Inside and Outside Chinatown: Chinese Elites in Exclusion Era California

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Chinese elites who were exempted from the Exclusion Act of 1882 became important figures in interethnic dialogue in the West. This article focuses on herbalists and missionaries, who were often able to cross boundaries of race, geography, and gender through their professions. In comparing the experiences of these elites in Los Angeles with their counterparts in San Francisco—the two cities in California with the highest Chinese populations by 1890—the authors demonstrate how a limited degree of inclusion was possible during a period of extreme discrimination and race hatred. The examination of photographs, newspaper articles and advertisements, memoirs, and other materials provides a way to understand the class dimensions of the Exclusion Act in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century California.

While much scholarship on Chinese American history has focused on race, equally vital is the issue of class for understanding the Chinese American historical experience. Ever since the arrival of Chinese during the Gold Rush, elite immigrants such as doctors and merchants had very different experiences from the thousands of working-class Chinese, who did much of the demanding and often dangerous labor in the West and faced even greater discrimination. The Exclusion Act of 1882, the first legislation in U.S. history to bar the entry of a group on the basis of race, demonstrated a class bias by exempting certain elite groups; such exemptions can also be found in later immigration legislation such as the 1917

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Immigration Act. These included “[e]lite Chinese diplomats and merchants, students and travelers, native-born U.S. citizens, some laborers, and some wives,” although such exemptions did not guarantee entry into the United States. The stories of these elites offer an opportunity to examine the class dimensions of the Chinese American experience during the Exclusion Era (1882–1943), especially in social and cultural terms. Existing historical research that emphasizes the issue of class has tended to focus on laborers, but a close look at elites, we argue, can shed new light on the complexities of class in Chinese American history.

This article considers two types of elites who continued to work in California during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: herbal doctors and missionaries. By the very nature of their positions, they left more of a historical record of their experiences in the United States, such as in photographs, newspapers, and books, than poor Chinese possibly could. Chinese elites in California had greater abilities and opportunities than the common laborer to cross racial, geographic, and even gender boundaries at a time when segregation, discrimination, and race hatred remained the norm in relations between Asians and European Americans. Elites could do so not only because of their economic and cultural resources but also because of their positions of leadership in the Chinese community.


By contrast, virulent racist sentiments that socially and physically segregated and isolated Chinese laborers significantly diminished the possibility of social and political interaction with whites. The experiences of elites thus offer valuable insights into the acculturation of a group living under marked hostility. This article examines the experiences of herbalists and missionaries in Los Angeles while comparing them with their counterparts in San Francisco. Such a focus will help to enhance our understanding of the increasingly urban Chinese population in California during this era.

Chinese in California during the Exclusion Era relocated largely to two cities: San Francisco and Los Angeles. The history of San Francisco’s Chinatown understandably has received much more scholarly attention than Los Angeles, which had California’s second-largest Chinatown by 1890 (surpassing Sacramento). The similarities are evident enough. Both San Francisco and Los Angeles were urban magnets for immigration during the late nineteenth century because of the availability of housing and employment as well as protection. Both cities developed traditions of Chinese culture and commerce; they often shared close commercial and cultural ties during a time when Chinese communities throughout the West went into a steady decline after the Exclusion Act.

There were also some significant differences. The first and most striking difference is size. An estimated 12,000 Chinese lived in San Francisco in 1870, or 8 percent out of a total population of 149,473. The Chinese population in Los Angeles, by contrast, was very small in 1870, with only 172 registered individuals, a number...
that climbed to 605 known residents by 1880 and then soared to 2,111 official residents of Los Angeles by 1900, constituting about 2 percent of the city’s population. The second difference is that in Los Angeles more Chinese lived outside of Chinatown than inside. Out of 4,424 Chinese in Los Angeles County in 1890 (with a total county population of 101,454), only 1,871 lived in the city of Los Angeles. By contrast, San Francisco County’s Chinese population in 1890 was 25,833, most of whom lived in Chinatown.

A third difference is that, while San Francisco’s Chinatown remained at the same location, Chinatown in Los Angeles moved at least three times, making for much displacement. Originally located on Negro Alley, Chinatown had to move further east in January 1888 when city authorities extended the street (and renamed it Los Angeles Street). For most of the Exclusion Era, Chinatown was at Apablasa, Marchessault, and Alameda streets, about one block east of the plaza at the city’s center. When the section was razed in 1933 to make way for Union Station, the new train depot, Chinatown moved for the final time to its present location, centered between Figueroa and Main streets or about three blocks north of the plaza. This difference in terms of continuity resulted, among other things, in different relationships that the two Chinatowns had with the surrounding Anglo society.

Scholars have traditionally argued that most Chinese in San Francisco and Los Angeles during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lived in relative isolation and apart from white intrusion. In San Francisco, as Anthony Lee asserted, the Chinese “often seemed to operate under a different set of principles, buying and trading exclusively with each other, thereby apparently remaining outside of or immune to the fragile economy of the new city.” Publication of the famous images by Arnold Genthe and Isaíah Taber of San Francisco’s Chinatown and the distribution of lesser-known

4. The registered Chinese population in the city of Los Angeles was 172 in 1870, rising to 605 in 1880, then 1,871 in 1890, and finally 2,111 in 1900. Total population for the city was 5,728 in 1870; 11,183 in 1880; 50,000 in 1890; and 102,000 in 1900. Lou, “The Chinese American Community of Los Angeles,” 17.

5. After Los Angeles, the next largest Chinese population in California, Sacramento, was considerably smaller, with about 3,500 Chinese residents. Sacramento County fell to third place in 1890 with 4,371 Chinese. By 1900 Long Beach also had a significant Chinese population, with 1,104 known residents. Mears, Resident Orientals, 414.

images by C. C. Pierce and Arthur Ellis of the Los Angeles Chinatown only served to reinforce perceptions of isolation. The elites’ experiences in Los Angeles and San Francisco, however, suggest that a different interpretation is in order. Both inside and outside Chinatown, Chinese elites were very much a part of the urban economy and society of these cities, and an analysis of their roles tells us about interethnic contact and contemporary views on acculturation during a highly troubled era in race relations.

**Herbal doctors and interethnic contact**

The position of herbal doctors offers one example. Drawing on a tradition dating back at least 2,000 years, herbalists performed an essential function in Chinese communities when western medical care was scarcely an option for most Chinese, either because of cost or access. Following the diagnosis of a patient’s illness or malady, an herbal doctor prescribed a cure that typically called for a

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8. Although some have used the terms acculturation and assimilation interchangeably, there are important differences between them. This article is not the place to analyze the complexity of these terms and their differences. Suffice it to note that we use acculturation to describe the process of cultural transformation or adaptation of the immigrant, whereas we use the term assimilation to denote the perspective of members of mainstream society to change or transform the immigrant. The exemptions of the Exclusion Act further impacted the Chinese immigrant population in the United States; in part because elites often married and formed families, they contributed decisively to what scholars have referred to as the “second generation of Chinese Americans.” Yung, Chang, and Lai, eds., *Chinese American Voices*, 104.

tea that drew on one or more of the hundreds of different herbs at his disposal. Such stores had long been common in Chinatowns throughout the West; in San Francisco alone, one resident “noted a dozen or more such herbal establishments.” At the center of the nascent Chinese community in San Francisco in 1856, there were fifteen drug stores and five Chinese medical doctors, making the health sector the second-largest sector after food establishments. The doctors and pharmacists were clearly among the economically well-off in the community; in the 1860 census, they were one of the groups that reported personal wealth—along with owners of various stores, lodging houses, and other businesses and those who identified themselves as merchants. Herbal doctors were thus important members of their communities, wielding enormous influence as transmitters of specialized knowledge. As Haiming Liu has stated, herbal medicine proved to be “an illuminating example of trans-Pacific flow of people, medical skill, and ethnic goods.”

This trans-Pacific influence is evident in a photograph of a typical herbalist’s office in Los Angeles (see Figure 1). We see a highly traditional setting, from the Chinese inscriptions on the wall to the dress of the three men. The shop is immaculate, and canisters neatly line the walls. The appearance of such stores served to counter whites’ depictions of the Chinese as being merely “beasts of burden” or “depraved heathens.” Yet, despite the evident lack of western influence, at least two items suggest otherwise: a clock on the wall in the upper right-hand corner, and a sign stating “Consultation Room” over the back door to the left.

During the Exclusion Era, herbalists were in demand not only among Chinese but also among whites. This popularity is striking,

10. A frequent method of diagnosis was to take the patient’s pulse (twelve different kinds of pulses could allegedly be distinguished), from which the doctor could prescribe the cure. While up to 3,000 items could have medicinal value in an herbal store in China, only “five to six hundred” would be in popular demand, as well as “barks, roots, gums, nuts, flowers.” Chinn, ed., A History of the Chinese in California, 78.
15. See photo CL Pierce (9894), Pierce Collection. The names of the three men remain unknown.
Figure 1. This herbalist shop in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, with its immaculate setting and appearance of affluence, belied contemporary views of the Chinese as “depraved heathens.” C. C. Pierce Collection. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
since, unlike Chinese restaurants or other businesses, as Liu has pointed out, “herbal medicine could not change its ingredients, flavor, or dispensation to suit the taste of mainstream America; rather, it had to remain distinctly Chinese to be effective.” 17 Such doctors tended to treat female patients in the same manner as they treated male patients, and women seem to have made up the majority of those seeking the services of herbalists. Liu has asserted that the non-invasive method of examination proved attractive for many women; unlike western doctors, who frequently called for the woman to undress to examine the body, Chinese doctors preferred to check the pulse or observe the tongue. 18 Several herbalists thus attracted a white clientele and even operated outside the boundaries of Chinatown.

Interethic contact was essential in the practice of two prominent herbalists in Los Angeles, Tan Fu-yuan (at the time spelled Tom Foo Yuen) and Li Wing, who were first cousins. 19 They founded the Foo and Wing Herb Company around 1890 and had a deep involvement in herbal medicine in California. Tan Fu-yuan was the nephew of a legendary herbal doctor in San Francisco, Li Po-tai. An immigrant from Shunde County in Guangdong Province during the Gold Rush, Li Po-tai had been one of the first Chinese

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17. Liu, *The Transnational History of a Chinese Family*, 3. Prescriptions themselves offered an advantage over many western medicines, both in terms of usage and apparent efficacy. Despite the perceived exoticism of herbal medicine, the herbalists’ prescriptions were fairly straightforward: “Three or four bowls of water are used for one package or one prescription of herbs. From six to twelve different kinds of herbs, on the average, are in a package. They are boiled for about half an hour, until reduced to one bowl. The patient, sipping very slowly, drinks it all at one time. Directions, however, are given by the doctor. Most patients, properly advised, can prepare the herbs for their use in their homes; it need not be done in the doctor’s office, unless the doctor is requested to prepare it there. The patient is usually given a supply sufficient to last a week. The supply is put up in seven packages, one for each day. About two ounces are in each package.” Quotation from Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*, 200.


19. Photograph OV 10,224, Department of Rare Books and Ephemera, Huntington Library. The photograph was taken by Garden City Photo Company. Dr. T. Foo Yuen’s last name was actually Tom, but, as was common among other Chinese immigrants, U.S. customs agents probably used his first names (Foo Yuen) as his last name, which he then continued to use publicly; the modern spelling is Tan Fu-Yuan. Discussion with Suellen Cheng, Curator, Chinese American Museum, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, Los Angeles, July 20, 2006. Louise Leung Larson referred to him as “E Bok Foo” or second paternal uncle, stating that he had at least five sons in California, in Larson, *Sweet Bamboo*, 34–37, 150–151. He may be the same figure as herbal doctor “Tom F. Yuen,” who founded the Chinese Presbyterian Church and was ninety-four in 1948; see Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*, 64.
herbalists to practice his trade widely among whites; one white doctor, in a compendium of California medicine, derisively noted that Li Po-tai had developed “a white-folk, medical, tea-guzzling following.” Tan Fu-yuan’s partner in the business, Li Wing, was a son of Li Po-tai and hence a vital member of the team. Together, Tan Fu-yuan and Li Wing made a formidable duo in the expanding business of herbal medicine in Los Angeles.

The doctors attracted a large clientele. Figure 2 features several of their clients, who posed on the front lawn and balcony of a large Victorian house, the site of their practice. Young and old, standing, sitting, or on crutches, all are well-dressed. The sole Chinese pictured is Tan Fu-yuan himself, about whom two signs on the sides of the house proclaim “Ex. Official Physician to the Emperor of China.” Although we cannot verify this specific claim, if true it does indicate that, while he was Cantonese, Tan Fu-yuan also worked in Beijing, which would have lent further prestige to his practice.

Equally intriguing is the location of the herbalists’ Victorian house at 903 S. Olive Street near Ninth Street, well outside the boundaries of Chinatown. This property was in a residential neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles—an ideal location for upscale clients who would otherwise be uncertain about venturing into Chinatown for medical care. A daughter of an assistant to Tan Fu-yuan recalled that there were “two dining rooms, one for men and the other for women, Chinese-style,” and that the “backyard was large, with a guest house and a storage building for herbs.”

The scale of the property, with its wide front porch, two levels, and front lawn, clearly indicated success. The success of the doctors’ practice is further underlined by the fact that the two herbalists remained at the Olive Street address for almost thirty years.

20. Henry Harris, *California’s Medical Story* (San Francisco, 1932), 173, 271. Thanks go to Alan Jutzi at the Huntington Library for making this book available.

21. The Foo and Wing Herb Company, founded in 1891, moved to this address in 1896 and stayed until 1924, when it moved to 951 S. Olive. The company changed its name to the Foo Herb Co. in 1934, where it was listed at 905 S. Olive in 1942; see *Los Angeles City Directory*, 1922, p. 2907; *ibid.*, 1924, p. 954; *ibid.*, 1934, p. 601; and *ibid.*, 1942, p. 824. An advertisement listed the address in *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, Nov. 5, 1899, p. 6.

22. Larson further noted that “[a]ll day long herbs were cooked on the stove for those patients who chose to take a dose of medicine before going home,” in Larson, *Sweet Bamboo*, 34–35.

Figure 2. The Foo and Wing Herb Company was one of many herbalist stores in Los Angeles. Located outside of Chinatown, it attracted a largely white and well-to-do clientele. Garden City Photo Company, Department of Rare Books and Ephemera. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
The presence of a prominent Anglo, George Hazard, in the photograph is also significant. Wearing a stovepipe hat and seated next to Tan Fu-yuan, George Hazard was a brother of Henry Hazard (1844–1914), a mayor of Los Angeles from 1889 to 1892 whose family had lived in the city since 1853. With his connections to other leading Angelenos, George Hazard was in an excellent position to promote the herbal doctors’ work in the Anglo community, and he even published a reference book that Tan Fu-yuan and Li Wing wrote in 1897: *Science of Oriental Medicines* (see Figure 3). The book, which appeared in both paperback and hardcover editions, “‘tells all about the Chinese system of medicine. . . . its founding and early history and its acquirement of the secrets of life and health through the practice of vivisection.’” With its claim to be “valuable to invalids,” it directly targeted the health-seekers who flocked to Southern California in growing numbers. Both the photograph and the advertisement affirm that the professional association between Tan Fu-yuan and George Hazard was a close one.

Despite their adherence to Chinese tradition, several herbalists were well attuned to American-style marketing. Tan Fu-yuan and Li Wing frequently advertised in the *Los Angeles Times*, and the advertisement (see Figure 3) clearly emphasized their Chinese identity. Similar to advertisements by Anglo doctors in the same medical section of the newspaper, they declared that “Diagnosis and Examination [are] Free.” Over a decade of such advertisements by Tan Fu-yuan and Li Wing further indicate the ongoing success of their practice in Los Angeles. Nor were they by any means alone. Another popular herbalist was Dr. Wong, whose advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times* asserted that people “came across the continent to see ‘The Grand Old Man’” and that, “[w]hen this class of

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24. Henry Hazard distinguished himself during the Chinese Massacre of 1871 by being one of the few whites, along with sheriff James Franklin Burns, who attempted to control the vigilante mob. Hazard also served on the Los Angeles Board of Health in 1889–1890 and 1891–1892; see George Kress, *A History of the Medical Profession of Southern California* (Los Angeles, 1910), 23. See also Verne Dyson, “California’s Romanti


patients can be cured there must be virtue in skill and herbs.”27

Like Tan Fu-yuan and Li Wing, Dr. Wong kept his office not in

27. In *ibid.*, Friday, Nov. 3, 1899, p. 15. An earlier advertisement by Dr. Wong stated that he was “[a]t his post from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.,” even listing the telephone number of his office—“895 Black,” in *ibid.*, Wednesday, Jan. 6, 1897, p. 11.
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Chinatown but rather at 713 Main Street, and, unlike most of his competitors, he had a “sanitarium” in addition to his office.

Similarly, herbalists in San Francisco had the necessary resources to reach beyond the boundaries of the Chinese community. In the years before the American Medical Association (AMA) gained overwhelming dominance over alternative medicine, herbal doctors commanded considerable respect. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the San Francisco Bay Area Chinese doctors advertised their services in English-language newspapers in San Francisco as well as in other western cities such as Seattle, competing with their non-Chinese counterparts. Some of these advertisements are quite elaborate and include testimonials from white patients as well as pictures of the doctors. One such advertisement, which was run by the Yit-Cho Lau Chinese Herb Company of San Francisco, distinguished Chinese medicine from western medicine in claiming that the “science of medicine as practiced in China for thousands of years has nothing to do with strong drugs.” Located outside Chinatown proper on Fillmore Street near Post Street, this company had clearly learned to use the mainstream media and offered services such as “free advice” and “free consultation.”

These signs of acculturation, however, do not represent a rupture from Chinese culture. Rather, such ads highlighted Chinese doctors’ connections to China and Chinese traditions. The advertisement for another doctor, Tom Shite-Wing of Oakland, for example, noted that he was “A Celebrated Alumnus of the Imperial Medical University of Peking.” Further, in 1912 the Foo and Wing Herb Co., based in Los Angeles, ran a half-page ad in the San Francisco Call, which included testimonials from former Anglo patients. As in Los Angeles, the advertisements touted its president, T. Foo Yuen (Tan Fu-yuan), as both a former physician to the emperor of China and as a graduate of the Imperial Medical University of Peking. Transpacific ties and cultural heritage thus served as effective tools of acculturation.

The European American demand for Chinese herbal doctors suggests a form of interaction—of important interethnic contact across racial and gender lines—rather than total separation and

28. San Francisco Call, Oct. 6, 1912, p. 54.
29. Ibid., Feb. 18, 1912, p. 49.
30. Ibid., April 28, 1912, p. 34.
exclusion. Not only did such doctors prosper—to the consternation of many practitioners of western medicine—but they also attracted a varied clientele of “lawyers, journalists, bankers, business people, and even Western physicians.” Contrary to the pervasive claim that the Chinese represented a threat to health, the herbalists symbolized the shared value of promoting health. Both in San Francisco and Los Angeles, herbalists were thus essential figures in Chinese communities. The ability to cross social boundaries enabled not only prosperity for herbalists but also continuous contact by many whites with Chinese skills, culture, and expertise. As a result, at least six Chinese herbalists worked in Los Angeles before the turn of the century, and that number grew almost fivefold by the early twentieth century, several of whom had offices downtown. Both inside and outside Chinatown, they could ply their trade well within the proximity of other, western doctors. This pattern lasted until the AMA began actively preventing herbalists from practicing medicine in the 1910s.

Chinese missionaries: “The kingdom of Heaven is upon you.”

Like herbalists, Chinese missionaries fulfilled a special role during the Exclusion Era, and they offer a useful comparison in

31. This situation was similar to that experienced by Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung, an American-born physician whose “inclusion [with Anglos] simultaneously maintained certain social barriers and hierarchies,” in Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards: The Life of a Wartime Celebrity* (Berkeley, 2005), 122.

32. Bowen, “The Five Eras of Chinese Medicine in California,” 178. Of the five distinct periods William Bowen outlined for Chinese herbal medicine in California, the “heyday” was 1871 to 1912. On the general interest in healing among Angelenos, see the classic study, John E. Baur, *The Health Seekers of Southern California, 1870–1900* (San Marino, Calif., 1959).


35. The American Medical Association increasingly struck out at herbalists practicing without an American medical license. Ten herbal doctors were listed for prosecution in 1911 for failing to have a legal medical license; all of their offices were outside of Chinatown, on Hill Street and Broadway Boulevard. See *The Bulletin of the Los Angeles County Medical Association*, 41 (March 30, 1911). In a listing of licensed medical doctors from 1910, none with a Chinese surname was listed, although three Japanese doctors with degrees from American medical colleges were included. See Kress, *A History of the Medical Profession*, 148, 170, 192.
terms of the possibilities for interethnic relations. Missionary activity formed an essential element in American interaction with the Pacific Rim; white American missionaries had been active in China at least as early as the 1830s in Guangdong Province. This missionary zeal, in turn, continued in Chinese communities in the United States in which several religious denominations sought to convert Chinese residents or improve their living conditions. Missionaries were also key figures in seeking to improve interethnic relations; as Henry Yu has noted, “missionaries had a long history of involvement in the effort to counter anti-Asian agitation.”Yet, while Chinese missionaries enjoyed positions of privilege, there were also significant differences from herbalists. Economically, Chinese missionaries clearly did not have the kind of wealth that many of the doctors and pharmacists possessed. Another difference was cultural; whereas herbal medicine represented an important element of Chinese tradition, missionary work embodied an effort to Americanize and assimilate the Chinese.

Los Angeles was home to at least eight missions that sought to convert Chinese residents. One photograph, dated about 1890, depicts twelve people who represented the Chinese Mission School of the Congregational Church, located in Chinatown (see Figure 4). One of the main groups involved in Christian missionary activity, the Congregationalists had dominated the American Missionary Association since the 1860s through programs that offered education, English-language courses, and employment. In true Victorian tradition, the photograph is carefully posed. We know the last names


38. The caption lists a group of twelve teachers at the Chinese Mission School of the Congregational Church, Chinatown, Los Angeles, before 1900. See photCL Pierce (9896), Pierce Collection, and California Historical Society, Special Collections, University of Southern California, online at USC Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu. The location of the Congregational Chinese Mission School may have been at 409–411 Apablaza Street; thanks to Suellen Cheng for this suggestion. The office moved to 321 North Los Angeles Street in 1913.

of most of the women, who tended to be married to or otherwise related to men of high status in Los Angeles society. They include the superintendent of the Chinese school, Mrs. O. V. Rice (wife of Reverend O. V. Rice), Miss Emily Peck (of the First Congregational Church, at the right of the globe), and Mrs. Lee (rear center). An unusual feature about the group is that the gender ratio is nearly even: seven women and five men. The dominant presence of women in the photograph, however, should not surprise us, since missionary work often attracted Anglo women with its opportunity for professional work as well as community involvement.

40. Although the woman wearing a high felt hat at the rear of the photograph was identified in the accompanying caption as a daughter of the founder of the Mount Lowe Railway, Professor Thaddeus S. C. Lowe, a legendary eastern inventor and wealthy entrepreneur, this could not be verified; thanks to Michael Patris and the Lowe family for their analysis of the photograph.

41. A prime example was Donaldina Cameron, who managed the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Home in San Francisco. Pascoe, Relations of Rescue, esp. 78–79, 118–123.
One striking aspect of the photograph is the women's spatial closeness to the men. The men are not grouped together, which would signify social isolation, but rather stand or sit throughout the group. That contradicts long-standing efforts to “protect” white womanhood from the supposedly lecherous Chinese, as Mary Ting Yi Lui, Henry Yu, and others have affirmed. In missionary circles, this photograph tells us, one could transcend some boundaries. As long as the men and women operated within the function of the church, there were few problems with spatial (as opposed to emotional) closeness. To adopt a more intimate relationship, however, and hence potentially to engage in miscegenation, was not possible in California. Significantly, the photograph includes no white man or Asian woman, perhaps because in Los Angeles missionary work involved primarily Asian men and white women. Again, the lack of a longer tradition of Chinese settlement in Los Angeles compared to San Francisco would presumably have given the men more freedom in such associations. The missionary world thus shared something in common with the world of herbal medicine: White women and Chinese men might have contact, if only within the confines of the profession.

Unlike the herbalists, however, the missionaries often went beyond acculturation. While we do not know the names of the men in Figure 4, we can draw some insights from their clothing and posture. Of the three men staring into the camera, two are in western dress, a prominent sign of assimilation. Their hair is parted, suggesting a lack of the queue or pigtail—long a target of derision by Anglos. The man to the left, although in traditional garb, is


43. California passed an anti-miscegenation law in 1872, which was ruled unconstitutional only in 1948. By contrast, an example on the East Coast that proved such unions could be possible was minister Huie Kin and Louise Van Arnam, a Presbyterian mission worker, who married in New York in 1889.

44. Members of this group appear in another photograph from 1896, which shows a much larger group from the mission, with a similar gender ratio and with only one white male, presumably a minister of the Congregational church. Smith, *The Lonely Queue*, 11.

seated at an organ, further suggesting a link to western culture. To varying degrees, all are thus products of the Americanization movement.

In discussing the acculturation of the Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one has to consider two cultural symbols, clothing and the queue, which usually went together. A nineteenth-century Methodist preacher in San Francisco, Otis Gibson, remarked: “So long as the queue is retained the Chinese fashion of dress will be retained.” He further noted both their cultural significance and obstacles to assimilation: “These two things will forever make them a distinct and peculiar people.” Until about the time of the republican revolution in China in 1911, the Chinese themselves also regarded their traditional style of clothing and the queue as markers of their identity. When the Burlingame delegation arrived in San Francisco in 1868, a notice was posted in front of the hotel where the delegation stayed: “No Chinese who wears Western-style clothes should see the Imperial Commissioners dispatched by the Emperor.” Such reactions demonstrated that in the Chinese community there was a suspicion of those who consciously assimilated through dress.

Americanization efforts, whether by missionaries or reformers not connected to any specific denomination, strongly influenced interethnic relations during the Exclusion Era. Much like the treatment of European and Mexican immigrants, the Americanizationists sought to overcome “alien” ways of thinking, speech, dress, and behavior among the Chinese. Often deeply inspired by religious faith, the goal of reformers was not mere assimilation but to end all perceived vices in Chinese communities and thereby prevent assumed temptation to whites. This meant to halt prostitution, to close opium dens, and to resolve the enduring conflicts between rival tongs that had long plagued Chinese communities in the West. Scholars such as Peggy Pascoe have shown how Christian missions aided “fallen women,” while other scholars have emphasized the attempt by Chinese missionaries to improve the public image of their communities. As Wesley Woo has asserted, “American

Protestants felt that they, their churches, and their nation had a special God-given role to bring about a perfect and complete Christian world order.” North America was the home base for both creating and maintaining that world order, and missionaries during the Exclusion Era targeted the Chinese for both assimilation and Americanization—two sides to the same coin. As a main point of disembarkation, California clearly played a significant role in that effort.

Several objects in Figure 4 indicate these goals. At the center of the photograph on the rear table sits a globe, which emphasizes the wide reach of the Congregationalist missionary effort. On the front table are books, probably Bibles, several of which have Chinese characters. For emphasis, one of the women is holding one of the tomes in her lap. The presence of the books tells us two things: Teaching Christianity in Chinese went hand-in-hand with the Americanization movement, and there was an emphasis on Scripture rather than mere preaching. We can thus conclude that literate Chinese probably formed a significant part of their targeted audience. Despite the interethnic contact depicted in the photograph, however, it is clear where the power lies; the women are in the foreground, and it is they who mainly surround the globe and the books, not the Asian men.

Above the man in western dress to the left, the phrase “Matthew 10” appears on a chalkboard in both English and Chinese characters. This chapter is the biblical injunction by Jesus Christ to his twelve disciples to go out into the world and proselytize (it may be no coincidence that the number of figures in the photograph is the same as the number of disciples): “And as you go proclaim the message: ‘The kingdom of Heaven is upon you.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out devils. You received without cost; give without charge.” It is a heady task, one that the Congregationalists fully took upon themselves and that here appears to be shared by whites and Chinese alike. Like many missionaries, they stood fast by Jesus’s further warning in the same chapter: “Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves; be wary as serpents, innocent as doves.” The biblical citation from Matthew in essence provided the religious basis for Christianization, Americanization, and hence western domination.


49. Woo, “Chinese Protestants in the San Francisco Bay Area,” 214.

50. Matthew 10: 7–8, 16, New English Bible.
While the Congregationalists were heavily involved in Americanization efforts, they were by no means the only Protestant denomination to do so. Figure 5 depicts Chinese missionaries from the Chinese Presbyterian Mission in Los Angeles (although mislabeled as Congregationalist in the photograph). Like the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians provided English-language instruction as well as religious guidance. Unlike the mission in Figure 4, however, this mission was located outside Chinatown at 214 N. San Pedro. The men in the photograph form a group, with some even smiling into the camera. As in Figure 4, there is an emphasis on Scripture, with three men holding books, perhaps Bibles, like those stacked on the table to the left. The Chinese inscriptions on the wall are translations of the Lord’s Prayer and Christian teachings, which again show that the Chinese could pray in Chinese without having to read an English-language Bible for understanding.

The man in western dress is Rev. Ng Poon Chew, who led the mission from 1894 to 1898. Handsome, charismatic, and a strong proponent for interethnic dialogue, Ng was a pivotal figure in the Chinese community in Los Angeles, and his work reached far beyond religion. An adamant supporter of assimilation and Americanization, he became a force to be reckoned with in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. Born in 1866 in the Taishan District in Guangdong Province, he left China at age fifteen for California, where he converted to Christianity at a Presbyterian mission in San Jose. After moving to Los Angeles, he became deeply involved in the Christianization movement. “Every Sunday afternoon,” he wrote in 1894, “there is a preaching service on a street in Chinatown where all the different missions cooperate. This meeting consists of singing, prayer and preaching, and, of course, the preaching is mostly in the Oriental tongue. The Chinese seem to listen well throughout

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51. See PhotCL Pierce (9855), Pierce Collection. The photograph, correctly labeled, can also be found in the Photograph Collection, Chinese American Museum, Los Angeles. Garding Lui claimed that the Chinese Presbyterian Church, founded on Los Angeles Street near First Street, was financed mainly by an herbal physician, possibly Tan Fu-yuan; see Lui, Inside Los Angeles Chinatown, 64.
52. We thank Haiming Liu for this point.
53. Rev. Ng Poon Chew lived in Chinatown at 421 Apablasa Street. On Ng, see Greenwood, Down By the Station, 27–29, and Ng Poon Chew, “The Treatment of the Exempt Classes of Chinese,” 109–117. We thank Suellen Cheng for identifying Rev. Ng in the photograph.
Figure 5. Rev. Ng Poon Chew led the Chinese Presbyterian Mission, located at 241 N. San Pedro, outside of Chinatown, between 1894 and 1898. As a key proponent at the time for assimilation and Americanization, Rev. Ng is in western dress. C. C. Pierce Collection. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
the service, and seldom any bad feeling is aroused.”54 The cover of Harper’s Weekly in the same year underscored this impression, depicting a large group of Chinese and Anglos in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, together “Singing Hymns in the Street.”55

Despite such enthusiasm, however, relatively few Chinese actually converted to Christianity, either in Los Angeles or elsewhere. One estimate is that by 1900 only about 4,000 Chinese had converted to Christianity in the United States as a whole.56 Moreover, those who did convert often combined ideas from Taoism, Buddhism, or Confucianism with Christianity, which proved highly frustrating to the missionaries’ efforts. Yet we need not measure influence by conversion alone. Like the herbal doctors, Chinese preachers and missionaries in Chinese communities were key figures in bridging racial and class divides.

Animosity and inclusion

The support for both assimilation and Americanization by Rev. Ng and his Christian colleagues was a response to deep Anglo animosity against the Chinese. Such animosity continued well past an event Rev. Ng almost certainly would have heard about: the Chinese Massacre of 1871 in Los Angeles, when nineteen Chinese were hanged following a riot after the murder of a white man by two feuding Chinese gangs or tongs.57 Another aspect of Anglo hostility at the time of Ng’s residence in Los Angeles was the development of the Anti-Chinese Union, which arose from the Workingmen’s Club that had formed a chapter in Los Angeles in 1885. Avidly supported by the Los Angeles Trade and Labor Council, its

54. Quoted in Greenwood, Down By the Station, 27.
55. Harper’s Weekly, Aug. 18, 1894, cover page; see also Choy, Dong, and Hom, eds., The Coming Man, 32.
56. Ira M. Condit, The Chinaman as We See Him and Fifty Years of Work for Him (1900; New York, 1978), 19, cited in Woo, “Chinese Protestants in the San Francisco Bay Area,” 217. See also Greenwood, Down By the Station, 30.
57. A detailed description of the incident is by P. S. Dorney, “A Prophecy Partly Verified,” Overland Monthly, 7 [2nd Series] (1886), 230–234. Another account listed a “riot in Los Angeles, in which fifteen Chinese were hanged and six shot by a mob roused by the killing of a policeman by Highbinders.” Kress, A History of the Medical Profession, 3. See also Chan, Asian Americans, 48–49, and Lou, “The Chinese American Community of Los Angeles,” 24–27, which provides a background for the two tongs involved, the Hong Chow Association and the Nin Yung Association. A drawing that depicts John Goller’s Carriage and Blacksmith Shop “where Chinese were hung” is photCL 188 (499), Ellis Collection.
members took an oath in May 1886 to end the hiring of Chinese and not to frequent Chinese businesses. They further gathered over 1,000 signatures to call for the expulsion of the Chinese beyond city limits.\(^{58}\) Had such a pledge found fruitful ground, the Chinese might well have had to depart the city of Los Angeles, as happened in nearby Pasadena, Norwalk, and Burbank, not to mention other towns in California, Washington, Oregon, and Wyoming that enforced the expulsion of the Chinese.\(^{59}\)

We cannot simply relegate such attitudes to the working classes. Prominent citizens in Southern California supported the resolution for expulsion as well, including state senator Reginald F. del Valle and real estate magnate J. P. Widney. In decided contrast, the *Los Angeles Times* surprisingly took a stand against the resolution, perhaps because Angeleno employers found the resolution ultimately unworkable.\(^{60}\) Nonetheless, while support for total exclusion subsided in Los Angeles, resentment against the Chinese presence in the city continued.

As a result, Rev. Ng seemed to view himself as divinely ordained to work toward solving this crisis in interethnic relations.\(^{61}\)

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58. The Los Angeles Trades and Labor Council organized a boycott of the Chinese and held a public meeting that attracted 4,000 people at the Tabernacle Hall on Main and Fourth streets. *An 1886 Chinese Labor Boycott in Los Angeles* (Pasadena, Calif., 1982), Rare Book Collection, Huntington Library.


61. Both the 1892 Geary Act and the 1893 McCreary Act sought to sever or severely restrict the economic and social bonds between China and the United States that had existed since at least the eighteenth century. The predictable result of such legislation was a gradual decline in the Chinese population throughout the United States that would continue until the lifting of limitations on Chinese immigration in 1943 and the allowing of citizenship in 1952. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act on December 17, 1943, which President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law; 78 Cong., 1 sess. (1943), ch. 344. Quotas, however, remained low until the Immigration Act of 1965. On eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trade between the United States and China, see Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*, chs. 2–4. On citizenship, see Lee, *Orientals*, 4, 60.
Appearing to be a member of the middle class, wearing western dress and devoid of the queue, and promoting conversion among the Chinese, he was countering any claims that the Chinese were incapable of assimilation. Yet we would be wrong to see Ng merely as an Asian “Uncle Tom” who abandoned his own culture to assimilate with whites. On the contrary, Ng emerged “as the leader of the cause . . . fighting against prejudice, and advocating Chinese Americanization, equality in society, and citizenship for the Chinese.” Moreover, he continued the struggle against discrimination after leaving for San Francisco, where he founded one of the first Chinese American newspapers in the United States. Titled Chung-Sai-Yat-Po (“China and the West Daily”), it was “a Chinese language weekly that initially reflected Christian perspectives . . . [while later] adopting more of a community/news orientation.”

The newspaper remained the only major one run by Chinese Americans, as opposed to those started and published by political exiles representing different factions in China.

To emphasize our point that Chinese elites were more likely to leave historical records than their working-class compatriots, let us consider an article Rev. Ng wrote in Los Angeles that addressed racial divides. He specifically wrote on interethnic relations in a popular journal that writer and booster Charles Lummis edited, Land of Sunshine. Ng called for greater understanding between Chinese and whites, and, to support his argument, he referred to traditional values in both cultures, such as marriage, education, and the virtue of hard work. He also used several illustrations that depicted Chinese men, women and children as “respectable” members of the community. One of these illustrations is of Ng himself (Figure 5 above), although he is not identified in the photograph.

An intriguing aspect of Ng’s argument was his treatment of a vice then commonly associated with the Chinese—opium addiction.


63. Greenwood, Down By the Station, 29. See also Ednah Robinson, “Chinese Journalism in California,” Out West, 16 (Jan.–June 1902), 33. The paper ended circulation in 1946.

64. Ng Poon Chew, “The Chinese in Los Angeles,” Land of Sunshine, 1 (Oct. 1894), 102–103. The photographer is unknown, but it seems likely that Rev. Ng drew on the Pierce Collection for this photograph, since several of the other illustrations in the article are from that collection.
As illustration, he included the photograph of a reclining figure who is wrapped around an opium pipe (see Figure 6). The scene suggests the essence of decadence: The addict seems oblivious to the world, under the control of the drug that overwhelms him. It also addresses a serious problem. While we do not have statistics for Los Angeles, one estimate is that opium addiction in San Francisco ran from 16 to 40 percent of the Chinese population during the 1890s (by contrast, reliable addiction rates among whites were not made public). It is certain that opium was big business; opium smuggling in the United States was estimated at between 60,000 to 100,000 pounds annually. Depictions of opium smoking proved

popular among tourists; Taber included a photograph of two men smoking opium in his collection on Chinatown, and there appeared an anonymous book of photographs titled simply *Chinatown*, published in 1889, which drew on the technique of “surprise” flash illumination to depict Chinese in San Francisco frequenting dimly lit opium dens.\textsuperscript{66}

Why did Rev. Ng depict an opium smoker, of all things, in his argument for interethnic understanding? The fear of opium addiction and its effect on the populace—Chinese and white alike—was a common theme in race relations in the West. Christianity had a role to play here: In claiming that the addict represented the heathen past of China, Ng promoted the work of eight Christian missions in Chinatown, where residents could be led “to the true God; to illuminate their darkened minds with the light of the truth of the Gospel; to unfold to them a better life through the love of God in Christ.” The opium smoker is a figure of evil, or at the very least in need of redemption, while Ng and other Christian missionaries represented those who had turned toward the light. “No matter how dark you may paint Chinatown,” he asserted, “and how sinful you may characterize its inhabitants, there are bright and holy spots within its border, through the reflected rays of these Christian missions.”\textsuperscript{67} He thus placed these photographs within a theological and cultural framework in order to use them for his own purposes.

While his role as a missionary was clearly coloring his perception of Chinatown and he was playing to a progressive vision of the city that sought to wipe out perceived vices, Ng’s purpose went beyond the mere promotion of Christianity. His use of the photograph was to argue what Chinese communities were trying to move away \textit{from}, and that view was filled with hope as well as deep concern for what the addict’s presence represented. In other words, he turned the stereotype of the opium smoker on its head; while a contemporary white commentator might use the photograph to argue for exclusion, Ng used it for the reverse claim: as an argument for \textit{inclusion} and the united effort to overcome vice.

\textsuperscript{66} Bonnett and Bonnett, \textit{Taber}, 48; the book of flash photography is anonymous, titled \textit{Chinatown} (San Francisco, 1889). A copy is in the Rare Book Collection, Huntington Library.

It is in this sense that his status as a member of the elite holds particular importance. A highly literate professional, Ng had recourse to the printed word, and he deftly made use of that privilege. That he published his article in a prominent local journal of the time assures us that he reached a large audience; the circulation of *The Land of Sunshine* was an estimated 8,000 subscribers in 1894, which rose to 9,000 subscribers the following year, and the total number of readers who saw the magazine was almost certainly far higher. As Jennifer Watts has noted, the magazine appeared "in public libraries, resorts, chambers of commerce, on steamships, and aboard overland railroads stretching from New York to Chicago, and from Denver to San Francisco." In his argument for interethnic understanding, Rev. Ng tried to convince his audience that the condemnation or isolation of Chinese residents of the city was often based on the use of stereotypes. In urging his largely Anglo audience to greater toleration, he represented one of the few prominent Asian voices able to present that argument in the late nineteenth century.

As in Los Angeles, there were also Chinese missionaries in San Francisco who sought to mitigate Anglo animosity against the Chinese. Protestant missionary work among the Chinese in San Francisco started in the early 1850s. Although the Chinese did benefit from their association with white missionary work, they tended to do so individually. One figure was Huie Kin, who arrived in San Francisco in 1868 at the age of fourteen from the same region that Ng Poon Chew had come from: Taishan District in Guangdong Province. Baptized by a Presbyterian minister six years later, Huie Kin launched a missionary career that was stunning by contemporary standards and that ultimately placed him solidly in the middle class. At first a leader of the Chinese Sunday School in San

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69. Lee Kan was another missionary; he attended a missionary school in China before coming to America. After his arrival in the United States, he worked as the Chinese editor of *The Oriental*, a bilingual newspaper started in 1855 by the Rev. William Speer, founder of the Presbyterian mission church among the Chinese. The skills he obtained from his association with white missionary work later gave him access to mainstream society and economic success—he went to work at the Bank of California in 1869 and operated an independent translation service. But he did not obtain his success as a Christian or missionary; in fact, he was never baptized. Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 74.
Francisco, he was soon joined by two other missionary workers, Yee Kai Man (who took the name Guy Maine) and Chew Mon Sing (who later became Joseph Singleton). One of their self-appointed tasks was to combat the gambling trade in San Francisco’s Chinatown, where they received the backing of the secretary of the Society for the Prevention of Crime, Anthony Comstock. Much like Rev. Ng’s work against the opium trade and other vices in Los Angeles, Huie Kin recalled that, in their new-found status as missionaries, “[w]e were then young, full of ardor to right the wrongs of the world, and decided to wipe out the evil business” of gambling. They found only limited success, however, in part because gambling met with more tolerance by the city police than Huie Kin would have liked.

He attained the position of preacher, which brought him in touch with the white middle class not only economically but also culturally after he moved east. Huie Kin attended a seminary in Ohio before becoming a Presbyterian minister in New York in 1885, where he became “one of the prominent leaders of the local Chinese community.” Remarkably, he married a middle-class white woman, Louise Van Arnam, and the couple had nine children. Asserted Huie Kin frankly, “the fact that she was of another race made no difference to me, and neither could the social prejudice against international marriages stand in my way.” Few positions other than preacher during the Exclusion Era would have given him the opportunity to cross racial lines and establish himself as a figure of interracial dialogue.

Several Chinese women also joined missionary work. While we find few examples of female converts in Los Angeles during the early Exclusion Era, such converts were readily in evidence in San Francisco, and these conversions had class connotations. Peggy Pascoe noted the presence of “native helpers,” such as those at the Chinese Mission Home in San Francisco, founded by middle-class Presbyterian women in 1874 and located on Sacramento Street, well outside the boundaries of Chinatown. Unlike the mission of Rev. Ng, the Chinese Mission Home specialized in rescuing Chinese girls from prostitution rings or tongs that provided sexual services to Chinese and white men. Female converts were essential to the work of the missionaries, because they “wrapped themselves

71. Ibid., 57, 61.
in the mantle of female moral authority and dedicated themselves to implanting the values of Victorian women’s culture in their own communities.” 72 They were thus key figures in the “success stories” that Protestant missionaries hoped to promote.

One example of a female convert was Tien Fu Wu. Ultimately viewed by her fellow missionaries as one of the “models of Victorian morality,” she came to the United States at the age of six, sold by her father to an agent to pay off gambling debts. After being abused by one of her female caretakers, she came to the Mission Home, where she converted to Christianity in her late teens. It was a match, it would seem, made in heaven. Tien Fu Wu became a steadfast supporter of the missionaries’ work, played the organ, and continued to work at the Home until her retirement. She achieved her status in part because of Protestant women’s assertion that race “should be no barrier to educational opportunity or to participation in religious activities.” 73 Tien Fu Wu and other female converts formed the Chinese counterparts of Native American women who had long been targeted by Catholic and Protestant missionaries in communities and territories in the West. Yet, unlike these Native American women, so Pascoe argued, an intriguing difference was the expectation that Chinese native helpers would not lose ties with their native culture. Rather, by maintaining such ties, they took on a role similar to that of the Chinese herbalists in California: figures who could transgress boundaries between Chinese and whites during the Exclusion Era. Thus, it would be difficult to make the claim of a “female Uncle Tom,” since Tien Fu Wu did not escape her native culture in order to assimilate into white culture.

Tien Fu Wu’s elite status came directly from her association with the Mission Home. Her position as a convert gave her special privileges in San Francisco that many other Chinese women did not have: the ability to travel, to associate with others beyond a restricted circle, and even to receive an education. That did not make the situation of Tien Fu Wu or other native helpers any easier, however; on the contrary, Chinese men, particularly those who earned money from Chinese prostitutes, treated native helpers with special scorn as threats to their existence or livelihood. Other than to proselytize and hence continue the work of white female missionaries, the unique status of

72. Pascoe, Relations of Rescue, 113.
73. Ibid., 115.
these converts meant that they essentially assumed dual roles of both assimilation and the maintenance of Chinese tradition.

As in Los Angeles, however, we need to be careful in evaluating “success” among the missionaries. Forces in San Francisco were at work to limit the influence of Chinese missionaries, and we believe there were at least two likely reasons for this situation. First, San Francisco’s Chinese community was one of the oldest and, for a long time, the largest in the United States. Its cultural traditions and institutions have strong and deep roots and seem to have been able to resist to a significant degree the influence of Christian missionary work in terms of conversions. Second, those Chinese who were influenced by missionaries risked condemnation or ostracism in the Chinese community, such as a young Chinese woman in San Francisco who fled from her husband after she sang “Jesus Loves Me,” a song she had learned from Protestant missionaries. 74 Chinese missionaries were privileged, but that privilege came at a price: the risk of being seen as too assimilated by other Chinese.

Conclusion

The premise of this article has been that during the Exclusion Era Chinese elites in Los Angeles and San Francisco continued to offer specialized skills that belied efforts to keep the Chinese out, both physically and culturally. Despite the great differences between the Chinatowns of these cities, Chinese elites shared some common experiences. While herbalists and missionaries comprised a relatively limited number of individuals in Chinese communities in California, their experiences offer valuable insights into the importance of class for understanding race relations. In comparison with working-class Chinese, they were in a better position to reach across divisions of race, class, and gender long after initiatives to restrict Chinese immigration had come into force. Further, an analysis of Chinese elites tells us something about Chinatown as a “site” that had a specific meaning. An examination of elites in Los Angeles in comparison with San Francisco reveals that Chinatown and the Chinese were not the same. Not all urban Chinese worked within Chinatown, nor was their labor entirely menial. The experiences of individuals in the positions of herbal doctor or missionary enable us to examine how Chinese crossed traditional racial and geographic boundaries.

74. Ibid., 97.
There are also some significant differences between these two positions. Herbalists functioned as representatives of Chinese culture, and they did not seek to shed their Chinese traditions in interacting with whites. As such, they were not condemned by the Chinese community for such interactions; on the contrary, they were frequently leaders in their communities as successful businesspeople who provided a vital service. Missionaries, on the other hand, risked condemnation as “sell outs” to whites, although this was not always the case; both Ng Poon Chew and Huie Kin remained respected members of their communities and were key figures in advancing the cause for greater rights. This degree of acceptance by other Chinese depended to a great extent on how much missionaries retained, or at least respected, Chinese values and traditions.

We should note further that the experiences of herbal doctors and missionaries in interacting with Anglos during the Exclusion Era were by no means exclusive to them. Similar experiences were shared by other Chinese elites, such as scholars, merchants, and government officials, all of whom enjoyed the privileges of class and who have provided historians with rich sources for further research. Merchants, in particular, were vital to the power structure of Chinatowns in the West; consistently, their organizations helped not only to coordinate commercial activity between Chinese and whites but also often acted as conscious guardians of Chinese traditions.

The Six Companies, for example, presents a fascinating case study in itself in terms of class. In an article that appeared in *Overland Monthly* in 1894, writer Fong Kum Ngon explained some of the duties of the Six Companies and how its members’ extensive ties with Chinese in the United States and in China worked. Founded in San Francisco after the Gold Rush, the organization often defended Chinese workers against attacks and discrimination, resolved issues among Chinese residents in California and in China, and helped find work and accommodation for many newly arrived immigrants. In the 1870s it even launched a campaign to ward off the influence of white Christian missionaries, inviting speakers from China to lecture on Confucian virtues. Beginning in the 1870s, Chinese merchants also started to make investments in China, a practice that continued into the twentieth century. Like the elites discussed in

this article, members of the Six Companies enjoyed an influence in the West that reached well beyond their own circle of membership.

Finally, in order to understand the cultural interaction and acculturation we discuss in this article, we must note that these issues cannot be understood simplistically. The complexity of class during the Exclusion Era indicates that, while Chinese elites in both Los Angeles and San Francisco possessed the ability and opportunity to interact with groups beyond the Chinese community and thereby to acculturate, those in the newer and smaller community in Los Angeles often found themselves in greater proximity to the non-Chinese world. By comparison, as the previous example of the Six Companies illustrates, Chinese elites in San Francisco had older, lasting ties to China and Chinese culture. This situation does not mean that they were less acculturated than their counterparts in Los Angeles, but that their experiences of interethnic contact do give us a different angle from which to appreciate the extent of their acculturation. In both cities, the demand by Americans for expertise and products from China ensured continuous interaction between Chinese and Anglos, and Chinese elites were often deeply involved in meeting that demand.

The written and visual sources we have examined here serve as a reminder that, far from merely going into decline during the Exclusion Era, Chinese immigrants remained very much a part of the urban economy and society in California. The work of herbalists, missionaries, and other elites demonstrates continued economic, social, and cultural involvement that did not end with the passage of political legislation that severely limited official ties between the United States and China and between white Americans and immigrant Chinese. Rather, Chinese residents sought ways of reaching past those barriers. There was clearly a limit to the degree of interaction: Chinese continued to be denied citizenship until after the Exclusion Era had ended; intermarriage in California was not possible; and few could own property. Yet Chinese elites in Los Angeles and San Francisco, both inside and outside Chinatown, benefited from positions of privilege, and during the Exclusion Era they were among those who refused to be excluded.