THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE AT
Angel Island

Part III: Literature of Exclusion and Detention

By H. M. LAI

The passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and its renewals in 1892 and 1917, was resented by the Chinese as an unfriendly dislocation of the life and work of their countrymen. To home them to the utter ineffec-
tiveness of a weak China in protecting its citizens abroad. Throughout the exclusion era these feelings were reflected in many pieces of Chinese literature.

As early as 1882, Huang Ts'ung-hsien (黄遵熹), also known as Hsü Kung-tu (徐公度), who had just arrived in San Francisco to assume office as Chinese consul-
general, wrote a lengthy poem, An Essay on the Expulsion of the Guests (逐客篇). The workбит-
terly told how the Chinese, after helping to develop this country with their sweat and blood, were rewarded by restriction and expulsion. The poet lamented the helplessness of the feeble Ch'ing government to come to the succor of her people abroad.

Such sentiments were expressed time and again by others in subsequent years. This was especially true in 1907 when the anti-Japanese boycott (called to protest the exclusion laws) inspired an outpour-
ing of Chinese artists and writers denouncing the government's immigration laws. Some of these works, such as the novels The Golden Mountain (The Golden Island) by Ma Yüeh-ch'ien (馬玉禎) and The Golden World (金世界) and various essays, poems, and songs, were well written and of considerable poetic merit.

In the main, this type of literature was based on second-hand information gleaned from newspapers and oral reports from Chinese emigrated from America. Few of the authors actually experienced the treatment received by the Chinese immigrants under the exclusion laws. As such, the Chinese in America, who suffered directly from the harsh immigration laws, were in general the least capable of being continuously engaged in making a living, they had little time to devote to serious literary efforts. However, there are a limited number of pieces of literature inspired by the immigrants' experiences.

Literature of this nature probably began during the first years of the exclusion era; however, that which survives today was mostly written during the era of the Angel Island Immigration Sta-
tion.

One of the earliest known today was dated only two months after the opening of the Island facilities. It is a long poem, "Preface of a Poem in the Wooden Building" (木屋囚所序), mailed from the wooden barracks and published in the widely read Chinese World of San Francisco (聖華西). Another work of that era was a group of Cantonese songs in 12 stanzas written around 1911 or 1912 entitled The Prisoner in the Wooden Island (紅樓養生). Thereafter, the Udorn in Hardships (木屋囚所吃苦) The following stanzas illus-
trate the spirit of the work:

My family is poor and suffers from shortages of food and rice. So I work as a porter to the Golden Mountains.

But it is difficult to escape from the interrogation of the immigra-
tion officer.

I went on to the island like a prisoner.

Arriving here, I sighed deeply in a dark room.

When a country is weak, others often treat it with contempt.

She is like a domesticated animal passively awaiting destruction.

家貧米惡/資本來金山/關閉閘閘脫身難/難往埃壇如監犯/到此間,藩院長欽命關/國本被多侮辱/微數眷屬任摧殘

The harsh treatment of the immigrants also inspired the composi-
tion of other works, such as articles in the Cantonese opera style. One example was "A Chinese Traveler Imprisoned on Angel Island" (天使島客囚禁), written some time during the early 1920s. Liter-
ature echoing similar sentiments could also be found dispersed in various Chinese newspapers and magazines.

POEMS IN THE DETENTION BUILDING

The works most celebrated today, however, are the poems on the walls composed by the deti-
tees at Angel Island. It had been a traditional practice for Chinese to use poetry as a vehicle to express their feelings. Thus it was not surprising that the traumatic experiences of the confinement would stimulate Island inmates to literary efforts revealing their anguish, sorrow, anger and frustration.

Contemporary tells of poems literally covering the walls of the detention shed at the San Fran-
sisco waterfront, which preceded the Angel Island facility. These have been lost forever to posterity with the razing of the building; however, specimens of later poetry still survive on the Angel Island barracks walls.

During the three decades the barracks was in use, many immi-
grants or their families held poetical contests, mostly anonymous, left their lite-
ry efforts. Most wrote their poems on their rice bags, which were washed off or covered with paint. But some left their works perma-
nently on the building walls, the poems being first written on the wood with a brush and then a carving tool applied. In spite of the crude implement the immi-
grants had to work with, the callig-
igraphy was highly artistic. These are the poems which are still vis-
tible today.

Of the few former detainees, thought enough of the literary merits of these works to pass com-
ment. For example, in 1935, a young immigrant, Smiley Jann (鍾雪美), quoted in his reminiscences about his stay on the island: Story Told by a Traveler to the Golden Mountains (金山客自述). However, Chi-

ese literary circles in America generally did not hold the poetry in high esteem because the style often violated accepted conven-
tions for Chinese poetry. Also there were often incorrect usages because of the limited Chinese education of some of the poets. However, there could be no doubt as to the intensity and genuineness of the feelings expressed in these works, giving them lasting value. They certainly could not be brushed aside lightly merely be-
cause they did not adhere to certa-
in formal precepts.

Some works dwelt on the dis-
appointment of the immigrants as many of the poetry were feelings of resentment and bitterness at the treatment they had received. Such cruel reality, upon arrival in a strange land.

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Peking Rolls Out Red Carpet for the Nixons

HONG KONG—In one of the sharpest attacks on alleged right-
ists, Peking's People's Daily charged February 17 that un-

abled "capitalist readers within the party" had altered an impor-
tant speech by Premier Chou En-lai last year and instead em-
phasized a call for unity, stability and economic growth.

The emphasis on stability and development had been closely associated with the late premier Teng Hsiao-ping, the party's No. 2 man.

Sources said that after the appointment of Hua Kuo-feng as acting premier, Teng has come under attack in wall posters. CONGRESS

The article in Peking's Daily suggested that Chairman Mao did not agree with last year's economic program from the time Chou proclaimed it at the Na-
tional People's Congress held in January, 1975. Chairman Mao did not attend the meeting at that time.

According to the article, certain "capitalist readers within the party who have refused to repent have raised all kinds of ulterior motives, distorted the great patriotic instruction." Teng denounced those behind the Cal-

ural Revolution as a "capitalist roaders."

Mao was said to issue an order to study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat last year. The article charged that the rights put two other previous instructions of the Chairman calling for stability, unity, and economic growth on the same footing with the new one, to confuse the people.

HONG KONG—Former Presi-
dent Richard Nixon arrived in Peking February 21, four years after a visit made to establish contacts between the People's Republic and the United States.

The Nixons were greeted in the cold mist at the airport by a governmental delegation headed by Hua Kuo-feng, the acting premier and Chiao Kuan-hua, the foreign minister. Deputy premier Teng Hsiao-ping was not at the airport.

There were about 400 people who waved flowers and clapped hands to welcome the Nixons. The Nixons arrived from Los Angeles on a special Chinese jet which they flew from the San Francisco airport to Los Angeles. Nixon told his hosts at a banquet held later in his honor that the Nixons' visit was "a particularly good one. Our visit, the Nixons said the two had a friendly conversation on a wide range of issues.

Present at the meeting were American diplomats, foreign minister Chiao Kuan-hua, chief of China's liaison office in Washington Huang Chen, deputy foreign minister Wang Hai-ju, foreign minister Chiang Han-chi and interpreter Tung Wen-
sheng.

Nixon was accompanied to his residence by his wife and an aide.

HONG KONG—Former Presi-
dent Richard Nixon met with Chairman Mao Tse-tung for nearly two hours Monday in the Chairman's office in Peking. A Chinese spokesman said the two had a friendly conversation on a wide range of issues.

The meeting was held in the office of the United States

Mao Has Long Talk With Nixon
The Angel Island Immigration Station

The committee completed its work and submitted a report to the Senate. The bill is now up to the state government to take action.

The works left on the walls of the detention station are an irreplaceable part of the Asian-American historical heritage. They reflect the trials and tribulations of members of one ethnic group, the Chinese, trying to enter the half-closed door of the "land of opportunity."

Discriminatory immigration laws are now a part of the past, but these inscriptions from only a few decades ago are visible reminders that at least two generations of Chinese Americans still carry in their psyches the permanent scars and wounds inflicted by a policy which regarded immigrants of Chinese origin as subhuman. A further study should serve as a reminder of the tragic consequences of racist policies and of the continuing need for attacking and eradicating the basic causes of racism from our midst.

Dr. Albert Yee calls for 'A New Identity'

By SARA CHIN

SAN FRANCISCO—You are not made from a simple formula, flour and water. Your history and worth are and must be measured as more than just your fortune cookie crumbles from the main course.

Professor Dr. Albert Yee called on Chinese-Americans to develop a new identity for themselves that was more "enlightened, non-pot-oriented." Dr. Yee, Graduate Dean at California State University in Long Beach, made these observations at a speech given before the Chinese Historical Society of America on January 17.

CONTACTS
Surveying the history of Western contacts with China, Dr. Yee pointed out the discovery of America resulted from a series of Expeditions in search of an easy route by sea to China. Columbus, landing in the Bahamas in 1492, "searched high and low in vain for China's court and her wealth."

In the first four centuries of the expansion of Christianity, China's silk and tea, concerned the revolutionaries and before and during the War of Independence, China itself introduced many Chinese goods and designs to the West. According to Dr. Yee, school textbooks do not cover this rich history of exploration, of trade in ideas and goods that connected China and America. "Yet, I was delighted to find, with the help of my magnifying glass, that the bicentennial stamps for the Boston Tea Party show facsimiles of the characters on the tea crates."

UNIQUE
Turning to the future, Dr. Yee called on all Chinese Americans to first, "realize you are unique, a great mixture of diverse heritages and cultures from the ends of the earth which has been brewing and coming together for centuries. Let's make the hyphen in Chinese-American mean more than a dimension of character."

Second, "be not afraid of developing a stronger sense of inner meaning and advocacy, rather than accepting the identities others wish to impose upon you."

Noting that it is said that Chinese Americans fight harder against nobody else than other, Dr. Yee called for unity. "I have never heard a complaint of being ex-pressed by Lao Tze should be in Chinese... they have fulfilled... they will say 'We did this ourselves.'"

The Chinese-Americans for their achievements in education, Dr. Yee also called for greater pride. "I believe that the Chinese, individually in areas like psychology and social services where Chinese are under-represented, have made great contributions to society."

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