



A Remonstrance from the Chinese in California to the Congress of the United States

Pun Chi (c. 1856-1857)

This document was prepared by a committee of Chinese immigrants living in California, but the principal author was a merchant whose name was rendered into English as Pun Chi. The document is a petition, asking the US Congress to protect Chinese immigrants from discrimination and violence. The selection presented here consists of the petition's introduction, followed by the first of twelve sections. Pun Chi, who was not Christian, asked a white missionary working among California's Chinese population, William Speer, to translate the petition into English and forward it to Congress. Speer did not forward the petition, partly because he believed Congress lacked the power to intervene as the petitioners wanted; but about 15 years later, Speer published the petition as part of a book in which Speer appealed to the American public to reject anti-Chinese prejudice. By the time Speer published the petition, Pun Chi had died, reportedly from opium abuse.

The sincere and gracious attention of your honorable body is earnestly requested to the consideration of certain matters important to our peace as foreigners, the following statements of which may be relied upon as certainly true and correct:

We are natives of the empire of China, each following some employment or profession—literary men, farmers, mechanics, or merchants. When your honorable government threw open the territory of California, the people of other lands were welcomed here to search for gold and to engage in trade. The shipmasters of your respected nation came over to our country, lauded the equality of your laws, extolled the beauty of your manners and customs, and made it known that your officers and people were extremely cordial toward the Chinese. Knowing well the harmony which had existed between our respective governments, we trusted in your sincerity. Not deterred by the long voyage, we came here presuming that our arrival would be hailed with cordiality and favor.

But alas! what times are these!—when former kind relations are forgotten; when we Chinese are viewed like thieves and enemies; when in the administration of justice, our testimony is not received; when in the legal collection of the licenses, we are injured and plundered, and villains of other nations are encouraged to rob and do violence to us! Our numberless wrongs, it is most painful even to recite. At the present time, if we desire to quit the country, we are not possessed of the pecuniary means; if allowed to remain, we dread further troubles.

But yet, on the other hand, it is our presumption that the conduct of the officers of justice here has been influenced by temporary prejudices and that your honorable government will surely not uphold their acts. We are sustained by the confidence that the benevolence of your eminent body, contemplating the people of the whole world as one family, will most assuredly not permit the Chinese population without guilt to endure injuries to so cruel a degree. [...]

* * *

We have heard that your honorable nation reverences Heaven. But if they comprehend the

reverence that is due to the heavenly powers, of necessity they cannot humiliate and hate the Chinese. Why do we aver this?

At the very beginning of time, Heaven produced a most holy man, whose name was Pwan-ku. He was the progenitor of the people of China. All succeeding races have branched off from them. The central part of the earth is styled by its inhabitants the Middle Flowery Kingdom. That is the country of the Chinese. The regions occupied by later races are distributed round and subordinate to it. Heaven causes it to produce in the greatest variety and abundance, so that, of all under the sky, this country is the greatest, and has bestowed upon it perfect harmony with the powers of nature, so that all things there attain the highest perfection. Hence we see that Heaven most loves our Chinese people and multiplies its gifts to them beyond any other race.

From the time of Pwan-ku till the present, a period of many tens of thousands of years, there have been born among us a host of sages, such as Fu-hi, Shin-nung, Hwang-ti, Yau, Shun, Yu, Pang, Wan, Wu, and Chau-kung. Gifted by Heaven, they attained consummate excellence. Their beneficent influence extended not alone around them; it shed peace upon all nations. [...] After some centuries, Heaven again produced a sage preeminent and alone in his excellence, whose name was Confucius, whom it made the great teacher of China. He combined what was greatest and best in all that preceded him and became the teacher and exemplar of all ages. As to things on high, he showed men the fear of Heaven; as to things on earth, he taught them virtue.

The sages of whom we have spoken had the wisdom to discern that all men on earth are one family. Now, what is meant in styling all men on earth one family? It is that the people of China, or of countries foreign to it, are all embraced, as it were, in one great circle of kindred, with its parents and children, its elder and younger branches, its bonds of unity; the pervading principle, love; no one member debased, none treated with dislike.

Again, after several centuries, Heaven brought forth one Jesus and ordained him to be a teacher to foreign lands. Now, Jesus also taught mankind the fear of Heaven. He showed that the chief end is to pray for eternal life. He comprehended the reverence due to Heaven and the obligations of virtue. He was in accord with the holy men of China. He looked on all beneath the sky as one great family. He did not permit distinctions of men into classes, to be loved or despised.

But now, if the religion of Jesus really teaches the fear of Heaven, how does it come that the people of your honorable country, on the contrary, trample upon and hate the race which Heaven most loves—that is, the Chinese? Should this not be called rebellion against Heaven? And how is it possible to receive this as of the religion of Heaven?

Source: William Speer, *The Oldest and the Newest Empire: China and the United States* (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton & Co., 1870), 588-591, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083039768>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Additional paragraph breaks inserted for readability. Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions. The spelling of Chinese names and the capitalizing of English ones (including *Heaven*) reproduce the usage of the source publication.

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