

Gendering Race: Stereotypes of Chinese Americans in Popular Sheet Music¹

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In the years following the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, a few psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists created a doctrine called Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism applied Darwin's theory of natural selection to the race, gender, and class of humans rather than to animal species as Darwin originally intended. Most notable among the Social Darwinists were English philosopher Herbert Spencer and American social philosopher and cultural anthropologist William Graham Sumner. To the Social Darwinists, the doctrine "explained" social inequality through the argument of survival of the fittest. Sumner wrote,

Let it be understood that we cannot go out of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; non-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members.²

The Social Darwinists argued that white Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic men were the most highly evolved because they were the most intelligent of all groups of humans.

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² Cited in Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America* (NY: Free Press, 1996), 90.

The basis of this assessment was the belief that the white male's brain weighed the most among all ethnic and gender groups.³ In addition, the white male was the highest on their scale of manliness. And the definition of manliness during this era was to be "civilized," to provide for the family, to protect women and children, and to be a self-made man.

It was during this time, however, that the possibility of self-making was complicated by dramatic social changes due to the wave of minorities into urban areas. A large number of African Americans were migrating north; there was a great influx of immigrants from both Europe and Asia, especially China. In the 1870s, 115,000 Chinese arrived on the West Coast, joined by more than 45,000 in 1881 and 1882 until Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act.⁴ The large number of immigrants from China was due to unrest at home and the prospect of employment in the United States. California seemed attractive to many immigrants due to the economic opportunities afforded by the Gold Rush.

In order to exclude the Chinese from cities, there were numerous attempts to set up anti-Chinese ordinances like the laundry tax and a "queue ordinance" in San Francisco.⁵ However, these ordinances were defeated

³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴ Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991; originally published in 1939), table 1, p. 16.

⁵ The "Queue Ordinance" was to restrict the length of hair of men to within one inch of the scalp. Most Chinese men at that time wore a long braid called a "queue." Obviously, the ordinance was targeted at the Chinese. The "Laundry Tax" requires "every laundry employing one horse-drawn vehicle to pay two dollars a quarter license fee, those employing two such vehicles four dollars a quarter, and those using none, fifteen dollars a quarter. Since practically all of the Chinese laundries came under the third classification, the discriminatory

in the California legislature. Undeterred, this anti-Chinese movement continued to work for the exclusion of Chinese, leading finally to the federal Exclusion Act of 1882. This was the first law in the United States that excluded immigrants on the basis of race; the act specifically prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers. In the following twenty years, six more acts were passed and two more treaties were imposed on China to make immigration restrictions more extensive and effective. The process culminated in the Immigration Act of 1924, which prevented the families of all classes of Chinese immigrants from entering the United States.

While laws were being established to exclude the Chinese, the Social Darwinists used pseudo-scientific doctrines to minimize the status of the immigrants. There were two ways to achieve this: since the theory held that white men were at a higher stage of evolution than white women, one strategy was to conceptually group the men of other races with women and children. For example, Ignatius Donnelly's book *Caesar's Column*, published in 1890, called the Chinese "wretched yellow under-fed coolies, with women's garments over their effeminate limbs, [who] will not have the courage or the desire or the capacity to make soldiers and defend [against] their oppressors."⁶

The second strategy was to put immigrants and minorities, including the Chinese, in the category of savages and subhumans. A cartoon, published in an 1877 issue of *The Wasp*,⁷ crystallizes the view. The print is titled, "Darwin's Theory Illustrated—The Creation of Chinaman and Pig" (figure 1). It shows the "evolution" of an ape into a

character of the ordinance is obvious." Both laws were introduced in 1873. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (p. 52).

⁶ Quoted in Kimmel, 92.

⁷ *The Wasp*, 6 January 1877: 217.

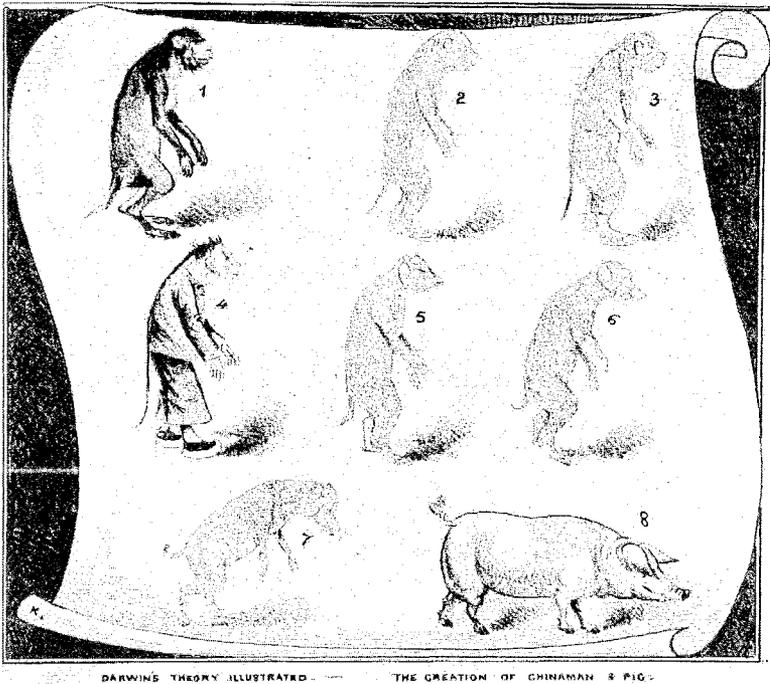


Figure 1. Cartoon published in an 1877 issue of *The Wasp* titled “The Creation of Chinaman and Pig”.

pig, with a Chinese man as the intermediate phase. In the cartoon, the Chinese man’s queue is in the position of the tail of the animal, thus equating the two.

These attitudes were not confined to political or social commentaries. The entertainment industries took up these threads in films, dime novels, and music. The persistence of such stereotypes even to this day, especially in movies and television shows, piqued my interest in investigating further how widespread this kind of stereotyping has been in popular music.

The first step of my research was to collect the data: to what extent were popular songs affected by this

racialist theme? I gathered over 300 songs from seven collections: the University of Missouri at Kansas City Special Collections, the Paramount Theater Collection in Oakland, California, the San Francisco Public Library Music Collection, the Houghton Library of Harvard University, the Popular Music Collection at the University of California at Los Angeles Music Library, the Clements Library at the University of Michigan, and the American music collection at the New York Public Library Music Division. In addition, I obtained materials from various non-music archives such as the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley. Of the more than three hundred titles I identified, most were published in the eastern United States, with New York City having the largest number of publications; the Midwest and the West Coast also published some of the titles.⁸ However, most of the music was widely disseminated regardless of its geographic origin, as evidenced by its existence in archives throughout the country. Music published in New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati was found in West Coast archives; similarly, some items published in San Francisco reside in East Coast or Southern archives. And often the same piece was found in multiple archives. One piece in particular, "Chinatown, My Chinatown," is documented as having been recorded twenty-five times between 1928 and 1941 and has become a jazz standard.⁹ This attests to the universal popularity of the subject.

From the self-advertisements on the covers of the sheet music, we know that many songs were sung in mu-

⁸ The East Coast published 242 items, the Midwest 56, and the West Coast 24. Of the East Coast titles, 217 were published in New York City.

⁹ Richard Crawford and Jeffrey Magee, *Jazz Standards on Record, 1900-1942: A Core Repertory*, CBMR Monograph no. 4 (Chicago: Columbia College, Center for Black Music Research, 1992), 14.

sicals and revues, while others were played by jazz bands. The cover of the music often touted: "as appeared in [a theater name]" or "as sung by [an actor/actress]." A large number of orchestra arrangements with performing parts were found in the Paramount Theater collection, which comprises the collection of Walter J. Rudolph, a vaudeville orchestra leader in San Francisco; a collection from Curt Massey, a Hollywood music director, singer, and composer who bought the NBC collections from the San Francisco and Los Angeles studios; and several other smaller collections from theater and salon orchestras, radio station orchestras, and theater owners.¹⁰ The provenance of the collections within the Paramount Theater Library alone show the popularity of the music and the venues in which the music was performed: vaudeville theaters, dance halls, salons, and radio. Since many of the songs were broadcast on the radio, and since the vocal score versions of these compositions were sold as sheet music intended for the home salon, we know that this genre was heard and performed in the home as well.

Most of the titles that have racist themes can be divided into love songs and "comic" songs, where the "humor" is direct and brutal. A smaller number of earlier songs, found mostly in ethnographic anthologies, are work-related and date from the 1890s to early 1900s. These are the songs most full of hatred, calling for killing the Chinese, demonizing them, or equating them with animals. Many of these songs, written by gold miners and railroad workers, set new lyrics to traditional melodies from Ireland. The Irish were one of the most recent groups of immigrants and therefore were relegated to

¹⁰ There are 70,000 titles from 1890 to 1950 in the Rudolph collection; 13,000 titles from the NBC collection donated by Massey, dating from 1915-1950; and 14,000 titles from many smaller collections.

some of the least desirable jobs: mining and building the railroad alongside Chinese immigrants. The conflicts between the groups are reflected in the hatred present in these songs. The later songs, from the beginning of this century, were mostly published in New York and other big cities. Presumably, these songs were written after the immigrants moved from rural mining and railroad-building jobs to big-city jobs such as in laundries and restaurants. Although the hatred was less overt, it was still present. In this paper, I will discuss the kinds of stereotyping of the Chinese found mostly in the later music: demasculinization, exoticism, and dehumanization, methods of stereotyping that reflect the earlier theories of the Social Darwinists.

Demasculinization

As I discussed earlier, one method of placing Chinese men lower on the evolutionary ladder than Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic men was to link Chinese men to women and children, to make them Darwinian throwbacks. Therefore presenting Chinese men as effeminate was a standard racialist tactic.

The cover for the seemingly grateful song, "China, We Owe a Lot to You"¹¹ shows an effeminized Chinese man with long fingernails, which are normally associated with women in western society; his hands strike a feminine pose, and he wears a colorful (orange and blue) embroidered robe, more like a woman's dress than a traditional man's robe (figure 2). This song was published in 1917, and yet the clothing dates back to the previous dynasty. Here, the artist uses multiple devices,

¹¹ Words by Howard Johnson, music by Milton Ager (New York: Leo Feist, 1917).

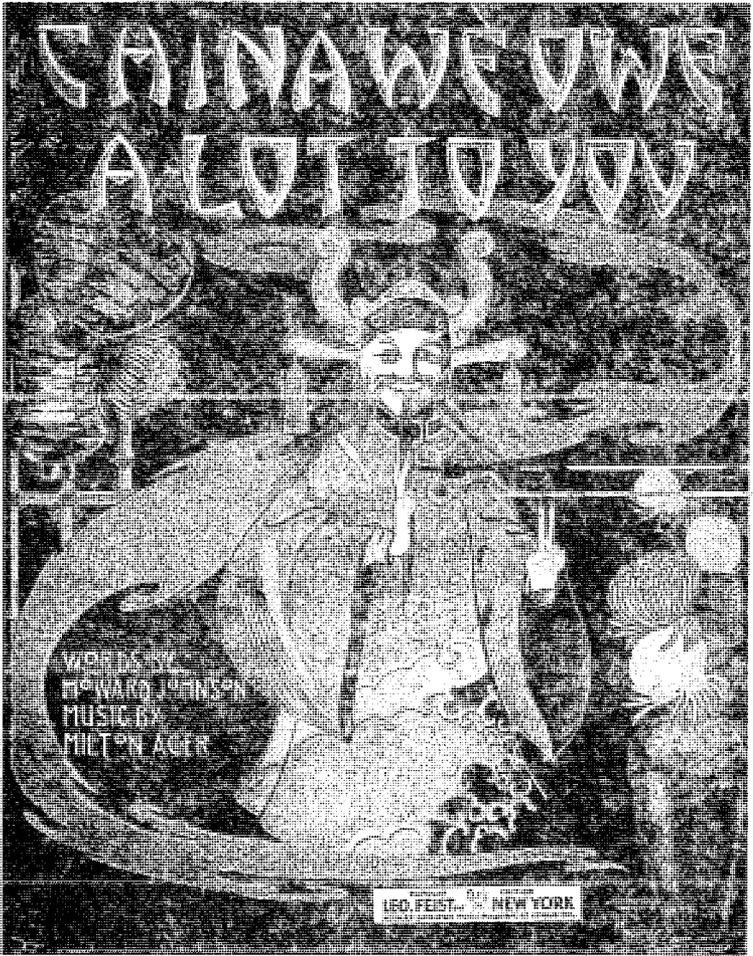


Figure 2. Sheet music cover: "China, We Owe a Lot to You" (1917).

including anachronism, to drive home the point of effeminacy in Chinese men.

In another song, "Jazzie Jazz in Chinaland,"¹² the lyrics describe the Chinese men's voices as "singee way up high in a funny little way." Presumably, the songwriter was alluding to the singing technique in Chinese operas—falsetto singing with a nasal timbre—and transplanted it to these men's jazz singing. In the context of the jazz tradition, the high voice certainly denotes effeminacy. This use of traits in inappropriate contexts, like the use of anachronism, took a strand of truth from one setting and applied it to another to drive home the point of the effeminized Chinese male.

Even in love songs, men were not painted as masculine and desirable mates. Instead, the Chinese men were belittled and treated as children in the songs. It was most common to refer to Chinese men as boys to rob them of their masculinity. To portray Chinese men as masculine would have been a threat to the white male's sexual domain. In "Chong, He Come from Hong Kong,"¹³ the cover shows a cute, meek, Chinese boy with a pigtail (figure 3). The lyrics say that "Little Allee Fo Chong played all day in an oriental way," leading the listener to assume that Chong is indeed a little boy. As the song progresses, we find out that Chong was actually playing the tom-tom in a Chinese cafe, not a child's playing as implied. Even after the audience finds out Chong is a man, the chorus of the song tells us that the "Chineeman cry way up high." Just as in "Jazzie Jazz in Chinaland," Chong is demasculinized by his falsetto singing. he is not a child. Being called "little" and shown as a cute

¹² Words by Herman Bush, music by Louis F. Borromeo and Al Hether (New York: Fred Fisher, 1920).

¹³ By Harold Weeks (New York: Leo Feist, 1919).



Figure 3. Sheet music cover: "Chong, He Come from Hong Kong" (1920).

boy may not seem to be malicious on the surface, but the intent of the songwriter is made clear in the refrain, which calls for Chong to go back to Hong Kong. In order to make Chong an undesirable man, the songwriter implicitly minimizes Chong's masculinity through descriptions of him as a boy.

In addition to making Chinese men undesirable mates by grouping them with children or describing them as effeminate, the rarity of traditional love songs written from a woman's perspective in this repertoire is another way to prevent any positive, "manly" descriptions of Chinese men. Even in the rare example of the song written from a woman's perspective, the man is still called a boy, as in "My Almond-eyed Boy."¹⁴

In the more than 300 songs relating to Chinese Americans that I have examined, "Ching Foo,"¹⁵ published in 1909, is one of a handful that allude to a possible relationship between a Chinese man and a white woman. The rarity of this kind of song indicates that this relationship was taboo. Ching Foo, the main character, is described as a "pigtail man,"¹⁶ who "heard about the pretty girls in Yankee Land. He longed to come here to the shores of Uncle Sam, Then he would win a Yankee maiden's hand." Ching Foo eventually arrives in the United States and the song continues, "The [Yankee] girls all jollied him then ran away," shattering his dream of winning an American maiden's hand. In the song, no

¹⁴ Words by Edward S. Abeles, music by Alfred E. Aarons (New York: M. Witmark, 1900).

¹⁵ Words by Joseph McKeon and William Tracy, music by W. Raymond Walker (New York: Atlas Music House, 1909).

¹⁶ The ubiquitous reference to Chinese men as "pigtail men" in these songs emphasizes not only their exoticism, but also their supposed subhuman or barbaric status. The portrayal of the pigtail as an actual animal tail discussed earlier in this paper makes this link clear.

reason was given for the Yankee girls' flight, except perhaps an implication that this man has a pigtail (an animal's tail) and he is, therefore, uncivilized and not quite human. The song ends with Ching Foo marrying a Chinese woman, a match that stays within the acceptable racial boundaries. The song makes it clear that miscegenation between a Chinese man and a white woman will not be accepted.

Ching Foo is further effeminized in the description of his reaction upon meeting his Chinese maid: "he rolled his almond eyes." The phrase "almond eyes" was used most often to describe Chinese women's eyes in this genre of music and rolling the eyes is considered a feminine gesture. When applied to men, as in this song and in the previously mentioned "My Almond-eyed Boy", such descriptions have a feminizing effect. Perhaps this portrayal of Chinese men as feminine in popular culture minimized the chance of them obtaining white women as partners in real life. Thus, a successful Chinese-white relationship is rare in this and other genres. Even if this kind of relationship is portrayed, as in D. W. Griffith's film *Broken Blossoms* (1919), the Chinese man invariably dies, as does the white woman who had the liaison with the Chinese man.¹⁷ At this time, society could not accept such a relationship because the sanctioned male-female relationship was not an equal one. Men were expected to have the dominant role, and to let a Chinese be in a dominant role (that is, higher on the evolutionary ladder) over a white person was unthinkable. In reality, however, the existence of interracial relationships between Chinese men

¹⁷ For a good discussion of this film, see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 32-45.

and white women during that period is well documented.¹⁸

Even in a relationship between a white woman and a Chinese man that does not involve romance, the life of the woman is ruined because of the liaison. One example is the song "Since Ma is Playing Mah Jong,"¹⁹ where a white mother plays the Chinese game, Mah Jong. Because of her exposure to the game and to the Chinese, everything has fallen apart in her home: she neglects the house, leaves dishes unwashed, makes the father use chopsticks and eat Chinese food, speaks Chinese words, and buys a silk kimono.²⁰ Because of this "calamity," the songwriter declares in the refrain, "since Ma is playing Mah Jong, Pa wants all the 'Chinks' hung." The fear of the Chinese people impinging on the white domestic sphere and thus its women is clearly shown here. On the other hand, a relationship between a Chinese woman and a white man was more acceptable because the concept of a white male dominating a Chinese retains the superior position of the white race. Even so, the relationships described in most of these songs are based on sexual desire for Chinese women. Marriage was not included in the subject because creating mixed-race children would be a threat to the idea of a pure white race.

While interracial romantic relationships between Chinese men and white women are discouraged in songs, there are many songs that describe interracial interactions

¹⁸ See Paul C. P. Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman* (New York: New York University Press, 1987). Siu discusses the sexual lives of Chinese male launderers in Chicago during the 1930s, including their relations with white women and the phenomenon of intermarriage, pp. 250-71 and 279-88.

¹⁹ Words by Billy Rose, music by Con Conrad (New York: M. Witmark, 1924).

²⁰ Kimonos are of course Japanese clothing, not Chinese. This mixing together of all Asian cultures is common among the songs and will be discussed later in the paper.

between immigrant white and Chinese men. A typical theme of these songs is contained in "Hop-Hop Hippety Hop,"²¹ where an Irish man is befriended, cheated, and led to smoke opium by a Chinese man. Even though the recent white immigrants were stereotyped in earlier songs, the stereotypes disappeared in later songs.²² Theater historian James Moy states that:

The process of comparison had a socializing effect on the incoming European immigrant population because its members, viewing the stereotypical representations on stage, could laugh at and deny any connection with the garish characterizations while affirming their new allegiance to America. Accordingly, the British, the French, the German, the Irish, and the Italian were each in turn subjects for viciously humorous attacks before receding into the background to later emerge as central characters on the American stage.²³

European immigrants were capable of "receding into the background" because of their whiteness; such fading was impossible for the Chinese and African Americans, whose skin color and other physical features would always set them apart. Consequently, popular music often put these two groups together as objects of ridicule. The desire to link these two most despised and, in society's mind, most depraved ethnic groups sometimes led to the imposition of African American themes into songs based on Chinese stereotypes. One song, "Wing Lee's Rag-time Clock,"²⁴ awkwardly juxtaposes the two races by combining ragtime, an African American icon, with a Chinese laundryman, a stereotypical occupation for Chinese Americans. The relationship is tangential: the African

²¹ Words by Joe Flynn, music by Billee Taylor (New York: M. Witmark, 1903).

²² See Charles Hamm's discussion in "Irving Berlin's Early Songs as Biographical Documents," *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 10-34.

²³ James S. Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 23.

²⁴ Words and music by Al Trahern (New York: Myil Bros., 1899).

Americans break into the Chinese laundry to dance to an irregular tick of the clock which the songwriter calls rag-time rhythm. Wing Lee, the Chinese laundryman, replies in pidgin English, “No likee ragtime, no likee coon, all lookee samee to me” (figure 4).²⁵

Chorus

No lik - ee rag - time, no lik - ee coon, all look - ee sam - ee to me, _____

No lik - ee rag time, no lik - ee coon shout - ed poor Wing Lee. _____

Figure 4. Excerpt from “Wing Lee’s Rag-time Clock” (1919).

The song emphasizes the most stereotypical elements of the two races, as well as placing them in the same space. Another example using the same two stereotypical cod-

²⁵ No doubt a reference to one of the most popular songs of the decade, Ernest Hogan’s “All Coons Look Alike to Me,” published in 1890, nine years before “Wing Lee’s Ragtime Clock” was published. Although the song was written by an African American, it is intended to reflect the white man’s perspective because this kind of “humor” was profitable. The intended humor in the song is that the Chinese, who all look alike to whites, are imputed to have the same stereotypical attitude toward African Americans.

ings is “Ragtime Temple Bells.”²⁶ The song is about Jack Tar, a sailor who deserted and finds employment as a janitor in a “heathen temple.” When he is told to play the temple bells, he rings them in ragtime rhythm. In the song, as the rhythm of the music turns to ragtime, the lyrics turn into nonsensical syllables interspersed with English phrases. As in “Wing Lee’s Ragtime Clock,” both Chinese American speech and African American music are stereotyped (figure 5).

Figure 5. Excerpt from “Ragtime Temple Bells” (1914).

The notion of the “humorous” mixture of elements from Chinese American and African American cultures was further explored in a song about miscegenation entitled, “The Wedding of the Chinese and the

²⁶ Music by Ivan Caryll, words by James O’Dea, from a “musical fantasy,” *Chin-Chin* (New York: Chappell and Co., 1914).

Coon.”²⁷ The cover shows an African American bridegroom, with exaggerated thick lips and oversized shoes, and the “Chinese” bride in a Kimono and Japanese hairstyle, at the wedding ceremony. The lyrics are full of African American and Chinese stereotypes: African American dialect, such as “I heard there’s gwine to be a mighty jubilee,” and Chinese references such as “joss-house” and “heathen Chinamen”. The songs not only drive home the idea that both cultures are “barbaric,” they also underscore the “freakishness” of the cultural mix.

Exoticism

While Chinese men were demasculinized to ensure them a lower rung in the Social Darwinists’ evolutionary ladder, Chinese women were subject to different kinds of stereotyping. They were portrayed as mysterious and exotic, “China dolls” and prostitutes all in one. In addition, their portrayal was not as hateful or violent, probably due to the rules of restraint for the Victorian middle-class: the “weaker sex” was not to be attacked. Nevertheless, the common image of a mysterious whore placed these women in a lower class than their white sisters.

In these songs, the songwriters take one strand of truth (the fact that some Chinese women were prostitutes) and generalize (the belief that *all* Chinese women are prostitutes). As discussed earlier, there were numerous immigration restrictions put on the Chinese at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The Immigration Act of 1924 prevented the families of all classes of Chinese immigrants from entering the United States. As a result of this Act, between

²⁷ Words by Billy Johnson, music by Bob Cole (New York: Howley, Haviland & Co., 1897).

1924 and 1930, no Chinese women were legally admitted into the United States.²⁸ Thus, many Chinese men visited brothels. In these songs, most Chinese women, especially those in the United States, were portrayed as nothing but prostitutes and temptresses. The only “pure” women were those portrayed as loved ones left at home in Asia, far away and unable to invade the United States economically or morally.

In the song “Chi-nee,”²⁹ the first verse describes the “oriental maiden” who “fills the air with mystic tunes” and other mysterious ways. She does the “chinese dance,” and “vamps” the author “with her glances as she shakes a cat step on the bamboo floor.” The word “vamp” adds to the mystique of her “feminine wiles,” and “bamboo floor” denotes the exotic. The song continues with “ev’ry time I kiss, she pleads for just one more.” The fact that this woman is one of the dancers and seduces men by her vamps and kisses indicates that she is in fact a prostitute.

In “My Little China Doll,”³⁰ the cover tells the story (figure 6). Having been desensitized with constant images of soft porn in modern advertisements, one probably sees this as a picture of a sexy, demure-looking woman: a perfect “China doll.” However, in 1917 when this piece was published, it was a picture of a “loose” woman or a whore, in an inviting pose with her outstretched arms and slightly forward-leaning body, and her half-closed, dream-like eyes. Most importantly, the collar

²⁸ See Victor G. and Brett de Barry Nee, *Longtime Californ’* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 149. As with Ernest Hogan’s “All Coons Look Alike to Me,” this piece was written by black men to cater to the tastes of a white audience.

²⁹ Words by Irene Delaney, music by Spot Cravello (Los Angeles: Cravello and Delaney, 1921).

³⁰ By Gus Van, Joe Schenk, and Jack Yellen (New York: Chas. K. Harris, 1917).



Figure 6. Sheet music cover: "My Little China Doll" (1917).

of her Chinese dress is wide open, which can only be an indication of her “loose” character. The Chinese collar, even to this day, is worn buttoned all the way up the neck, and never the way it is shown in this picture. The lyrics tell us that Pat McCann, an Irish sailor, has sailed into Hong Kong and met this woman. In 1917 when this song was published, Chinese women didn’t just go out and meet men, especially not foreign men, unless they were working in a whorehouse or on the street.

And in “Ching-a-Ling’s Jazz Bazaar,”³¹ the words “jazz bazaar” indicate a brothel: the word “jazz” was synonymous with the word “sex” in the early 1900s. The lyrics of the song confirm it: “you’ll see each China John, with swell kimonos on” looking at “the sing song girlies.” The women dance for the men, and “ev’ry jazzy little dance they do is handl’d neat, sweet. And when they roll their almond eyes, it’s pigtail paradise.”

Although the women are almost always described in the context of desire and sex, they are also described as deceitful, and as providers of drugs (mainly opium) to their customers. This is rather ironic, since it was the British who fought a war to maintain their right to import opium into China in 1842. In “China Dreams,”³² the protagonist says, “I love the smile of the fascinating China doll for she’ll light my dream-pipe and smile but that is all.” And in “Down In Chinatown,”³³ drugs and women were intertwined in the text: “pretty almond eyes, fill you with surprise, as they wander to and fro, incense burning there, sweetly fills the air, with a dreamy haze, oh!” This implies

³¹ Words by Howard Johnson, music by Ethel Bridges (New York: Leo Feist, 1920).

³² Words by Raymond Egan and Gus Kahn, music by Egbert van Alstyne (New York: Jerome H. Remick, 1917).

³³ By Joe Meyer and George Hulten (New York: Leo Feist, 1920).

that the Chinese prostitutes, exotic and beautiful, offer drugs as well as sex to their clients.

The Chinese American women discussed in these songs do not have individual identities, but are instead classified into a generalized group, such as prostitutes.³⁴ This fits into the Social Darwinists' racialist strategy of treating everybody of a particular race or gender as a category rather than as individuals. Thus, many song titles remain generic: "China Baby,"³⁵ "My Dreamy China Lady,"³⁶ and "My Little Hong Kong Baby,"³⁷ and their objects of desire remain anonymous, adding to their mysteriousness. This distancing of the audience from any specific character implies that "they are all alike" and therefore should all be treated the same way, as distant objects rather than as personal friends. This same generalization happens in other aspects of the song, such as associating kimonos, the Japanese traditional clothing, with Chinese culture in "Since Ma Is Playing Mah Jong" and "The Wedding of the Chinese and the Coon," discussed above, as well as in many other songs. The cover to the song "China Dreams"³⁸ shows a "Chinese woman" in a colorful kimono, and wearing a traditional Japanese hairstyle (figure 7). Similarly, the cover of "Ching, A-Long-Fou"³⁹ is full of Japanese icons: a kimono,

³⁴ The idea of generalization here comes from Ellie Hisama. See her article, "Postcolonialism on the Make: the Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie, and John Zorn," *Popular Music* 12, no. 2 (1993): 91-104.

³⁵ Words by Sam Rosen, music by Joe Verges (New Orleans: Universal Music, 1920).

³⁶ Words by Gus Kahn, music by Egbert Van Alstyne (New York: Jerome H. Remick, 1916).

³⁷ Words by Paul West, music by John W. Bratton (New York: M. Witmark, 1902).

³⁸ Words by Raymond Egan and Gus Kahn, music by Egbert van Alstyne (New York: Jerome H. Remick).

³⁹ By Charles B. Weston (New York: Charles B. Weston, 1919).



Figure 7. Sheet music cover: "China Dreams".



Figure 8. Sheet music cover: "Ching, A-Long-Fou" (1919).

a Japanese torii gate, and Mount Fuji, even though the lyrics tell us that the man is from Hong Kong (figure 8).

The idea of generalizing extends to the music itself. Much of the music has the same generic “Chinese sound”: repeated and parallel chords, open fifths, and whole-tone steps. In fact, the sound is so generic that the following three songs, published within a decade, are remarkably similar.⁴⁰ They are in different keys, but the melody is almost the same (figure 9). These three songs are typical in that they include generic elements of exoticism not only in the music, but also in the lyrics describing the mysteriousness of Chinatown and the people.

Figures 9a, b, c: Comparison of three songs

Allegro Moderato

When the town is fast a sleep,
Strangers taking in the sights.

Figure 9a: Excerpt from “Chinatown, My Chinatown” (1910).

⁴⁰ “Chinatown, My Chinatown,” words by William Jerome, music by Jean Schwartz (New York: Jerome H. Remick, 1910); “In Blinky Winky Chinky Chinatown,” words by William Jerome, music by Jean Schwartz (New York: Waterson Berlin & Snyder, [1915?]); “Pipe Dream Blues,” words by Marguerite Kendall and J. Russel Robinson, music by Spencer Williams (Chicago: Lee S. Roberts, 1918).

Moderato

f

p

p

Lights of blin-ky, win-ky Chi-na - town
See that shal-low, shal-low look-ing youth

Figure 9b: Excerpt from “In Blinky Winky Chinky Chinatown”
(ca. 1915)

Moderato

f

fz

mf

p

pp

See old Di Dong puff and blow those thick blue rings,
Op-um flow-er worth it's ver-y weight in gold,

Figure 9c: Excerpt from “Pipe Dream Blues” (1918).

Dehumanization

Another thread that runs through these songs is the idea of dehumanization; the listener is constantly reminded that the Chinese men have pigtails, and are always shrouded in opium smoke. This idea of dehumanization also had its roots in the Social Darwinists' theories. The Social Darwinists put the Anglo-Saxon white male at the top of the evolutionary chain, women and children next, and immigrants and minorities last, because they were considered savages and subhumans. As illustrated above by the cartoon in the magazine *Wasp*, the Chinese were seen at the same evolutionary level as animals; the "Darwinian" cartoon equated the Chinese man's queue with the tail of the animal (see figure 1). In fact, the word pigtail implies that the queue resembles an animal's tail rather than human hair.⁴¹ Authors and artists latched onto this Chinese hairstyle as an icon of backwardness. A cartoon titled "The Pigtail has to Go" illustrates this point (figure 10). Here, Columbia, a symbol of America, is labeled "Civilization" and the Chinese man's queue is labeled "Worn-out Traditions." Thus, Columbia is justified in cutting off the queue. The same idea of "civilizing" the Chinese generated the failed "queue ordinance" mentioned earlier. Sheet music cover artists were similarly obsessed with this "worn-out tradition" and often displayed queues prominently on the covers of the music. The pigtail was often emphasized by showing the men from the back or side view as illustrated by the cover of "All

⁴¹ William Austin, in his book on the songs of Stephen Foster, notes that hair types are symbolic of their characters in Foster's songs. See Susanna Jeanie, *The Old Folks at Home: The Songs of Stephen C. Foster from his Time to Ours*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), chapter 10.

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PUCK BUILDING, New York, October 19th, 1898.
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PRICE TEN CENTS.

"What fault have mortals but"

Puck

Entered at N. Y. P. O. as Second-Class Mail Matter.



THE PIGTAIL HAS GOT TO GO.

Figure 10. Cartoon from an 1898 issue of *Puck* titled "The Pigtail Has Got to Go".

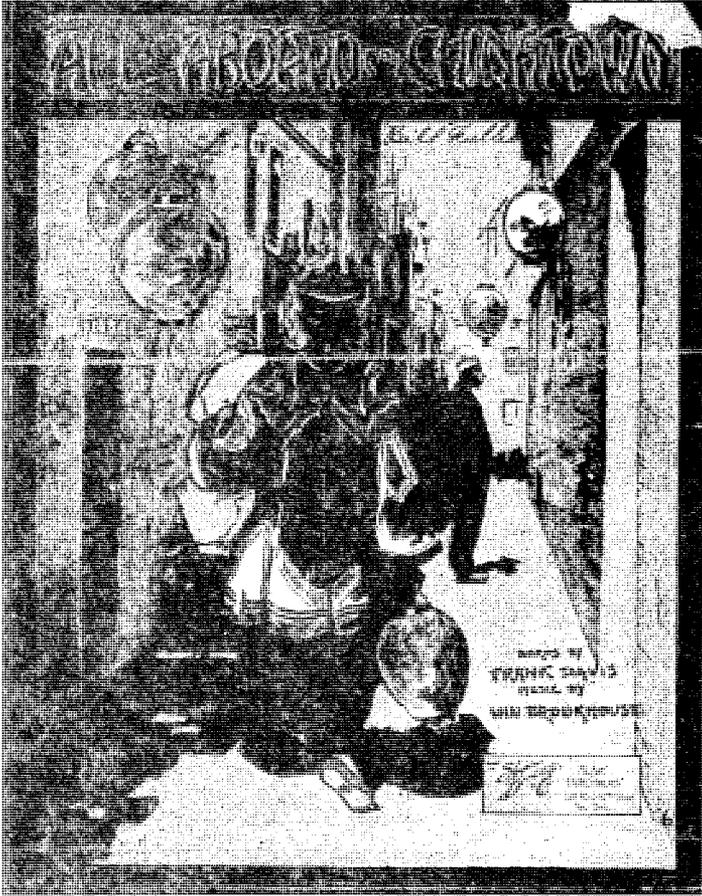


Figure 11. Sheet music cover: "All Aboard for Chinatown" (1916).

Aboard for Chinatown”⁴² (figure 11). One of the first things that strikes the viewer is that no one in the picture faces the front; the only clear view is of these men’s backs, and their braided hair.

This emphasis on the queue—even in frontal views—appears again and again on the covers of the sheet music; on the cover of “The Chinee Laundryman”⁴³ (figure 12), for example, the laundryman’s pigtail sticks out unrealistically to the side. In a more devious light is the cover of “Chung Lo,”⁴⁴ where the man’s crafty expression, fan, and claw-like dark fingernails combine with the flying queue to portray a deceitful, subhuman character (figure 13). The queue is highlighted by its use to “doodle” out the name of the man, Chung Lo. In effect, the pigtail becomes his name, his identity. The subtitle “a Chinese monkey doodle” may in fact have the double meaning of the queue doodling in the air as well as the secondary meaning of the word, “a cheat.” And the use of the word monkey combined with the demonized image on the cover implies that Chung Lo is not a civilized human, but an animal.

⁴² Words by Frank Davis, music by Win Brookhouse (New York: Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., 1916).

⁴³ By Frank Dumont (Philadelphia: Chas E. Escher, 1880).

⁴⁴ By Neil Moret (New York: Jerome H. Remick, 1909).

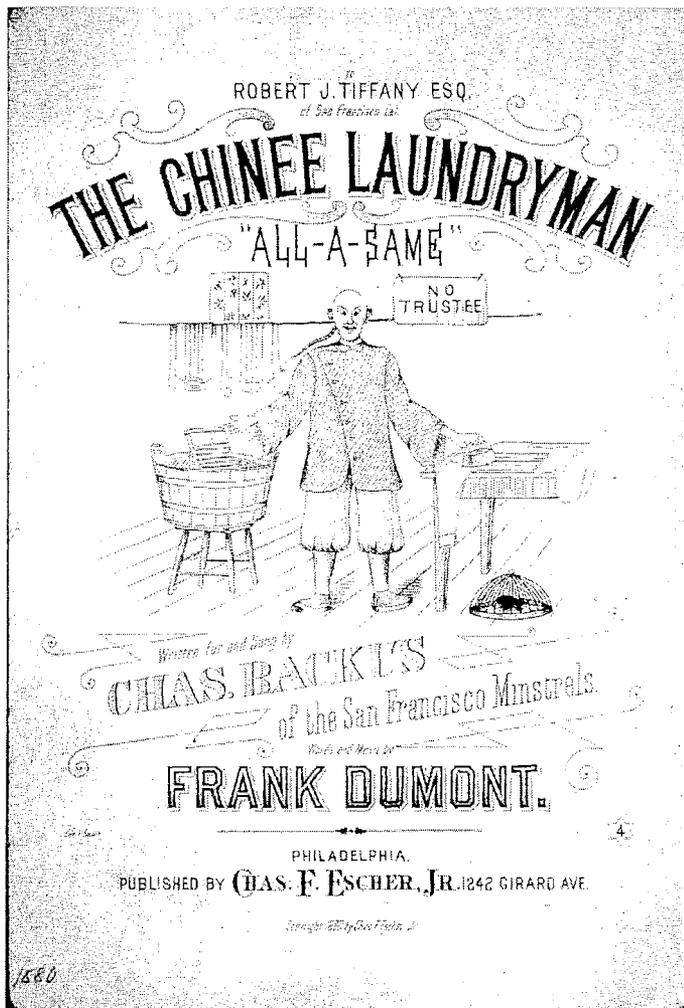


Figure 12. Sheet music cover: "The Chinee Laundryman" (1880).

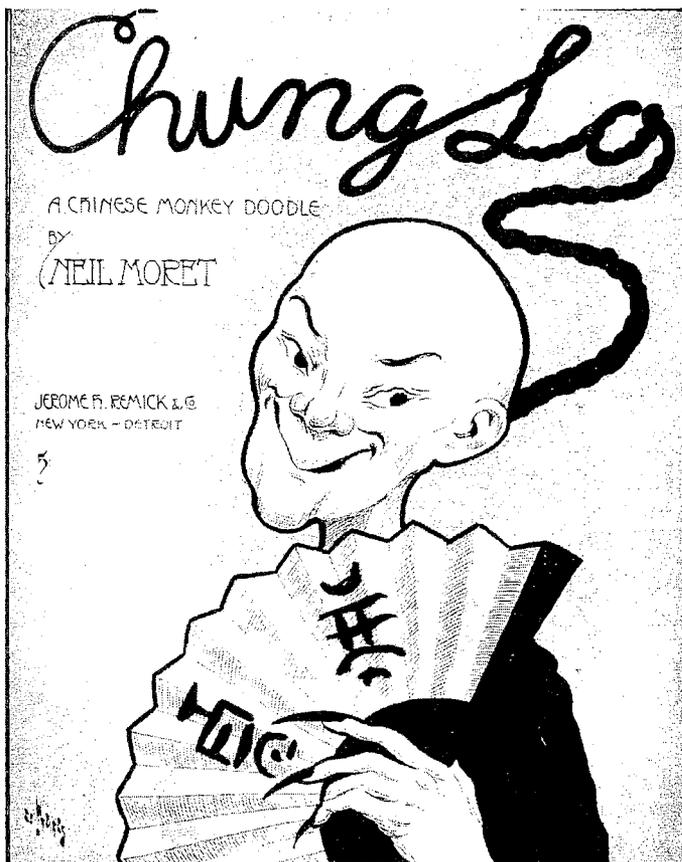


Figure 13. Sheet music cover: "Chung Lo" (1909).

Another tactic used to dehumanize the Chinese is to depict their behavior as barbaric or animal-like. In an early song, "John Chinaman,"⁴⁵ the Chinese workers were described as ungrateful rat- and dog-eating subhumans. It says:

John Chinaman, John Chinaman,
 But five short years ago,
 I welcomed you from Canton, John -
 But I wish I hadn't though;

 I thought of rats and puppies, John
 You'd eaten your last fill,
 But on such slimy pot-pies, John
 I'm told you dinner still.

The song continues to declare that the whole race is a "thieving clan" and that gold is what the Chinese are after. The linking of subhuman behavior (eating rats and dogs) to stealing is typical of songs of the time, highlighting all possible vices and linking them to the Chinese immigrants who were "taking away" mining jobs from white males. It is therefore a threat to the self-making and masculinity of white men.

Other kinds of dehumanization of the Chinese have a prominent presence in popular music as well. The cover for "Chinky Chinee Bogie Man"⁴⁶ depicts a Chinese

⁴⁵ From *A San Francisco Songster, 1849-1939*, ed. Cornel Lengyel (San Francisco: Works Progress Administration, History of Music Project, History of San Francisco Series, 1939), 2:145. Originally in *California Songster*, ed. David E. Appleton (San Francisco: Noisy Carrier Books and Stationery Co., 1855).

⁴⁶ By Haven Gillespie, Richard Whiting, and Neil Moret (San Francisco: Villa Moret, 1929).

man as a demon rising from the horizon like an apparition, with a fang-like Fu-Man-Chu mustache and claw-like fingernails (figure 14). The lyrics state that the Chinese Bogie Man is working out his “sneaky plans,” though what those are is never specified. The man is described as “scary” because his “pigtails shiver” and his “pale lips quiver.” Why this Chinese man is so threatening is never explicitly stated; the text merely states that “mystery [is] lurking all about.” Instead, the symbols for the Chinese (such as the pigtail) are presented as inherently frightening.

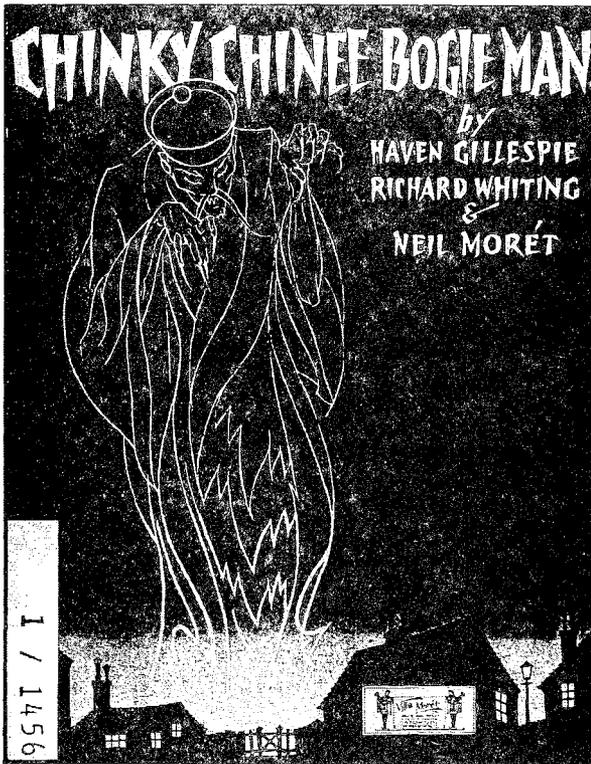


Figure 14. Sheet music cover: “Chinky Chinee Bogie Man” (1929).

Popular songs also depict the Chinese as opium addicts and gambling cheats. Song titles are full of opium references such as “Pipe-Dream Blues” and “In Blinky Winky Chinky Chinatown.”⁴⁷ The lyrics often associate the blinking of the eye with opium smoking. Even when the songs do not have anything to do with smoking opium, the picture on the cover of the sheet music may contain smoking themes, as if that completes the character description of the subject. The cover of the song “Sang Lee”⁴⁸ is an example (figure 15). The entire song relates Sang Lee’s plight of being swindled by a grocer, with no mention of Sang Lee being an opium smoker. However, two of the five scenes on the cover of the music show Sang Lee smoking opium! In the upper left scene, Sang Lee is shown using his abacus to calculate his loss, but the cover artist seemed determined to drive home the link between the Chinese and opium. Since it is implausible for someone intoxicated with opium to have a clear mind, it makes the image all the more ridiculous.

Another aspect of the “uncivilized” nature of the Chinese, according to the songs, is that they are all gambling cheats. In “The Heathen Chinese,”⁴⁹ one of several song versions to Bret Harte’s text, the Chinese servant character, Ah Sin, is trying to cheat two white Americans in a card game that he claims he doesn’t understand. He has been discovered and one of the men is trying to strangle him. The servant on the cover of the music is shown from the side view, with his queue flying as he is

⁴⁷ See note 40.

⁴⁸ By George M. Vickers (Philadelphia: I. L. Gragin, 1878).

⁴⁹ The song was originally published in the September 1870 issue of *Overland Monthly* (San Francisco), the music by Francis Boott. Another version of the song was also published in 1870 with music composed by Charles Towner (Chicago: Root and Cady). Ah Sin is also the main character in Mark Twain and Bret Harte’s play, *Ah Sin*.



Figure 15. Sheet music cover: "Sang Lee" (1878).

strangled by one of the white men; he also has long, dark claw-like fingernails, and cards come tumbling down from his Chinese sleeve (figure 16). Of course the character's name, Ah Sin, is not accidental either, as illustrated in the second verse of the text, "Ah Sin was his name; And I shall not deny, In regard to the same, What that name might imply." Again, the depiction of deceit goes hand in hand with "typical" Chinese characteristics explicitly marked by the artist as subhuman: Ah Sin's queue implies a tail and the long fingernails, claws.

Conclusion

Racism and anti-feminism fed off fears of hindering manhood in America at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The threat came not only from immigrants but also from women who were entering the workforce in droves. In this context, Social Darwinists created a discourse that put any kind of threat to white masculinity onto the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder through demasculinization, exoticism, and dehumanization. Based on the representations of the Chinese in popular songs during this period, and considering how widespread such images were in other popular media, white America appears to have bought into Social Darwinist theory. Discussing the issue of stereotyping in drama, James Moy argues that:

Since the beginning of the Western tradition in drama, dominant cultures have represented marginal or foreign racial groups in a manner that presents these characters as othered—that is, not only as different from people in the dominant culture but also as less than completely human or civilized...the need to demean or dehumanize these othered people serves to maintain or reestablish an advantage for the

dominant culture. Playwrights and audiences alike have been fascinated with racial difference.⁵⁰

Such otherizing practices can be found in popular song as well. The popularity of the songs throughout the early twentieth century—republications and numerous recordings of the same titles, and the large numbers of this genre that survive in archives and music libraries—shows that the mainstream culture accepted and embraced the stereotyping in music as they had in other media. As we enter a new century, these and other stereotypes of course still exist. Asian men in American television and film are overwhelmingly cast as docile houseboys, cold-blooded gang members, or inscrutable kung-fu cops, and similar stereotyping (of the exotic, mysterious “China girl,” for example) persists in contemporary popular songs.⁵¹ A study of the historical roots of these denigrating images of Asians sheds light on the origin of this deep-seated racism in our culture. By gendering race, especially the effeminizing of the Chinese males, American culture believed that masculine gender identity was preserved for white men.

⁵⁰ Moy, *Marginal Sights*, 1.

⁵¹ See the excellent discussion of Asian stereotyping in current popular music in Hisama, “Postcolonialism on the Make.”