少有人提及華人娼妓史。或許有，仍不深入。筆者有鑑於此，認為有撰寫此篇論文的必要。

這篇論文是一篇華人娼妓在舊金山活動的社會史。以四個主要的論點作分析探討：

一、探討華人婦女移入舊金山的原因：

十九世紀中葉以降，在中國老家除了連年乾旱天災外，內憂（太平天國之亂等）及外患（中英鴉片戰爭等）接踵而至，而有限的食糧不能養活這麼多的中國人，賣女兒出洋作娼妓成爲唯一解決的途徑。一來可疏解人口的壓力，二來這些婦女賺了錢還可寄回中國老家來作接濟；也由於美國西岸的舊金山較易登岸，再加上此地也是金礦發掘之地，挖礦工人多，所以華人婦女就在這種情況下出洋賣身了。

二、析探華人婦女在美從事娼妓行業的型式：

可分成二種經營的方式：其一爲自由競爭的階段（1849-1854）。華人娼妓往往賺集可觀的資金後，回中國開設禮品店，專賣外國貨品；要不就留在美國繼續從事經營妓院的工作；要不則加入其他商業活動的行列中。其二爲集體交易的階段（1854-1925）。這個階段人數較多，工作時間較長，但

所得卻相當低。華人婦女經由拐騙、誘惑、欺騙或販賣等方式輾轉來到美國，經由「堂」（以「益英堂」為主）的操縱，以比原價高過20倍的價錢賣出。

三探討華人娼妓在舊金山的經濟及生活狀況：

華人娼妓被區分為「高層次」及「低層次」二種。「高層次」者指長得有姿色，以接待白種人為主，接待價錢以每人16元上下不等，可保有白種客人所贈的手飾、戒指等；但「低層次」者只能接待華工及其他國家的勞工，接待價錢每人0.25元不等。契約期限四至五年，不得懷孕、逃跑或生病，否則，按期補回等等。

四探討華人娼妓人口數在1882年以後遽降的原因：

除了南中國販賣女兒的人數逐漸漸少；美國在1882年通過排華法案，婦女人數自然減少外；加州法律在此時立法反對華人娼妓的存在；一些主張廢除論的外籍婦女倡言娼妓的不准存在；美國也透過大眾媒體、報章雜誌等大肆揭露對華人娼妓存在的反感，以及危害到白人男性身體健康等宣傳，引起大眾的注意。因而，長老教會的信徒們伸出援手，為華人娼妓作拯救的工作。