



Chinese Immigration, Its Influence on Our Moral and Religious Interests

Samuel V. Blakeslee (1877)

Samuel Blakeslee was a white Congregational missionary who, in 1849, began working in California, where his ministry included an effort to teach English to Chinese immigrants. He delivered the address excerpted here during a conference of California's Congregational churches held in 1877. At a time when opposition to Chinese immigration was increasing nationwide, the conference unanimously adopted three resolutions. The first denounced mob violence against Chinese people living in the United States. The second recommended "most zealous and persevering efforts to evangelize those who are and may be among us." The third urged the US government to restrict Chinese immigration "and so relieve us from impending peril to our republican and Christian institutions." Blakeslee's address makes the case for restricting immigration. His address was subsequently included in a report that California's state senate issued calling for federal action to end Chinese immigration. The federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.

["A people adverse to us in every feature"]

At the present, this country is in its infancy—partly intelligent, partly moral, partly Christian, partly honest, partly established in character, trying for itself and for the nations of the world a new experiment, that of an extended free republic, in which every citizen shall have an equal opportunity to make the government, through his vote, what he may choose to make it: noble, righteous, peaceful, Christian, or base, corrupt, iniquitous, heathenish, and in anarchy, tending to ruin. It is immensely important that the good and true prevail. [...]

Now, right over against our country, a little to the west, is a vast people—an ocean of men—400 millions of human beings—adverse to us in every attainable feature of character; confirmed in heathenish feelings, tastes, prejudices, customs, and habits; differing from us in fixed peculiarities of life, in dress, in food, in dwellings, arts, language, race, color, government, and religion. And this numerous people are discovering that, in every respect, America is vastly more desirable for them than China itself; and they are becoming eager to migrate here in multitudes, to locate themselves and their families permanently, with all their distinct peculiarities. [...] Already 250,000 have come, of whom over 100,000 remain. They are building cities after their own manner; establishing business after their own customs; carrying on operations after their own habits; putting up temples for their own heathen gods; enforcing a heathen religion after their own forms; organizing a secret government to their own liking, with laws after their own notions; instituting a police force, even with the death penalty, to compel obedience; and building dens of debauchery and vice, the same as in their own region and shadow of death, while every inducement is tried to wheedle men as victims into their nets.

The tendency of all this is tremendously towards evil, towards vice and abomination, towards all opposed to the true spirit of Americanism, and is very dangerous to our morality, to our stability, and to our success as a people and nation. [...]

[“The prospect of their conversion is very small”]

But, it is said, we will prevent this by Christianizing and elevating these Chinese, to make them fit to be citizens with us in the great republic. Look at the facts in the case: Of the 250,000 who in twenty-five years have come among us, only two in a thousand have become nominal Christians—while of these, nearly one-half had before been trained in Christian schools by missionaries in China, leaving only about one in a thousand converted really in California. And this is in comparatively favorable circumstances; for as they come in larger numbers, they will the more effectually support each other in their national peculiarities and vices, to remain a fixed, distinct class among us, confirmed in heathen immoralities with an influence, in every respect, tremendously bad. Surely, the prospect of their conversion is, humanly speaking, very small [...]

Now, to all this add the certainty that in a few years—say, twenty or thirty at the most—these Chinese, yet being heathen, must surely become enfranchised as citizens, to vote, hold office, sit as judges of the courts, enter the legislature to make laws, and act equally with others to shape the government to their preferences, and this, too, while they retain their heathen religion, prejudices, vices, and clannish spirit. Then must the sons and daughters of Christians in our land be brought before heathen tribunals, by heathen marshals, to be tried as to their lives, liberty, and property by heathen juries, influenced by heathen prejudices, the same as before juries of other nationalities. All this is inevitable fact, and no theory, if the Chinese continue to come [...]

[“Exposing our whole country to heathen hosts”]

But a taunting question is often proposed: Is not Christianity stronger than heathenism? Is your religion afraid to meet the religion of the Chinese? Christianity is strong, but Americans are not always strong in Christian principle. True Christianity is the embodiment of divine and almighty truth; but believers are a partially regenerated and reconstructed army of moral soldiers, contending—oh, how weakly!—with very powerful and varied forces of evil. Christianity is martialing these moral soldiers, stationing them in squadrons occupying favorable positions, and arranging attacks upon the enemy, certain of ultimate victory in the end—how long first, none of us know. But to say that the champions of Christianity, because of her strength, must relax their effort, cease their vigilance, open the gates of her fortresses to the enemy, put her weapons into their hands, and give them advantages equal with themselves, or else they fear for their religion and dare not trust it in conflict with heathenism, is to utter a falsehood and to charge on Christianity a lie. The very element of practical Christianity is devotion to religious truth and zealous effort for its advancement by the improvement of every God-given advantage and means to that end. Christianity demands all the judicious strategy possible in the contest, and to give up the strategic points because Christianity is strong is to act the traitor in the religious camp and is a crime for which deserters should be hung. God has kept America, for thousands of years, for the experiment of true Christian liberty, intelligence, and vital piety, free from the petrified tyrannies, errors, vices, and irreligions of the old continents. And now, to prostitute all American advantages and opportunities to a vast people, confirmed in old systems of debasement, idolatry, prejudice, immorality, and clannishness, by equal immigration, equal possession, equal vote, equal office, equal lawmaking power, and equal effort to modify the whole government, in its political character, to conform to their tastes, is exceedingly dangerous. It is exposing our whole country and its policy to volcanic eruptions of heathen hosts and abominations. [...]

["Chinese immigration is worse than slavery"]

From the fearful evils of African immigration, called slavery, the results of our fathers' thoughtless misjudgment, we have tried to free ourselves by most terrible struggles. But in Chinese immigration, there is what is vastly worse than that [...] In both cases, Christians used exactly the same arguments for their coming: [...] that the heathen would be better off here than in their own countries; that through their conversion and going back, they would cause the Christianization of their native lands; that God had glorious designs in the movement, and we must not fight against Providence. These arguments in the two cases are exactly the same; and some of the results for evil in the case of slavery we now know, though by no means is the end yet.

But now observe the practical superiority of slavery, over Chinese immigration, as an impelling force for good. Slavery compelled the heathen to give up idolatry, and they did it. The Chinese have no such compulsion, and they do not do it except one or two in a thousand during twenty-five years. Slavery compelled them to give up their heathen customs, habits, fashion, language, and they did it. The Chinese have no such compulsion, and they do not do it; they retain all these. Slavery forbade the building of heathen temples, with all the debasement of their worship. The Chinese build more numerous temples than Americans, and our government, by its laws, guarantees that these temples shall never be diverted to better uses. Slavery compelled the adoption of Christian forms of worship, resulting in universal Christianization. The Chinese have no such influence tending to their conversion and rarely—one or two in a thousand—become Christian in form. Slavery prevented all clanship combinations for executing secret schemes adverse to American interests. The Chinese have every opportunity for such combinations, with a language we cannot learn, enabling them openly, in our midst, to carry out any heathen or anti-American plot. Slavery took the heathens and, by force, made them Americans in feelings, tastes, habits, language, sympathy, religion, and spirit, *first* fitting them for citizenship and then giving them the vote. The Chinese feel no such force; but remaining in character and life the same as they were in old China, unprepared for citizenship, and adverse in spirit to our institutions, they must certainly become enfranchised, hold office, and administer laws.

Why, we see at once how slavery was, in practice, immensely better, more effectual for good upon the heathen than Chinese immigration is, and also it was vastly less dangerous to us [...] Which of these two systems appears the most dangerous? The thoughtful candid answer is: Chinese immigration is worse than slavery. [...]

["True to Americanism, true to Christianity"]

I [...] rejoice in all the coming glory of America. But I know that all our welfare, all our prosperity, all our safety, all our success, depend upon whether, as a people, we are true to ourselves, true to Americanism, true to Christianity—yes, true to American Christian principles and practices. And now, in our infancy as a nation and in our weakness, to open our various fields of labor and our rich resources to hordes of Chinese immigrants, to become equal competitors with us in all of labor, of wealth, or liberty, of politics, of religion, of influence in everything good in America, is to subject America to immense forces of vileness and fearful heathen abominations, involving the greatest danger of ruin. The only possible, even partial,

hope [...] is that of the conversion of their millions to Christianity as they come. But only one or two in a thousand in twenty-five years is the basis of human estimate for the future, and this possibility, humanly speaking, seems to become an infinite impossibility. Hence there remains for us no alternative. Existing treaties must be changed and a legal restriction upon such immigration be enforced [...]

Without such a treaty and such legal restriction, the vast tidal waves of corruption, debasement, and heathenism threaten to roll in upon us from the west. But with such a restraint, California and all America, becoming free from the power of Asiatic evils, may by steady, earnest, persevering efforts rise triumphant over all evil, in the full liberty of Christian, political, civil, and personal freedom, planned by our fathers and offered us by the one God of salvation, made known through the inspired and infallible volume of revelation—the only light to our feet, the only lamp to our path, for the individual, the nation, and the world.

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