

Heathen, Christian and Confucian: Interrogating Chinese Identities in Nineteenth Century America

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In the late summer of 1887, an essay entitled “Why Am I a Heathen” written by Wong Chin Foo (Wang Qingfu) appeared in the *North American Review*. A month later Yan Phou Lee (Li Enfu) responded with another essay “Why I am not a Heathen—a rejoinder to Wong Chin Foo”.¹⁾ That this exchange took place in the pages of *The North American Review* points to the cultural displacement of nineteenth century Chinese American intellectuals. This exchange of opposing views on Christianity and Confucianism, on America and China, illuminates the elasticity and limits of displaced Chinese identity in late nineteenth century America.

In essays, lectures and public letters, Wong Chin Foo styled himself “the heathen” and, after Bret Harte’s Ah Sin, Wong was perhaps the most public of American Chinese in the late nineteenth century.²⁾ Wong’s lectures defending Chinese civilization, explaining Buddhism and criticizing American political corruption and Christian hypocrisies made him a controversial yet popular speaker on the lecture circuit. Newspapers around the country variously described Wong as social crusader, a Buddhist missionary, and an idolator.³⁾ In New York, Wong was a featured guest at Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophy salon where he shared the Russian mystic’s demi-monde notoriety. Wong’s brash style combined with a sharp sense of humor, brought him hostility in many quarters and notoriety across the country but it seems to have paid off enormously in New York city where he drew an audience of six hundred to his lecture at Steinway Hall.⁴⁾

1. Displacements and Diaspora

The debate between Wong Ching-foo and Yan Phou Lee over the values of Confucianism and Christianity, over the relationship between Chinese and American identities, can best be understood in the context of the multiple displacements that marked the Chinese experience of nineteenth century America. Angelika Bammer defines displacement as “the separation of people from their native culture, through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture.”⁵⁾ The advantage of deploying displacement as an conceptual framework lies in the fact that while

¹⁾ Wong Chin Foo, *North American Review* 145 (August 1887): 169–179; Yan Phou Lee, *North American Review* 145 (September 1887): 306–313.

²⁾ Bret Harte, “Plain Language from Truthful James,” *The Overland Monthly Magazine* 5, no. 3 (September 1870): 287–288. Well-known and republished as “The Heathen Chinese.”

³⁾ *New York Times*, October 4, 1873, 4. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 2, 1877, 4.

⁴⁾ *New York Times*, April 30, 1877, 8.

displacement shares with diaspora the notions of physical dislocation, banishment, and exile, it emphatically draws attention to the cultural dimension; that is how one's ancestral culture or the culture of the birthplace has been dislocated, transformed, rejected or replaced by a new one.⁶⁾

Recent studies by Yong Chen and Adam Mckeown have placed the Chinese experience in America in the context of the global Chinese diaspora emphasizing the multi-class nature of Chinese immigration to the United States. They have focused on the transplanted business networks, social organizations and rituals and the strong ties that Chinese immigrants maintained with their natal places.⁷⁾ Scott Wong has shown how Chinese elites both in China and the United States imagined America in Confucian terms.⁸⁾ Yet to talk about diaspora or transnationalism absent the broader context of displacement diminishes the weight of exile, the notion of home or conversely the act of recreating the new home place and the construction of new identities and community within the nation-state in which the group has resettled.⁹⁾

Emigration to the United States was produced by demographic, economic, and social dislocations in nineteenth century South China as well as by the existence of long established patterns of overseas settlement. The Guangdong economy underwent major shifts in the nineteenth century. The population of Guangdong came close to doubling between 1786 and 1882 putting tremendous pressure on the land.¹⁰⁾ The gazetteer of Xinning county, a major source of emigrants, provides evidence of the bitter struggles over even the most marginally arable reclaimed bottomland (*xia tian*).¹¹⁾ The increase in foreign trade, especially opium, must also be counted as an important factor in disrupting the economy of Guangdong. Local officials constantly warned of the rising cost of silver and falling value of copper cash in their memorials warning the Qing court of the evils of the trade.¹²⁾ Fiscal instability put strains on merchant and peasant alike but peasants bore the direct burden because taxes and rents were calculated in silver while agricultural produce brought in increasingly worthless copper. By the late 1840's,

⁵⁾ Angelika Bammer, ed., *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xi.

⁶⁾ Wann Anderson and Robert Lee, eds., *Diasporas and Displacement: Asians in the Americas* (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 5.

⁷⁾ Chen Yong, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), and Adam Mckeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁸⁾ Kevin Scott Wong, "The Transformation of Culture: Three Chinese Views of America" *American Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1996) 201-232; and "Encountering the Other: Chinese Immigration and its Impact on Chinese and American Worldviews, 1875-1905" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1992).

⁹⁾ Anderson and Lee, 6.

¹⁰⁾ Yearly figures by province for 1786 to 1898 are given in Yen Ching-p'ing, et al., *Zhongguo jindai jingjishi tongzhi ziliao xuanji* (A selection of statistical materials in modern Chinese economic history) (Shanghai: Koxue chushuban she, 1955). See also Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), 311.

¹¹⁾ Fu-h'ai Ho, et al., comp., *Xinning xianzhi* (Gazetteer of Xinning county) (1893; reprint, Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1968), 26 zhuan, 3 ze, 11:12

the cost of silver had risen to three times its official value.¹³⁾ Furthermore, the opium wars themselves added the burden of tax surcharges and a corrupted tax structure allowed large landlords and powerful clans to avoid taxation.¹⁴⁾ Finally, silver flowed not into foreign coffers alone but into the treasuries of Cantonese merchants as well.¹⁵⁾ Given the general pattern of the reinvestment of commercial capital into land and usury, it is no surprise to find complaints in the gazetteers regarding the rise of absentee landholding in Guangdong.¹⁶⁾ This phenomenon was especially strong in the areas immediately surrounding Canton, by the 1930's close to 70% of all rural families in Guangdong province were either tenants or landless laborers.¹⁷⁾

Merchants and peasants alike suffered from economic instability and a deteriorating social fabric. The great Taiping rebellion largely bypassed Guangdong but in 1854, the Red Turban society rose in the hill districts, outside of Canton. The Red Turbans principally dispossessed peasants controlled the rural counties until their defeat in 1856. The reactionary terror in which well over a hundred thousand suspected rebels were executed led to a complete domination of the countryside by the victorious gentry landlords.¹⁸⁾ Social banditry became common feature of the Guangdong countryside. The area around Canton was under the influence of three or four overlapping secret societies between 1800 and 1850 and some seventeen bandit groups operated in the province in the 1860's.¹⁹⁾ The increasing concentration of land in the hands of the wealthy could only have increased Guangdong's "floating" population of vagrants, beggars and bandits.²⁰⁾

Guangdong society was fractured not only along class and clan lines but along ethnic lines as well. Long standing conflict between the Hakka (a ethnically distinct group who had settled in Guangdong in the 8th Century) and the native "Punti" people, disputes over land, water rights, rents and women, erupted into open warfare which lasted from 1853 to 1867 and by conservative estimates took upwards of half a million lives.²¹⁾ A major characteristic in this war

¹²⁾ See for example the memorial of the Liangguang governor general contained in, The History Department of Nankai University, *Qin shilu jingji ziliao jiyao* (Economic materials from the veritable records of the Ch'ing) (Peking: Zhong Hua xuju, 1959), 478. See also Chang Hsin-pai, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

¹³⁾ Chang, 39-40.

¹⁴⁾ See Wang Yu-ch'uan, "The Rise of Land Tax and the Fall of Dynasties," *Pacific Affairs* 9 (1959-60), for a concise summary of this phenomena and Hsiao Kung-ch'uan, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the 19th Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 84-143.

¹⁵⁾ See Liang Chiu-pin, *Guangdong shisan hang kau* (A study of the thirteen hongts of Guangdong) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937); Hao Yen-p'ing, *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹⁶⁾ *Xinning xianzhi*, zhuan 26, ze 3, 11-12.

¹⁷⁾ Chan Han-seng, *Landlord and Peasant in China* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 117.

¹⁸⁾ Frederick Wakeman Jr., *Strangers at the Gate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 115-116.

¹⁹⁾ F. Lai Yi-fai and Michael, J. Sherman, "The Use of Maps in Social Study Research: A Case of South China," *Geographical Review* 52 (1962): 92-108.

²⁰⁾ Kung-ch'uan, 418.

of attrition between Cantonese and Hakka was the large scale sale of prisoners into the coolie trade, then active between Macau and points in southeast Asia, the West Indies, and South America.²²⁾

Physical evidence of the widespread social strife in Guangdong can still be seen the thousands of multi-storied gun towers built to protect villages in the five counties that supplied the largest numbers of emigrants headed for America. By the 1920's and 30's there were over three thousand of these fortresses in the relatively poor rural *Kaiping* county alone.²³⁾

Politically, the relationship between Chinese immigrants and both the Chinese and American national state was alienated and contested. Intellectual displacement took the form challenges to the stability of Chinese identity both in China and in the United States. In the face of catastrophic failure of the Qing dynasty, its successive defeats at the hands Britain, France and Japan and successive rebellion, (the most massive of which, the Taiping Rebellion between 1850 and 1864, took upwards of 25 million lives) Chinese identity was by the later decades of the nineteenth century an increasingly unstable and contested signifier. By the late nineteenth century, Chinese civilizational identity as signifier with universal value (under the sign of *rujia*, commonly translated as Confucianism) began to be displaced by claims of ethnicity, race, and nation.²⁴⁾ In the United States, Chinese were confronted at both the popular and state level with a definition of Chineseness which was diametrically the opposite of their own, that is the Chinese as a race, degraded and incapable of civilization. Chinese, in the American view, were the very antithesis of civilization, so irrevocably “the heathen Chinese” that Justice Harlan in his famous dissent in *Plessey v. Ferguson* singled them out as “a race so different from our own,” that they were prohibited from naturalization.²⁵⁾ Hostility was not limited to state policy but expressed again and again in popular violence against American Chinese. In September of 1885, a year before Wong and Lee aired their views in the *North American Review*, 28 Chinese coal miners were massacred in Rock Springs Wyoming and Chinese were driven from their homes in Seattle and Tacoma Washington.

2. Confucius Confronts the Heathen Chinese

Despite their differences, Wong Chin-foo and Yan Phou Lee shared remarkably similar paths to the pages of the *North American Review*. Both writers had come to the United States in their late teens and both received an American college education. Both had returned to

²¹⁾ John A. G. Roberts, “The Hakka-Punti War” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1969).

²²⁾ Roberts, 224.

²³⁾ He Shujiong, *Kaiping Dialou* (Kaiping: NP, 2002).

²⁴⁾ On the complex relationship between Confucianism and *rujia* see, Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism, Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997). On the emergence of Chinese nationalism I am particularly influenced by the Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

²⁵⁾ *Plessey v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

China briefly in the early 1870's where each became involved in the Tongzhi Restoration, a program of self-strengthening that the historian Mary Wright has called the last stand of Chinese conservatism.²⁶⁾

Early training in the classics, upbringing in the intellectual milieu of the treaty ports (Shanghai and Canton respectively), and experience, however brief, with the self-strengthening movement in the 1870's, situated Wong and Lee in the rapid currents of Confucian thought in the late Qing dynasty. Both Wong and Lee can be understood on the context of the Practical Statecraft (*jingshi*) school of Confucianism that had emerged in the early nineteenth century. This school of thought sought the acquisition of technical knowledge needed to tackle the concrete problems of effective administration but insisted that revived Confucian principles could respond to the challenges of modernization.²⁷⁾ Both Lee and Wong returned briefly to China in the 1870's, but found China inhospitable to their new values. Wong fled China after attempting to form a political association and Lee returned when he found his Christianity incompatible with a bureaucratic career.

By the summer of 1887, both Wong and Lee had both resided in the US continuously for fifteen years and both had become naturalized American citizens before 1882. Both were well known public speakers who pressed for citizenship rights and believed that Chinese in America could and should become American citizens. In 1884, Wong was a founder of the Chinese Equal Rights League, the first political organization of Chinese American citizens.²⁸⁾ For Wong and Lee, American citizenship did not preclude Chinese identity which remained rooted in civilization and universal values rather than tied to a race, ethnicity or nation state. Mary Wright observes that next to peace and economic stability the central goal of the self-strengthening movement was the restoration of..."cultural pride and devotion not to the Chinese nation but to the unique way of life to the Chinese people."²⁹⁾ In this civilizational model of identity, Chineseness could be conferred on anyone who successfully assimilated to Confucian ethics (*ru*).

Both Wong Chin-foo and Yan Phou Lee assert that the good and just society is produced by the rule of reason. Wong, following the New Text (*jinwen*) Confucian scholarship in China which argued for understanding Confucius as a political philosopher and not simply a chronicler of ancient rites, writes that China had seen and tried many religions but only "when we began to reason, we succeeded in making society better and its government more protective and our great Reasoner, Confucius, reduced our various social and religious ideas into book form and

²⁶⁾ Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

²⁷⁾ See Wright 59-67, and Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

²⁸⁾ Qingsong Zhang, "The Origins of the Chinese Americanization Movement, Wong Chin-foo and the Chinese Equal Rights League" in *Claiming America, Constructing Chinese American Identities in the Exclusion Era*, ed. K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

²⁹⁾ Wright, 60.

so perpetuated them.”³⁰⁾ Likewise, the idea of reason remains at the core of Lee Yan Phou’s Christian ethical system. He writes, “The reason why I am enabled to sign myself a ‘Christian’ is because I am endowed with faculty of reason, which I supplemented with formal logic and a desire to tell the truth.”³¹⁾ Lee and Wong also shared the orthodox Confucian view that the private and the public did not stand in opposition to each other because the path to the public good began with the moral rectification of the individual, and particularly in the correct behavior of its ruling elite.³²⁾ Lee, the Christian, writes that his faith

“teaches me to cultivate my mind, rectify my heart, and to make my conscience delicate and sensitive. It bids me to be tolerant, charitable, and just to my fellow men. It tells me to faithfully discharge my duties, public and private. It gives me the requisite strength to act the good citizen and the true husband. It commands me to accord to others their rights, and to take nothing that is not my due.”³³⁾

Is faith that he is writing about Congregationalism or Confucianism? For Lee, moral rectification of the individual is at the heart of politics, here he simply substitutes Christian goodness for Confucian propriety. He writes, “I fervently believe that if we could infuse more Christianity into politics and the judiciary, into the municipal government, the legislature and the executive, corruption and abuses would grow beautifully less.”³⁴⁾

The great rebellions of the mid-nineteenth century led Confucian intellectuals during the Tongzhi restoration to interpret the common interest between the state and the people on increasingly popular terms; the good of the people dictated the good of the ruler. Tongzhi intellectuals insisted that proper role of officials and the military was to behave as “father and mother” to the common people (in order to win their loyalty). It is not surprising then to read Wong’s claim that “Such confidence we Chinese have in our heathen politicians that we leave matter of jurisprudence entirely in their hands. They are able to devise the best laws for the preservation of life.”³⁵⁾ Wong focuses his most scathing criticism on the corruption of the party system in the United States. In Wong’s view, principled officials were more effective than party politicians in promoting “property and happiness without Christian demagogism, (sic) or by the cruel persecution of one class to promote the interests of another.” Chinese civilization’s universalist claim leads Wong to conclude that the Chinese are “so far heathenish as to no longer persecute men simply on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude, but treat them all according to their individual worth.”³⁶⁾

³⁰⁾ Wong, 174.

³¹⁾ Yan Phou Lee, 308.

³²⁾ Schwartz, 10.

³³⁾ Yan Phou Lee, 309.

³⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 311.

³⁵⁾ Wong, 175.

³⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, 177.

“Why Am I a Heathen?” was a barbed critique of Christian America in the satirical mode of Mark Twain. It was neither the idea of a Christian deity nor its claim to universal value that most exercised Wong but rather the organized practice of American religion. The hypocrisies of organized religion led to the absence of principle among America’s political class and to the corruption of society. Wong invokes an image of a paternal God whose purpose is to create a good and just society. He writes that

“[God] has created this and other worlds to effectuate beneficent, not merciless, designs....all that He has done is for the steady , progressive benefit of the creatures whom He endowed with live and sensibility and to whom as a consequence He owes and gives paternal care and will give paternal compensation and Justice.”³⁷⁾

For Wong, “the main element of all religion is the moral code controlling and regulating the relations and acts of individuals towards God, neighbor and self.”³⁸⁾ Wong catalogues a host of Christian sins against this universal ethical purpose of religion. He begins with pithy summaries of the mainstream and “eccentric” Christian sects and professes both bewilderment at their “multitude” and fright at their conflicting claims to a monopoly on salvation. Wong charges that the Christian faith, based as it was on the sanctity of the individual, is fundamentally irrational and at odds with reason. He writes that

“It may be flattering to the Christian to know that it required the crucifixion of God to save him, and that nothing less would do; but it opens up a series of inferences that makes the idea more and more incomprehensible, and more and more inconsistent with a Will, Purpose, Wisdom and Justice thoroughly Divine.”³⁹⁾

Wong asserts that Christianity serves the purpose of injustice when it rewards even last minute professions of faith on the part of evildoers over the virtuous lives and good works of non-believers. To this end, Wong wonders aloud whether on the basis of such a last minute reprieve, the anti-Chinese demagogue Denis Kearny might not arrive in Heaven shouting, “the Chinese must go!”⁴⁰⁾

At the heart of Wong’s critique of American Christianity is his identification of Christianity with unfettered capitalism, social injustice and racism. In Wong’s view, the goal of Confucianism is the promotion of the happiness of a common humanity, while “the Christian’s only practical belief appears to be money making (golden calf worshipping).” He accuses Christian churches of providing ideological cover for the Opium Wars, thus exposing China to the scourge of addiction and social decay under the guise of opening China to its missionaries.⁴¹⁾

³⁷⁾ Ibid., 179.

³⁸⁾ Ibid., 171.

³⁹⁾ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁰⁾ Ibid., 173.

In Wong's judgment, Christianity fails as a social philosophy that supports good government. He describes New York as "the richest and poorest city in the world, [where] misery pines while wealth arrogantly stalks. [Where] The poor have the votes and yet elect those who betray them for lucre to corporate and capitalistic interests." Christian political institutions had provided neither social equality nor harmony; Wong asserted that "among 400 million Chinese there are fewer murders and robberies in a year than in New York State." Confucianism, he concluded, had provided China "a superior social administration and social order." He writes,

"Though we may differ from the Christian in appearance, manners and general ideas of civilization, we do not organize into cowardly mobs under the guise of social or political reform, to plunder and murder with impunity. And we are so far advanced in our heathenism as to no longer tolerate popular feeling or religious prejudice to defeat justice or cause injustice."⁴²⁾

Yan Phou Lee's rejoinder to Wong Chin Foo attempts to cast Christianity on the similar universal footing as Confucianism. Lee draws a distinction between religion and ethics, neatly allowing him to adopt Christianity as a religion without jettisoning Confucianism as a moral philosophy. Lee further makes the distinction between Christianity in the universal abstract, Christianity in practice and of course, in its perversion. It is not the failure of Christianity in the universal abstract that is to blame for what Lee agrees is its failure as social philosophy but rather inevitable human frailty. Lee rejects Wong's accusation that Christianity encouraged misbehavior and argues that it is in the power of Christianity to change the hearts of men. In Lee's reading of the recent history China's relations with the West, it was not Christianity itself but the failure of the West to act in true Christian fashion that accounted for the evils of the opium trade and the violence perpetrated on the Chinese in the United States. Lee asserted that Britain had only claimed to be a Christian nation when it forced opium on to the Chinese market under the banner of "free trade."

True Christianity required living according to principle. Lee writes,

"When the Chinese were persecuted some years ago-when they were ruthlessly smoked out and murdered-I was intelligent enough to know that Christians had no hand in those outrages; for the only ones who exposed their lives to protect them were Christians. The California legislature that passed various measures against the Chinese was not Christian, the Sandloters were not Christian, nor were the foreign miners. They might call themselves Christians, but I don't call a man a great genius simply because he claims to be one. Let him do something work of the name first."⁴³⁾

⁴¹⁾ Ibid., 174.

⁴²⁾ Ibid., 175.

In response to Wong's jibe that Dennis Kearny might get into heaven based on a last minute declaration of faith, Lee argues that if did, Kearny would be lamb-like and would say "the Chinese must stay! Heaven would be incomplete without them."⁴⁴⁾

Lee points out that the greatest allies of the Chinese in the United States were Protestant Christians. Protestant missionaries had championed the cause of Chinese immigration in the face of the virulent anti-Chinese movement. Many Protestant churches had welcomed Chinese students and workers into their congregations and into their homes. Indeed, Lee himself had married the daughter of the socially prominent family that had taken befriended him as young convert. In his experience, shared Christianity was the basis of equality. Referring to his denunciation of the Chinese Exclusion Acts his Yale commencement oration, Lee writes

"When I stood on the commencement platform to denounce the anti-Chinese policy of this government, it was the Christians who strengthened me with their enthusiasm and their applause. It is the Christian who looks on me as his equal and who thinks the Chinese are as well endowed, mentally, as he."

Lee asserted, "The true Christian is the friend of the poor, downtrodden and the oppressed of all countries."⁴⁵⁾

They shared much in their critiques of the American polity; the prevalence of political corruption, and of racism, violence and crime. While they disagreed on which universal signifier —Confucianism or Christianity—had the power to correct these wrongs, they agreed that the United States might become a just and good society if its political leaders would act according to moral reason instead of naked self-interest.

Conclusion

Wong Ching Foo and Yan Phou Lee spoke to and spoke for American Chinese, yet neither shared the experience of the great majority of Chinese immigrants who were workingmen separated from families in China. Nor were Wong and Lee members of the traditional merchant elite that dominated Chinese American. Merchant and workers alike were more likely to share the values of loyalty and righteousness personified in the deity Guandi, the God of War and protector of merchants and travelers whose statues are centrally place on the alters of innumerable temples, guild halls, and secret societies. Indeed, Wong and Lee who were both American educated and, in the Lee's case Christian and married to a middle class white woman, can be said to represent a new type of American Chinese, displaced but not diasporic.

Nevertheless, the debate between heathen and Christian provides a small window on the Chinese struggle to make sense of their place and their identities in the decade of the Chinese

⁴³⁾ Yan Phou Lee, 308.

⁴⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, 311.

Exclusion Act. Both Wong Ching Foo and Yan Phou Lee deployed the logic of universal Confucianism in their attempts to resolve to the dilemma of displaced Chinese American identity. The discourse of Confucian universalism as a dominant political ideology did not, however, survive the end of the century either in the United States or in China. In 1892 the passage of the Geary Act stripping American Chinese of their *habeas corpus* rights and requiring all Chinese to carry identity cards galvanized tens of thousands of American Chinese into a massive resistance movement. (This merchant led mass movement and not the 1904 Boycott of American goods should perhaps be considered the first moment of modern Chinese nationalism.) In China, the defeat of the Qing dynasty at the hands of Japan in 1895 signaled the coming collapse of the dynasty and the exhaustion of Confucianism universalism. When radical reformers and republican revolutionaries arrived in North America at the turn of the century, they would find American Chinese community already mobilized around questions of modern citizenship.