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First Draft Essay

The Chinese Six Companies in the Anti-Chinese Movement

In July 1888, an article entitled “Evils of Chinese Immigration,” which was published by *The Los Angeles Daily Herald*, claimed that all the Chinese laborers in the United States belonged to the Six Companies, and the Chinese laborers were virtually slaves based on the treatment from the Six Companies.¹ Several years later, when the Six Companies denied the constitutionality of *Geary Act*, a law that required all Chinese immigrants to register for a resident permit,² *The Los Angeles Daily Herald* fiercely commented that the attitude of the Six Companies in this event had furnished a good reason why the Geary Act should be enforced.³ What were the Six Companies and what role did it play in the Chinese community in the United States? Ironically, this is a question that has become a puzzle for many American politicians and historians for over a century.

This paper uses the Anti-Chinese Movement in the second half of the 19th century in the United States as the historical background to study the nature of Chinese Six Companies, its function, and its significance in the Chinese American community.

This paper argues that instead of importing Chinese laborers and prostitutes, as the Anti-

1. “Evils of Chinese Immigration,” *Los Angeles daily herald*, July 21, 1888, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042460/1888-07-21/ed-1/seq-4>.

2. The person who did not gain a permit will be deported to China by the American custom.

3. *Los Angeles herald*, Sept 23. 1892, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84025968/1892-09-23/ed-1/seq-4/>.

Chinese Movement alleged, the Six Companies was the powerful umbrella organization in Chinese community with a benevolent nature. Moreover, by using the American justice system in fighting against the Anti-Chinese Movement, the Chinese Six Companies, proved that Chinese immigrants were not just passive victims.

The Anti-Chinese Movement in the United States was a less favored topic for American historians up until the recent past. The movement spanned over four decades on the American west coast and required historians to have an overall understanding of American social change in the 19th century. Moreover, the event also required historians to comprehend Chinese culture and its social structure. Therefore, the studies of the Anti-Chinese Movement in the 19th century early 20th century were rare and biased.⁴

Fortunately, the contemporary study of the Anti-Chinese Movement has generated much new scholarship. Many historians began to realize that the Chinese resistance in the movement was considerable. For example, Charles McClain argues that Chinese immigrants in the second half of the 19th century were thoroughly familiar with the American government institutions and fully understood how to use those institutions to defend themselves.⁵ Lucy Salyer also expresses similar views with McClain and even argues that Chinese immigrants enjoyed remarkable success in

4. The public opinion about Chinese immigration at that time was fully biased, and many people believed the Chinese was inferior to the white people. For example, See United States Congress, Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, "Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration: February 27, 1877," (Washington, D.C: G.P.O., 1877).

5. See Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (California, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

combatting discriminatory legislation in the courts.⁶ More recently, Scott Baxter also asserts that Chinese immigrants were not passive victims.⁷

However, many contemporary scholars, despite turning their attention to the Chinese resistance, continue to misunderstand the role of the Chinese Six Companies in the Chinese community. For instance, Jean Pfaelzer, in her book *Driven Out*, falsely states that the Chinese Six Companies kidnapped Chinese women and forced them to be the prostitutes.⁸ Scholars such as Alexander McLeod even alleges that the Six Companies imported coolies, ran gambling dens, and established their own secret laws.⁹ More importantly, many contemporary scholars fail to see the Six Companies' importance when they address the Chinese resistance. For example, Yen Ching Hwang, in his book *Coolies and Mandarins*, argues that the Chinese legation was trying to defend the Chinese immigrants' interests by using diplomatic negotiations.¹⁰ However, Yen's book fails to recognize that the Chinese Six Companies were helping the Chinese legation to shape Chinese foreign diplomacy. Therefore, as Yu Cheng Qin argues, scholars may be good at understanding Chinese immigration, but they are also shortsighted when they deal with the Chinese Six

6. Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (North Carolina, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 7.

7. Scott R. Baxter, "The Response of California's Chinese Populations to the Anti-Chinese Movement," *Historical Archaeology* 42, no. 3 (2008): 29.

8. Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2007), 93.

9. Alexander McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1947), 213-215.

10. Ching-Hwang Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese During the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore, Kent Ridge: Singapore University Press, 1985).

Companies.¹¹

Indeed, the current scholarship, except Qin's book, has not intensely and systematically studied the Chinese Six Companies. Most of the studies do not consider the Six Companies an important subject. In fact, despite some contemporary scholars' notice of the existence of Chinese Six Companies, very few of them use the Six Companies to illuminate the Anti-Chinese Movement in the Chinese perspective. For example, Him Mark Lai details the historical development of the Six Companies but he does not connect its development with the Anti-Chinese Movement.¹² In comparison, Qin's book is the only exception. Qin chronologically depicts the development of the Six Companies; moreover, he also combines the Anti-Chinese movement in his narrative, and thus argues that the Six Companies was the major force shaping the Chinese legation's diplomatic strategy.¹³

Thus, this paper adds to the scholarship by exploring the nature and origin of the Six Companies, and its accomplishment during the Anti-Chinese Movement to combat the racial stereotype which claims Chinese immigrants were merely passive victims, or that the Six Companies were criminal or abusive organizations.

This paper uses historical newspapers, personal testimonies, and both primary and secondary

11. Yucheng Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China's Policy Toward Exclusion* (Hawaii, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 3.

10. Him Mark Lai, "Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1987, pp. 13–51, <https://himmarklai.org/digitized-articles/1986-1990/historical-development-of-the-chinese-consolidated-benevolent-association>.

13. Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, Introduction.

books to explore the character of the Six Companies and their significance in Chinese resistance. Among them, Qin's book provides a very insightful interpretation of the significance of the Six Companies. McClain and Salyer's books also give this paper much substantial evidence to support the thesis. For the primary books, Hoy William's book is considered vital because it was published by the Six Companies itself.¹⁴ Moreover, several Congressional reports and Frederick Bee's memoir also contributes much more information for this paper.¹⁵

The rest of the paper will follow into two parts. The first part will introduce the district associations, which were the ancestors of Chinese Six Companies, and then continue to discuss the emerging of the Six Companies and confront the myths around it. The second part of the paper will focus on several flashing points during the Anti-Chinese Movement and analyze how the Six Companies protected the Chinese community by using American institutions. Finally, based on the previous discussion, the conclusion part of this paper will reassess the Six Companies and the implications of the misunderstandings surrounding it.

District Associations and the Origin of the Chinese Six Companies

The Six Companies, as an institution, did not exist until the 1860s. What existed before the Chinese Six Companies were the surname associations, fighting tongs, and the district associations. In fact, the Chinese Six Companies, as Hoy explained, was formed by the district

14. William Hoy, *The Chinese six companies; a short, general historical resume of its origin, function, and importance in the life of the California Chinese* (California, San Francisco: The Chinese Consolidated Benevolence Association, 1942).

15. Frederick Bee, *The Other Side of The Chinese Question; Testimony of California's Leading Citizens; Read and Judge* (CA: San Francisco: Robert D. Reed, 1886).

associations.¹⁶ Therefore, a brief study of district associations is necessary for better understanding the Six Companies.

By 1851, the number of Chinese arrived in California was about 12,000.¹⁷ The dramatic increase of the Chinese population in California required some type of social organization to fulfill the social demand for Chinese immigrants. Thus, based on their domestic experience, some wealthy California Chinese established several district associations to serve their countrymen.

In China, the district association was called *Huiguan* which means the meeting hall. As Qin explained, the district association in China had a long tradition. By collecting fees from their native members, the district associations supported those natives who came from the same region as the district association represented. For example, when a person emigrated to a city, the district association the person belonged to would help that person with lodging, finding jobs, caring for the sick, providing a place for ancestor worshiping, and resolving the disputes between natives. Moreover, district associations usually opened their membership to all their natives and required them to register the membership if they wanted to receive aid. In a patriarchal society, district associations also had judicial power over their members, which means that district associations had certain authority to regulate their natives.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, district associations in the United States served all the same functions as

16. Hoy, *The Chinese six companies*, 9.

17. Hoy, *The Chinese six companies*, 1.

18. Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 27-30.

they had in China. More importantly, because of the language barrier and culture difference in the United States, Chinese immigrants' leisure activity mainly happened in their community and thus enhanced the importance of the existence of district associations. According to the statistics in 1876, six influential district associations, which formed the Chinese Six Companies in the early 1860s, together claimed about 151,300 Chinese memberships which was almost the same as the U.S census count of the entire Chinese population.¹⁹ Based on the number, it is fair to state that the district associations, by their functions and the outside factors, became the powerful organizations in the Chinese community in the 1850s.

Despite the establishment of district associations helped Chinese immigrants to improve their living conditions, Chinese merchants and district leaders still felt the need to establish an institution that could address the overall issues related to Chinese immigrants. There are three reasons that prompted such a decision. First, the district associations only helped their natives based on their geographical distributions in China. However, when the Taiping Rebellion undermined most of the southern provinces' economy in China during the 1850s, more and more Chinese refugees chose to emigrate to America. These refugees, in other words, were not eligible to register in most of the district associations because they were not the natives of the district associations. A situation like this prompted the Chinese district leaders to build an overall agency to serve all Chinese immigrants. Second, in fact, before 1878, the Chinese empire did not have any legation in the United States. The Chinese community, on the other hand, by its dramatic

19. Hoy, *The Chinese six companies*, 16.

development in the United States, wanted a spokesman in Washington, D.C. to represent their interests. Third, the Anti-Chinese Movement also accelerated the need for Chinese Six Companies. After 1854, American courts already denied using Chinese testimonies because, as California Supreme Court Chief Justice Hugh Murray declared: “Chinese people’s mendacity is proverbial, and they are inferior in nature.”²⁰

Moreover, the Chinese labor forces, because of their low wages, caused Caucasians to detest their existence. A consequence was that during the entire 1850s, Chinese miners suffered endlessly assaults and even roundups from Caucasians.²¹ As a result, as Qin states, anti-Chinese violence forced Chinese immigrants to abandon their nativism because they found whites treated them only based on their skin color and nationality, rather than the geographical distribution in China or local dialects. Thus, the emerging of Chinese Six Companies also embodied the awakening of Chinese nationalism.²²

The date of establishing the Six Companies, as Hoy conjectures, should prior to 1862. Composed by influential district associations, the Chinese Six Companies inherited the same functions as the district associations had. It should be noted that the Chinese Six Companies is a term that was bestowed by Caucasians, and its official name is the Chinese Consolidated Benevolence Associations.

Chinese Six Companies: Its Relationship with Importing Chinese laborers and Prostitutes

20. Hall, 4 Cal. 399 (1854), quoted in McClain, *In Search of Equality*, 22.

21. See Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, Chapter I.

22. Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 6-11.

From its establishment to the passage of Chinese Exclusion Act, the American press and politicians firmly believed that the Chinese Six Companies directly participated in importing Chinese contract laborers. Some Americans even accused the Six Companies, aligned with the steamships companies, of creating the Coolies Trade. Moreover, the statement potentially assumes that Chinese Six Companies, via sending thousands of Chinese laborers to America, gained huge profit and hurt the free market system in the United States. Such a statement, however, misunderstands the difference between Chinese laborers and coolies.

First, the Chinese Six Companies did not participate in the Coolie Trade because the Chinese laborers in America were not coolies. The terminology of coolies comes from India, and it refers to a caste of low laborers according to Otis Gibson who was a missionary from the United States and had worked in China about six months.²³ Gibson also testified that the Chinese men in his mind were not in servitude but the all freemen except women. Gibson explained that the Coolies Trade was applied to the importation of coolies into Cuba and South America, but China did not have such things as slavery in the American notion.²⁴ Frederick Bee, who was the spokesmen for the Chinese Six Companies and the Chinese consul in the San Francisco, even gives a wages statistic of Chinese laborers which shows that in some professions such as domestic servants, their payment is 25 dollars per month more than the Caucasian.²⁵ The amount of payment

23. Frank Shay, *Chinese Immigration: Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration; Testimony Taken Before a Committee of The Senate of the State of California* (California, Sacramento: State printing Office, 1876), 27.

24. Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 27.

25. Bee, *The Other Side of The Chinese Question*, 70.

definitely smashed the rumors that Chinese immigrants were mostly coolies because many biased reports at that time believed that Chinese coolies could only earn enough to buy a bowl of rice every day.²⁶

Second, by understand the relations between the Six Companies and steamships companies, the cooperation between Chinese Six Companies and steamships companies prove that Chinese Six Companies did not threaten the freedom of Chinese immigrants. There was clear evidence that the Chinese Six Companies made an agreement with the steamships companies which transported Chinese immigrants between China and the United States. As the agreement stipulated, the steamship companies would not sell a ticket to a Chinese person who wanted to go back to China until the person acquired a certification from the Six Companies.²⁷ Thus, the stipulation caused a lot of accusations because the American press viewed it as the direct evidence that all the Chinese immigrants were subject to the Six Companies.²⁸

However, there was some objective fact behind this stipulation. In the second half of the 19th century, a lot of Chinese immigrants were situated in the poor class in Chinese society, which meant most of them could not pay their expense for boarding the steamships. Moreover, many of them, because the language of barrier, could not find jobs immediately after they arrived in the United States. So, the situation caused Chinese immigrants to be unable to afford the fees of memberships when they lived in the lodges run by the Six Companies. However, as a benevolent

26. Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 17.

27. Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 71-77. Also see Bee, *The Other Side of The Chinese Question*, 21. And see Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 26.

28. Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 17.

society, the Six Companies did not urge their members to pay the fees on time and even loaned them money. Therefore, as many scholars have illustrated, the only purpose of making an agreement with the steamships companies was that Chinese Six Companies want to make sure their members pay off their debts and member fees before they left.²⁹ Moreover, as a benevolent organization, the Chinese Six Companies even shipped the bones of their deceased members back to China without charge.³⁰ Apparently, that is an action that a labor broker would not do.

Third, the Chinese Six companies even discouraged Chinese immigrants from coming to the United States. In 1870, when the Anti-Chinese Movement further increased, the article named “Our San Francisco Letter” translated the Six Companies’ telegraph text from Chinese. It state:

*California and the Pacific States are very different now to what they were a few years ago. That the prevailing impression that money can be easily made is a wrong one. Chinese miners do make money in them (White people) they are liable to be robbed and murdered. China man are not eligible in the court and thousands of China man cannot find jobs.*³¹

Therefore, if Chinese Six Companies gained the profit from consulting their countrymen coming to the United States, then this telegraph text would make this assumption very self-contradictory.

The charge that the Six Companies imported and controlled the Chinese prostitutes was even

29. See, Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 71-77. Also see Bee, *The Other Side of The Chinese Question*, 21. And see Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 26.

30. Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 17.

31. “Our San Francisco Letter,” *Weekly Trinity journal*, June 4, 1870, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025202/1870-06-04/ed-1/seq-2/>.

more ridiculous. From the Chinese Six Companies' perspective, running prostitution and other types of illegal business was incompatible with their purpose. William Speer, who was an American missionary in China, observed that the Six Companies are the church for the Chinese society.³² In his translation, Speer illustrates that the Six Companies had stringent regulations which prohibited its members from calling on prostitutes and gambling with others in the Six Companies.³³

Moreover, one of the methods that Chinese Six Companies used to establish their authority among the Chinese community was to appoint Confucian scholars as its leaders.³⁴ Because their high ranking in traditional Chinese society, Confucian scholars could also assert their authority in American Chinese community. On the other hand, Confucianism heavily opposed prostitution. Therefore, it was not very possible to believe that those Confucian scholars would agree to the Six Companies to running such businesses because such behavior would undermine its reputation in the Chinese community. In fact, many officials of the Six Companies always denied that the Six Companies had participated in the prostitutions' business.³⁵

Furthermore, as above mentioned, there were other types of organizations in the Chinese Community, such as surname associations and fighting tongs. An interesting phenomenon is that a Chinese immigrant while he was the members of the Six Companies, could also belong to his

32. William Speer, *The Oldest and the Newest Empire: China and the United States*, (PA, Pittsburgh: Robert S. Davis & Co., 1877), 574.

33. William Speer, *The Oldest and the Newest Empire*, 564.

34. Hoy, *The Chinese six companies*, 11.

35. See, Shay, *Chinese Immigration*, 74, 98.

surname association and even several fighting tongs.³⁶ That is, if a businessperson who ran a house of prostitution claimed to be a member of the Six Companies, it does not mean that his business represented the Six Companies' interests. In fact, a typical mistake that Americans at that time made is that they falsely connected the individuals and the Six Companies together and believed the individual behavior represents the willing of the Six Companies.

Some contemporary historians' interpretation may explain who imported the Chinese prostitutes. As Benson Tong explained, when a ship arrives in port with prostitutes on board, fighting tongs would go down and receive them.³⁷ On the other hand, aiming to improve the image of the Chinese community, the Six Companies occasionally requested city authorities to enact laws to close the brothels and gambling places.³⁸ Also, as Hoy notes, there was an unwritten law in the Six Companies indicating that the president of the Companies could not be the member of fighting tongs.³⁹ In fact, throughout the late 19th century, fighting tongs become the rival of the Six Companies, and both of them aimed to eliminate each other. Therefore, Chinese Six Companies, because its nature and stance, is impossible to participate in the business about prostitutions.

In sum, the accusation, which aligns the Chinese Six Companies with the Coolies Trade,

36. Note: generally, fighting tongs were a type of organization in the Chinese community which often tied to criminal activities. Some people would refer fighting tongs as secret societies or sworn brotherhoods. Hoy, *The Chinese six companies*, 8.

37. Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 67.

38. Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 67.

39. Hoy, *The Chinese six companies*, 11.

control of Chinese laborers, incitement of Chinese to emigrate to the United States, and importation of Chinese prostitutes were false. Due to the racial bias, culture difference, and the Anti-Chinese sentiment, Chinese Six Companies endured most of these unfair accusations more than a century. Those accusations, imply the racial stereotypes in the American, which American white people hold for the Asian American, rooted in the culture and philosophy's incompatibility. It also reflects that 19th century America was a potential hotbed for racial science and eugenics which began to gain popularity in the early 20th century.

Chinese Six Companies in the Anti-Chinese Movement

The Six Companies' performance in the Anti-Chinese Movement was impressive. Before the establishment of Chinese legation, the Six Companies played the role of Chinese legation in Chinese community. The Six Companies also challenged many anti-Chinese ordinances by wielding its social power and American justice system. Furthermore, in the process of establishment of the Chinese legation, the Six Companies also made a considerable contribution. Finally, in 1894, the Six Companies publicly protested the enforcement of the Geary Act which would set the stage for Sino-American conflicts in the early 20th century.

The cases of Queue Ordinance and Lodging House Ordinance embodied the common strategies that Chinese Six Companies employed in defending the Chinese community. The *Queue Ordinance* was first proposed in 1873 and re-issued at 1876 in San Francisco and stipulated that all prisoners in the city must have their hair cut within an inch of the scalp. The Lodging House Ordinance issued in 1870 regulated that the amount of space to be allocated to

the tenants of lodging houses. Since the Chinese Six Companies provided lodging to their countrymen and Chinese immigrants usually had a long queue, these two ordinances undoubtedly targeted the Chinese immigrants and the Six Companies.

In response to these anti-Chinese laws, Chinese Six Companies first recruited white Chinese sympathizers to work as their spokesmen. These men were Frederick Bee and Benjamin Brooks.⁴⁰ These two men on the one hand debated the anti-Chinese laws of California in the Special Investigation Committee of the Chinese immigration. On the other hand, they also defended Chinese people in the circuit court. For example, when Bee testified the Special Committee, he argued that “the infamous ordinances (Queue Ordinance and Lodging House Ordinance) is a disgrace to any civilization.”⁴¹ Brooks, in the court, also argued that “the ordinance (Queue Ordinance) is special legislation imposing a degrading and cruel punishment upon a class of persons who are entitled, alike with all other persons within the jurisdiction of the United States, to the equal protection of the laws.”⁴²

Chinese Six Companies also understood to use the *Burlingame Treaty* to pressure the American government. As the treaty guaranteed, the Chinese immigrants in the United States could enjoy the privilege of immigrating freely. In the Six Companies’ statement of their

40. *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration: February 27, 1877*, 1.

41. *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration: February 27, 1877*, 47.

42. *The Federal Cases, Comprising Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit and District Courts of the United States, Book 12 Case No.6,394-Case No.7,009* (Illinois: West Publishing Company, 1895), 252.

grievances to State Department of California at December 1877, the Six Companies reminded the State Department of California that the government of California has failed to protect Chinese immigrants as the treaty guaranteed and therefore Six Companies urge the California government to aid.⁴³ More surprisingly, in 1876, the Six Companies even wrote a letter to President Grant to complain the harsh situation that Chinese immigrants suffered in the California and accused the officials in San Francisco against the Chinese immigrants.⁴⁴

Multiple methods that Chinese Six Companies used in battle with anti-Chinese ordinances were successful. For the Lodging House Ordinance, after the Six Companies costs about 5,000 dollars as the fee for testing the laws, the court decision emphasized that the city should not enforce the law only in the Chinese community. The court also advised that the police had no right to break in at random to see if people were violating the law.⁴⁵ For the Queue Ordinance, the Six Companies completely won this battle. As Judge Huffman declared:

*The ordinance being directed against the Chinese only, and imposing upon them a degrading and cruel punishment, is also subject to the further objection, that it is hostile and discriminating legislation against a class forbidden by that clause of the fourteenth amendment to the constitution.*⁴⁶

At that time, one San Francisco paper commented that the action of Chinese Six Companies

43. "The Six Companies: Statement of their Grievance," *Helena weekly herald*, Dec 20, 1877, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036143/1877-12-20/ed-1/seq-5/>.

44. Lloyd Briggs, *California and the West, 1881, and Later* (Boston: Wright Potter Printing Company, 1931), 99-103.

45. McClain, *In Search of Equality*, 69.

46. *The Federal Cases*, 252.

in the fight with *Queue Ordinance* was incredible.⁴⁷

By understanding the importance of having a legation in the United States for Chinese immigrants, the Six Companies also assisted the establishment of Chinese legation. In June 1874, when the Chinese Ambassador Chen Lan Bin arrived San Francisco, the officials of the Six Companies including Bee and Brooks greeted Chen at the port. During the time Chen stayed in San Francisco, he went to the Six Companies and talked to the several presidents about the issues of Chinese immigrants.⁴⁸ Although in his diary, Chen did not mention too much the detail of conversation between he and the Six Companies, he did affirm the contribution that Bee and Brooks did for Chinese Immigrants. Moreover, according to San Francisco's newspaper at time reported, the Chinese empire would soon establish a consulate in the city and the Six Companies would defray the expense.⁴⁹ In 1878, when the Chinese legation established in Washington D.C, Chinese emperor also commissioned Bee who was the attorney for the Six Companies at the same time as the first consul at San Francisco.⁵⁰

From Chen's personal dairy and newspapers' report, it is fair to state that in the early period of Chinese legation in the United States, because the absence of experience, Chinese legation was willing to accept the assistant from the Six Companies, and Chinese legation even appointed

47. McClain, *In Search of Equality*, 73.

48. Lan-Pin Chen, *Shi Mei Ji Lue, The Trip of the United States, Cuba, and Peru* (Chang Sha: Yuelu Shu She, 2016), 7-10.

49. "The Chinese Consulate-He will Probblly be an American-More Chinese student," *Los Angeles daily herald*, 01 Aug. 1874, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84038806/1874-08-01/ed-1/seq-2/>.

50. "The Chinese Must Go," *Daily globe*. (St. Paul, Minn.), 18 Nov. 1878, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025287/1878-11-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.

the officials of the Six Companies as their consuls. The evidence also reveals that the Six Companies and the Chinese legation had a close relationship. Thus, it is crucial to realize that because the close relationship, the Six Companies and Chinese legation worked together in fighting against the Anti-Chinese Movement effectively. The Rock Springs Massacre, for instance, with the help of Bee, Chinese legation successfully forced the U.S. congress to pay compensation to the Chinese government.⁵¹

The Geary Act, issued in May 1892, symbolized the Anti-Chinese Movement was entering another level. Also, the fight of Chinese Six Companies in this vortex determined that the Sino-American relationships will fall into another freezing point in its near future. As Salyer explains, the Geary Act required all Chinese laborers to apply for a certificate of residence from the collector of internal revenue in one year. If Chinese laborers failed to register, they might be arrested and deported by the executive department.⁵²

The Six Companies' reaction to the law was an unexpectedly intransigent. First, by using their influence and the help of lawyers, the Six Companies posted circulars in the Chinese community to encourage Chinese immigrants not to register. The circulars directly stated that the Six Companies do not want Chinese to obey it because the law degrades Chinese.⁵³ Second, the Six Companies soon wrote a letter to collector Quinn as the formal way to inform the American

51. For further detail of the Rock Springs Massacre, please see Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 116-118.

52. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*, 46.

53. "The Heathen Chinese," *Baxter Springs news*, Sept 24, 1892.
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040592/1892-09-24/ed-1/seq-3/>.

government that Chinese immigrants would not obey it because the law in their mind is unconstitutional.⁵⁴ Third, the Chinese Six Companies soon again act with Chinese legation to fight in the battle. In August 1892, the president of the Six Companies with Minister Cui visited Secretary of State Foster during which they protested the unfairness of the *Geary Act*.⁵⁵ Fourth, based on their previous experiences, the Six Companies again hired three prominent lawyers to challenge the constitutionality of the *Geary Act*.⁵⁶

The outcome of the battle for the Six Companies in the first phase was considerable. By the deadline of the registration, less than one-tenth Chinese immigrants had registered.⁵⁷ The situation led to the coming of McCreary Amendment which granted an additional six months for Chinese to register. However, after the loss from the Supreme Court, Chinese Six Companies can only swallow a painful fact. However, as Salyer suggests, despite losing in a determined fight, the strong Chinese response in this battle showed that the Chinese community and its leaders can unite quickly against the law to hamper its implementation. Therefore, the ending of the fight over the Geary Act was another beginning of the national conflict in the Sino-American relationship's history. As Li Hong Zhang, a leading statesman at that time warned that China would treat the American in China as the American had treated the Chinese in the United States.⁵⁸ Indeed, later events such as the Boxer Rebellion and the Chinese boycott of 1905

54. The Six Companies: Their Reasons Given for Not Registering. *Los Angeles Times* Sep 25, 1892, ProQuest Historical Newspaper: Los Angeles Times.

55. Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 121.

56. For further details about litigation, see Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*, 47-58.

57. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*, 48.

58. Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 121.

clearly illustrated Li's warning. On the other hand, because of its action and overall performance during the Anti-Chinese Movement, the Six Companies was far away from just a normal benevolent organization.

Conclusion

The nature of Chinese Six Companies is undoubtedly a benevolent society. From its functions and purpose, it is fair to assert that the Six Companies, as its aim was to provide aid for the Chinese, embodied the ideology of Confucianism. However, the Six Companies was not just a simple benevolent society. Since the Six Companies had a certain social power for regulating and organizing its members, such facts provided evidence for Americans that the Six Companies was the government of Chinese community. Thus, as Hoy commented, the Six Companies was a unique organization because of its historical context. The context may include culture conflicts, language problems, and very early racial biased. Therefore, the Six Companies would find that in order to fulfill its commitment to the Chinese community, having a certain authority and social control was necessary. Besides, the absence of a Chinese legation also led the Six Companies to speak for the Chinese community.

The Six Companies were also the leading Chinese resistance in response to the Anti-Chinese Movement. Combatting the California legislature, unfair accusations, and mob violence, the Six Companies revealed its sense of responsibility for Chinese immigrants. Although the Six Companies could not avoid the tragedies happened, its accomplishments were still considerable. On the other hand, the Chinese Six Companies also, using itself as an example, demonstrates that

Chinese immigrants were not just passive victims.

Moreover, the accusations against the Six Companies also indicate that there was a cultural misunderstanding between China and the United States. It is very crucial to observe that almost all leading American Chinese sympathizers have had working experience with Chinese immigrants, and they always argued that the Chinese Six Companies were a benevolent society. Thus, this phenomenon indicates that those unfair accusations against the Six Companies showed that a lot of American bystanders did not fully understand the Chinese world and its social order. Moreover, the study of these accusations, also reveals that the economic issue over the coming of Chinese labors may have been the central force which prompted the Anti-Chinese Movement.

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