

EXAMINING THE PERMEABILITY OF EXEMPT CLASSES OF THE CHINESE  
EXCLUSION ACT

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
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In

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by

Phillip Cheng

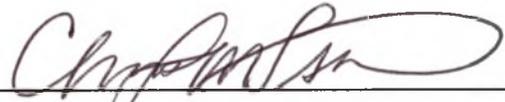
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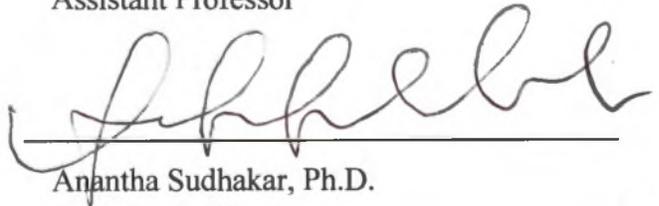
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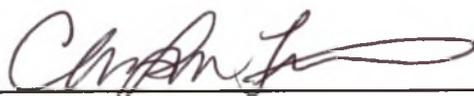
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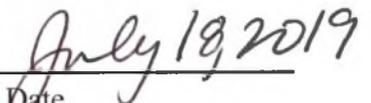
Examining the Permeability of Exempt Classes of the Chinese Exclusion Act

Phillip Cheng  
San Francisco, California  
2019

During the period of Chinese exclusion (1882-1943), Chinese students were the most numerous among foreign students in U.S. universities. This thesis explores Gainesville, Florida and the University of Florida as a site of historical excavation of Chinese American history and more broadly Asian American studies in the U.S. South. It follows the lives of two Chinese students, Yick Kuen (Y.K.) Wong and Len Bo (L.B.) Tan, as they entered the U.S. by way of the port of San Francisco and their journeys across the continental U.S. to attend school at the University of Florida. Their existence and purpose are captured within the master narratives of Chinese American history and Chinese students in the U.S., and their connection to the history of Florida and the U.S. South are offered. This thesis concludes with a summary of their lives after leaving Gainesville and the University of Florida and the need to always question the master narratives we are told.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
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Chair, Thesis Committee

  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my professors, Dr. Christen Sasaki and Dr. Anantha Sudhakar, who inspired me, guided me, and always allowed me to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I am also very grateful for my cohort members and great friends, Soojin Jeong and Mai Foua Her, for going through the M.A. program with me and for always being there for me. I'd also like to thank my family for giving me unconditional love and support throughout this journey. Lastly, I would like to thank the University of Florida and all of the people there that made this research possible. May this thesis inspire others to continue the research on Asians and Asian Americans at the University of Florida and the U.S. South.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	vii
Preface.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Chapter Outline.....	12
Methodology .....	14
Chapter 1: Beyond the Chinese Exclusion Act .....	22
Violent Acts .....	23
The Exempt Student Class.....	26
Living in a Contradictory Environment.....	27
Chapter 2: Chinese Students in the U.S.....	32
Genealogy of Chinese Students in the U.S. ....	32
Enter Y.K. Wong .....	37
Background of Wong Kee, Y.K.'s Father.....	38
Y.K.'s Arrival to the U.S. ....	41
Y.K.'s Entrance to the U.S. University System.....	42
Y.K. Leaves California .....	43
L.B. Tan's Diplomatic Departures.....	46
Settling in the U.S. ....	47
L.B.'s Entrance to the U.S. University System.....	49
Falling Ill, Recovering, Going Hawaii.....	50
Form 431 .....	52
Chapter 3: Interstices in the South .....	57
Coolies in the U.S. South.....	58
Racial Politics of the Southeast.....	59
Gainesville, Florida.....	61
Y.K. Wong at U.F. ....	61
L.B. Tan at U.F. ....	66
Conclusion .....	72
Y.K. Leaves Florida.....	72
L.B. Leaves Florida.....	74
Bibliography .....	78

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1. The Flint Chemical Society .....	63
2. Len Bo Tan.....	66

## PREFACE

In 2008 as a sophomore at the University of Florida, I had an insatiable desire to learn more about the history of Asian American students who went to my alma mater before me. In a brief meeting with the University Archivist at the time, Carl Van Ness, he explained to me that the archives were not set up in a way to record the memories of individual students, much less Asian American students. Galvanized by the chance to uncover history, I began searching through old university yearbooks from the 1930s for any trace of students who might have been Asian American. Not long after, I began coming across students with the names Yoshikazu W. Yamauchi , S.J. Takami, and Theodore Sakaye Kobayashi who hailed from Miami Beach, Jacksonville, and Boca Raton respectively.<sup>1</sup> After this discovery, I tucked this bit of knowledge into the back of my mind in the hopes that I would be able to devote more time to it in the future. Eight years later, I began my master's program in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University

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<sup>1</sup> The three Japanese students mentioned above were born and raised in South Florida and are descendants of the Yamato Colony of Florida. Established in the Boca Raton area in 1905, the Yamato colony brought Japanese settlers from Japan to Florida in order to infuse the much uncultivated farmlands with new methods of agriculture and farming. By World War II many of the families had left the colony to either return to Japan or to move elsewhere in the United States. Of the few families who stayed in Florida, many of their children went on to pursue their university education there.

and it was without a doubt that I would continue this research that I started almost a decade ago.

Fortunately by the time I started my program, all the university yearbooks had been digitized and I was able to go further back into the university's history to uncover even more students from Asia who predated the students I had originally found from the 1930s. These students were from China and the earliest student to attend the University of Florida was Yick Kuen (Y.K.) Wong in 1915. Four years later, another student by the name of Len Bo (L.B.) Tan entered in 1919.<sup>2</sup> Who were these students and where did they fit in the history of Chinese America? How did they make their way to Gainesville, Florida and what was their experience like? I write this thesis in the hope that it will inspire other Floridians to uncover the stories ignored and neglected by scholars for far too long.

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<sup>2</sup> Juan Veloso, a student from the Philippines studying at the College of Law and Chin Wu Wang, and undergraduate student studying agriculture were also found in the 1919 yearbook.

## Introduction

The stories of Yick Kuen (Y.K.) Wong and Len Bo (L.B.) Tan can be placed on the spectrum of several master narratives that categorize Asian immigrants. First, by spectrum, I refer to an “almost-ness” that is situated between something that *is* and something that *is not*. Much like how the positionality of the Asian American already sits in the in-between, so do the lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan, particularly through their attendance at the University of Florida. Second, by master narratives, I use Ronald Takaki’s “Master Narrative of American History,”<sup>3</sup> to frame three master narratives that exist within and shape Asian American history. I argue that the presence of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan in their trajectories towards and attendance at U.F. challenges the master narratives of Chinese American history, the history of Chinese students in the U.S., and the postbellum racial history of the U.S. South.

During their time at the University of Florida, Y.K and L.B. were both pictured in the 1916 and 1920 yearbooks respectively. Underneath their senior pictures were the captions: “As rare as a white crow” and “Our little Oriental has endeared himself to all with whom he has come in contact for he has all of the qualities that go to make a

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald T Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1990). Historian Ronald Takaki posits the “Master Narrative of American History” is a myth perpetuated by historians that America is white. He challenges the “white-centered” narrative of American history by telling a different story of the U.S. that focuses on diversity and its history.

friend....”<sup>4</sup> What exactly do these quotes convey? How do their positionalities as Chinese immigrant students during the time of Chinese exclusion make them legible at a place like the University of Florida? To say that the color of their skin, their nationality, or them being “as rare as white crow[s]” was the main factor that made them “different” in their attendance at U.F. would oversimplify and not entertain any disruptions to any of the three master narratives mentioned above.

It would be easy to characterize Y.K. and L.B. as victims of discrimination due to the anti-Chinese sentiment happening in the country at the time. Yet when we look at their ability to travel across the Pacific and across the continent to attend school at a place where there were virtually no other people who shared similar backgrounds as them (as opposed to locales with large Chinese populations), they enter into a state of racial, institutional, and geographic limbo. Isolated from the master narratives of Chinese immigrants during the period of Exclusion (1882-1943), Chinese students studying in the U.S., and the racial binary of the U.S. South, Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan are anomalies who sit in the interstices of these narratives. Leslie Bow argues anomalies are “productive site[s] for understanding the investments that underlie a given system of relations; what is unaccommodated becomes a site of contested interpretation.”<sup>5</sup> Existing in the interstice not only pushes us to

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<sup>4</sup> 1916 and 1920 University of Florida *Seminole* yearbooks.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) Kindle edition, 3.

the boundaries of what we know, but also gives us the opportunity to reinscribe stories that until now have merely been considered inconsequential. My thesis follows the lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan in an attempt to negotiate a new site of excavation for Chinese American history. In each chapter, I present a master narrative only to then rupture it at the site of an interstice. Through rupturing the master narrative, I critically question the stories that are told to us. My hope is to unbury the stories that exist outside the framework of our historical imagining and to give them a place in history.

On many levels, these two students continuously complicate our understanding of what we know about Chinese immigrants. Be it within the contexts of time, class, or place, the curiousness of their existence serves to, as Bow puts it, “disrupt and suture” master narratives.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore by placing these two students together within the framework of interstitiality,<sup>7</sup> this thesis opens up more possibilities to understand those who might be cast aside if their stories did not fit within the framework of a master narrative. The first master narrative speaks to when Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan arrived in the U.S.—during a time when anti-Chinese sentiment towards laborers was pervasive and discrimination towards the Chinese race in general was vehement, as epitomized by the passing of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. Routledge Classics (London: New York: Routledge, 2004). This refers to Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial discourse on the production of culture from an interstitial perspective. Bhabha uses this theory to explain and describe how the clash of two opposing groups gives birth to a new type of identity that carries notions of constructive agency and hope.

Chinese Exclusion Act. The second master narrative analyzes how Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan's enrollment at the University of Florida falls outside the narrative of other Chinese students studying in the U.S. at that time. Lastly, the third master narrative takes a regional focus and looks at the location of their pursuit of higher education. This last master narrative forces us to consider the perplexity of the intersection of regionalism and Asian American studies. In utilizing Leslie Bow's conceptual lens of interstitiality, I explore the space of the in-between to reconceptualize how these students' mobility transcended physical and political boundaries. I look at how Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan used their respective backgrounds to move throughout the nation-state, transform their immigrant status to student status, and impact the impressions people had of them and their community. I try to answer how they reconciled—or failed to reconcile—their in-betweenness within three master narratives and what their experiences might offer to the fields of Asian American studies, Chinese American history, and U.S. higher educational institutional history.

Some scholars have attempted to create a space of justification to allow for Chinese students to conceptually exist during this time of exclusion. The necessity to interpret these students and to make them legible along the lines of Chinese exclusion is evidenced through the work of scholars such as Hongshan Li and Weili Ye. In his book, *U.S.-China Educational Exchange: State, Society, and Intercultural Relations, 1905-1950*, historian Hongshan Li contends that educational exchange between the U.S. and China was the strongest tie between the two nations despite strong differences in political stance and

economic systems. When examining this tie more thoroughly, Li asserts that educational exchange is the key to understanding U.S.-China relations, and that educational exchange was not singlehandedly driven by the U.S.<sup>8</sup> Li argues that when faced with foreign encroachment in the 19th century, sending students abroad to acquire the necessary skills for modernization was an easy choice for China. Because the U.S. felt the strong need to educate Chinese students as part of its “soft power” regime, they received these students wholeheartedly.<sup>9</sup>

In her book, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927*, Weili Ye argues that these 20th century students chose to live a modern lifestyle by virtue of the systematic education they received and their decisiveness to further the development of the modern Chinese identity by studying in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> She contends that through issues of nationalism, democratic participation and voluntary association, professionalism, romantic love, new forms of leisure, and race, uncovered in their writings, modernization of the Chinese people was a turbulent and painful process still relevant to Chinese people today.<sup>11</sup> These students who were born at the end of the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>10</sup> Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), Kindle edition.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 174, 200.

19th century, were the last to have the remnants of a Confucian-based education and the first to face the intrusiveness of the Western world encroaching upon China and the Chinese people.<sup>12</sup> Their dualistic identities gave rise to a new hybrid transnational identity.

Through Li and Ye we can see that scholarship concerning Chinese immigrant students studying in the U.S. is based through a lens of government, nation building, or political influence. Their specific framing of these Chinese immigrant students and their time in the U.S. renders a plausible interpretation of why we see a stark contrast between Chinese students and their laboring counterparts. Whereas Li demonstrates how the students were subjects of nation-building for both the Chinese and American governments, Ye places the agency of these students in their own hands as they sought modernity for themselves and for their country. To analyze these students is to look at how the porous spaces of Chinese exclusion are subject to interpretation. While the interpretations above grapple with apparatuses of nation-building and modernization, they do not necessarily draw strong connections to the field of Asian American studies.

Students who traveled to the U.S. from Asia in the early 20th century to receive a Western education are only discussed marginally, if at all, in relation to Asian American history. As a result, it is difficult to conceptualize their belonging and place in Asian America. Asian America is defined for the most part by a political agenda for social equality and representation predicated on two claims: 1) native born Asian Americans and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 25.

their relation to the U.S. national formation and loyalty to the state and 2) labor migration as the mainstay of Asian American formation.<sup>13</sup> However, as Madeline Hsu argues, “The richness of migrant lives encompasses not just their trajectory here in the United States, but in context and connection with persons, places, and possibilities throughout the world.”<sup>14</sup> Archives documenting the experience of Asians studying abroad in the 19th and 20th centuries provide us valuable transcultural history in which modern America was developed and foregrounds a bilateral transpacific engagement.<sup>15</sup>

Fortunately, scholars from various backgrounds have realized the important and precarious roles students have held during the many types of Asiatic migrations to the U.S. For example, in her overview of Asian American history in *The Making of Asian America*, Erika Lee touches upon the experiences of student immigrants such as the pensionados from the Philippines, the Japanese Americans who sought education inside the internment camps during WWII, and the influx of students from Asia seeking higher education after 1965.<sup>16</sup> The dearth of research on this topic beginning in the mid-nineteenth century onwards is the focus of Eileen Tamura’s article *Asian Americans in the History of*

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<sup>13</sup> Chih-ming Wang, *Transpacific Articulations: Student Migration and the Remaking of Asian America* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013) Kindle edition, 35-36.

<sup>14</sup> Madeline Hsu, *Transnationalism and Asian American Studies as a Migration-Centered Project* (Journal of Asian American Studies 11, no. 2, 2008), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Wang, *Transpacific*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), Pensionados-177, Japan Americans-237, after 1965-288 & 299.

*Education: A Historiographical Essay*.<sup>17</sup> Tamura explains the lack of historical coverage of student immigrant history in two ways. First, she argues that more sociological studies rather than historical ones have been conducted regarding Asian American students and their grapplings with the American educational school system; and secondly, out of the limited number of historical works available regarding Asian Americans and their educational attainment, a large number focus on the Japanese American population before and during World War II. She argues that while these studies are important to historians, there is a significant lack of historical works that offer “contextual understanding and the perspective of time.”<sup>18</sup> Other scholars such as Eiichiro Azuma and his book *Between Two Empires: Race, History and Transnationalism in Japanese America* have brought turn of the century student immigrants somewhat into the limelight, offering us less sociological and more historical perspectives on Asian immigrant students and their experiences that “transcend the narrow bound of nationality and race.”<sup>19</sup>

For students from China, their high profile in various sectors in modern China made studying abroad a key element in Chinese modernity and the term *liuxuesheng* (overseas

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<sup>17</sup> Eileen H Tamura. *Asian Americans in the History of Education: An Historiographical Essay*, *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Cambridge University Press, Spring, 2011), 58-71.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America*, (New York: Oxford Press, 2005), 3.

student) became synonymous with the modern Chinese intellectual.<sup>20</sup> These students' varied forms of cultural and political engagement connected Asia and America in significant and complex ways and represented a transnational intellectual force that has shaped Asia as well as Asian America.<sup>21</sup> Wang argues that through political activism and literary activities, transnational students brought together Asia and America while holding on to different and alternating nationalist and ethnic imaginaries and identifications. Some students, as we will see in the case of Y.K. Wong, stayed on and raised families on American soil, their youthful struggles and idealism were passed on to successive generations providing new sources for ethnic and national identifications that challenge the coalition principle of Asian American identity and politics.<sup>22</sup> In examining overseas student writing and activism, Wang seeks "to expand the linguistic and discursive repertoire of Asian American criticism to make room for Asia-based perspectives."<sup>23</sup>

Utilizing Wang's perspective in incorporating the experiences and writings of transnational students in order to re-think Asian America's boundaries and *raison d'être*, I use David Palumbo-Liu's argument in redefining "Asian American" to "Asian/American" to dually represent the "distinction between 'Asian' and 'American,'" and [as] a dynamic,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 12.

unsettled, and inclusive movement...[that] implies both exclusion and inclusion.<sup>24</sup> To further emphasize this reconfiguration of Asian/America, Arif Dirlik claims in order to understand Asian America, “it is no longer sufficient to comprehend their roots in U.S. history or, for that matter, in countries of origins, but [through] a multiplicity of historical trajectories that converge in the locations we call Asian America;”<sup>25</sup> in my research, I extend the geography of Asian America to include Gainesville, Florida. As Wang states, we can no longer “afford to ignore the presence of Asia as a site of significance” and that what Asian America has come to represent “is no longer so much an ethnic identity as a transpacific interactive dynamic that has been actively engaged on both ends of the Pacific.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Chapter Outline*

In Chapter 1, I examine the anti-Chinese sentiment and violence towards laborers on the West coast and how it led to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act. This examination sets up a master narrative that I attempt to disrupt by understanding how the arrival of students complicates our understanding of class and race of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. I show that while the master narrative is mainly constituted by Chinese laborers

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<sup>24</sup> David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Prazniak, Roxann., and Arif. Dirlik. *Places and Politics in an Age of Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2001), 83.

<sup>26</sup> Wang, *Transpacific*, 16, 18.

and the discrimination enacted towards them, the exempt class of students presents different and varied viewpoints. Yet even when these students were welcomed by colleges and universities, they still faced discrimination by virtue of their ethnic and national ties to the working class. While they lived in a contradictory environment, they still had to negotiate how to handle their situation in the U.S. while gaining the knowledge necessary to return and modernize China.

In Chapter 2, I use the narrative of Chinese students in the U.S. from Chapter 1 in order to situate Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan for another iteration of disrupting the master narrative. Through their stories, I reveal the different external factors, economic and social conditions, and influences that undergirded their entrance into the U.S. university system. Furthermore, their transcontinental journeys, which began at the University of California in Berkeley, California and ended at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida, illustrates how their backgrounds afforded them mobility divergent from the other Chinese students studying in the U.S. at the time.

In Chapter 3, I shift the frame of Chinese American history away from the Gold Rush in the West coast to the sugar plantations of the South in order to provide historical and contextual understanding of the region Y.K. and L.B. entered as they attended the University of Florida. Throughout their tenure at U.F., Y.K. and L.B. appeared many times in the school newspaper that captured the positive impressions they left on their classmates. As “rare” individuals who attended U.F., their rareness was not derived from simply attending U.F. but through their respective backgrounds and the social capital they brought

with them that allowed them to reach Gainesville in the 1910s. This final layer seeks to disrupt all prior master narratives and challenges the field of Asian American studies to uncover more interstitial narratives that until now have been buried in relation to other dominant master narratives.

In the conclusion, I summarize the lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan after they graduated and departed the University of Florida. Their transnational lives in pursuit of education undergirded by their social and monetary capital during the period of Chinese Exclusion serves to remind us how complex and incomplete our understanding of Chinese American history is. Furthermore, the lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan expose the necessity to uncover, interpret, and localize the South as an important site of Asian American studies.

### *Methodology*

My research methodology required gathering information concerning the lives of Y. K. Wong and L. B. Tan from the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida and the National Archives in San Bruno, California. My findings at these two locations include yearbook pages, newspaper articles, immigration files, and for L.B. Tan letter exchanges between him and the university president A.A. Murphree. While the documents I have attained are still extremely meaningful, given the scope and timeline of this project, if more research were to be conducted, I would seek out the oral histories of their descendants to get a fuller picture of their lives. The rest of this section will describe in detail each resource I have drawn from.

First published in 1910 and known as *The Seminole Yearbook*,<sup>27</sup> the U.F. yearbook served as a primary resource for information about student life and campus culture. They provide an account of school events that took place and also provide a glimpse into local, national, and sometimes global happenings. These yearbooks complement the historical texts of the time and capture details that may have been too obvious to put in writing, such as information on student trends, mannerisms, and interactions. One of the benefits of using school yearbooks as a historical resource is the insight it gives into the time period and location in which the yearbook was published. *The Seminole* yearbook was produced and edited by students elected during the student body elections each year; therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the interests and overall impression the yearbook presents was created by select group of students who may have not always captured the actuality of life for all students at the time. Furthermore, in using the yearbook as a historical resource, images and commentary of professors of the school and the subjects they taught not only reflect what the students were studying, but also serve as an indication of the university's and state's direction towards public education. I have chosen to examine any mentioning of Y. K. Wong and L. B. Tan in the yearbook, including their yearbook pictures, any clubs they were a part of, and any interactions they had with other students. This allows me to

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<sup>27</sup> The naming of the school yearbook, *The Seminole*, is indicative of Florida's settler colonial past. Known as the "Unconquered people", the Seminole Indians of Florida stemmed from the Creek Indians of Georgia and Alabama who evaded capture by the U.S. army in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This type of history reveals the various layers of racial analysis that subtends Florida as an important site for historical racial excavation.

understand how the school identified them, their interests outside of the classroom, and the relationships they might have had with their classmates. By the time I began my research, all of the text in the digitized yearbooks were also now searchable by keyword, so I began entering keywords such as “China”, “Chinese”, “Japan”, “Japanese”, “Korea”, “Korean”, “Philippines”, “Filipino”, “Asia”, and “Asian”. Through this combined method of perusing page-by-page and searching by keyword, I found information about Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan.

While the school yearbook serves as a good starting point for finding students, another source of locating students from Asia during this time period that may have not been in the yearbook is the university catalog. Published yearly, each catalog not only contained information about the school and course descriptions, but also a variety of information regarding every single graduate and undergraduate student in attendance, their areas of study, their hometowns, and information about their matriculations. Both the university yearbooks and catalogs are housed digitally within the University of Florida Digital Collections website. All university publications beginning in 1905-2010 are located here, though not all of the content is searchable by text as with the yearbooks. While these sources of information provide an abundant amount of information regarding the university and the students, it is most likely that the best way to locate students from Asia during this period is to confer with the registrar’s office for verification of student attendance and matriculation. Due to FERPA regulations however, it was extremely difficult to attain information beyond date of enrollment, matriculation, and degree received if the person

seeking the information is not related to the student of interest. As such I was only able to verify the attendance and matriculation of Y.K. Wong by the current (as of May 2018) Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management & University Registrar, Steven J. Pritz, Jr.

The next resource I draw from is the school newspaper known as *The Florida Alligator*. *The Florida Alligator* became part of the university in 1912 and was supervised by the Office of Student Publications, which was also responsible for the publication of *The Seminole* yearbook. During the late 1910s, *The Florida Alligator* was published once a week and contained information about sports, school activities, special guests, local and national news, school happenings, advertisements, and occasional news about alumni. Like the production of the yearbook, the content and information in *The Florida Alligator* was created through a select group of students who represented a certain viewpoint in the way they wanted to convey information. During my perusal, it was important to broaden my lens of interpretation to catch any type of bias that may have been inadvertently or intentionally produced in understanding the content of the newspaper, particularly when it pertained to Wong and Tan. Because the newspaper was only digitized from 1919 onwards, I employed two different methods in searching through the newspaper.

In researching the time period 1915-1917, I accessed the microfilms available at the university library. This time period mainly dealt with information regarding Y. K. Wong. For the time period 1919-1921, I accessed the digitized version of the newspaper available on the university's digital collections website as listed above. The information

collected during this time period mostly pertained to L. B. Tan. When accessing the microfilms and performing searches on the digitized materials, the scope of my search included not only the two students, but also any information pertaining to international students, developments of the university at the time, and anything containing the words “China” or “Chinese.” This was done in attempt to gain further insight on their student experiences within the context of what was happening at the school and in the country. While Wong was only mentioned a few times in the newspaper, mainly about his arrival and graduation from the university, Tan had several articles written about him regarding his patriotism to China and the admiration his peers had for him in his endeavor to better his homeland. While the information written about Wong and Tan in the school newspaper helps us understand their lives before and after their time at U.F., it still does not exactly speak the reasons they attended U.F. in the first place. In future iterations of this research, I would expand my search to include the local Gainesville newspaper known as *The Gainesville Sun* to provide more context about what was happening in the City of Gainesville beyond U.F. at the time of their attendance.

The last resource I draw from at the University of Florida are the files of President Albert A. Murphree, 2nd president of the University of Florida. Correspondence between President Murphree and L. B. Tan are located in these files and speak to the very sincere and close relationship they had. The missives in this correspondence contain a series of exchanges in regard to Tan attaining a teaching position at the University of Hawaii as well as updates and well-wishes towards Tan’s illness. This is the only resource that contains

Tan's personal written letters and shows his life after graduation. These letters corroborate other information found on Tan concerning his illness and travel to and from Hawaii and his intentions thereabout. The existence of these letters and their place in the U.F. archives stand out in comparison to other types of correspondences the president had in his files and mirror other well-known Chinese students around the country during this time period who had close relationships with the universities they attended.

With their names, pictures, and years of attendance of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan in hand, I turned next to the National Archives in San Bruno, California. In directing my search towards the National Archives, I attempted to gain a foothold on the lives of the two Chinese students and their experiences as immigrants in the U.S. This information would not only allow me to place their lives within the historical context of Chinese immigration to the U.S., particularly during the time of Chinese exclusion, but to also speak to two lesser researched topics within Chinese immigration history: student immigrants and Asians in the U.S. south. At the National Archives, I located the immigrant case files of Y. K. Wong and L. B. Tan. Within these arrival case files are documents created by agency officials such as memoranda, interrogation testimony, case cross-reference sheets as well as family photographs, marriage certificates, and student documents. These documents allowed me to look into when, how, and why they came, left, and/or re-entered the United States. In tandem with their case files are the ship passenger manifests located on the institutional version of *Ancestry.com*. Vessel passenger manifests contain ship/vessel information and who they might have traveled with. These case files along with

information available online at *Ancestry.com* provide us a paper trail of their existence in the U.S. and their subjecthood in relation to the nation-state of the U.S. and China at that time. Because of the possibility of document falsification, illegibility, and incorrect information provided, these documents may not always give us the most accurate information about the details of their lives, but at least provide us a working knowledge of their border crossings and whereabouts in the U.S.

All of the information located in these files speak to their lives on paper and allows us to hypothesize about the motivations for traversing across the ocean and country, and what influence other people, such as relatives, lawyers, or professors, had on their lives. The documents that come closest to capturing their actual voices are transcripts of their interrogations as they prepared to depart the country. In both of their transcripts, they mentioned having attended school at the University of Florida, which provides more insight about their experiences during and after attending U.F. While we know that these transcripts do not represent their most authentic voices and do not speak to their internal motivations, like journals or oral histories would, at the very least, they serve as clues and reference points for further excavation.

These combined resources only give us a glimpse into the rich and exciting lives of these two Chinese student immigrants. While we have a paper trail of their entrance into the U.S. and their subsequent departures and returns, we are limited in understanding their motivations and circumstances in coming to the U.S. and/or returning to China. Furthermore, while the information found at the University of Florida allows us to peer

into their areas of study, the clubs they joined, or the activities they did, it does not allow us to understand their internal stirrings or what their daily lives might have been like. Only through L. B. Tan's correspondence with President Murphree can we begin to think about Tan's contemplations in staying in the U.S. or returning to China. Because little is known about Y.K. and L.B.'s schooling in the U.S. before attending university, as well as information concerning their whereabouts afterwards, we can only surmise what brought them to U.F., how their experiences there affected them thereafter, and the impressions they left on the university and its students at the time.

## Chapter 1

### Beyond the Chinese Exclusion Act

Before the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted into law in 1882, anti-Chinese sentiment had run rampant for decades throughout the West coast and especially in California.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1855, the state of California began to impose taxes on any shipowners known to have transported Asian immigrants into the state.<sup>2</sup> In 1876, a statement in the *Marin Journal* published in San Rafael, California, listed numerous reasons why Californians believed that Chinese needed to be expelled from the shores of their state.<sup>3</sup> Among those reasons which can be categorized into the three major categories of economic, moral, and social and political reasons, the most insidious of them pointed to the economy of Chinese labor, racialized as “coolies.”<sup>4</sup> The lives of coolies, who were poor

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<sup>1</sup> Signed into law by President Chester Arthur on May 6, 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers. It was the first law that prohibited members of a specific ethnic group from immigrating to the U.S.

<sup>2</sup> Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 92.

<sup>3</sup> *Marin Independent Journal*, Mar. 30, 1876.

<sup>4</sup> Historian Moon Ho Jung points out the problematization of the term *coolie* in his article *Outlawing “Coolies”: Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation*. U.S. senators often confused and conflated the term *coolie*, which was more-or-less equated to slavery, and the term laborer. Ho asserts that “the outlawing [of] ‘coolies’ racialized ‘immigrants’ as decidedly white and European...and neglect[ed] the legal space afforded to ‘free and voluntary’ Chinese migrants (p. 698).”

Chinese hired under contract in bulk, were compared to African slaves that had no means of escape from their contract or contractor. These undertones of slavery just a decade after the end of the Civil War did not appeal to many Californians. Furthermore because of the cheap labor that Chinese could provide, white Californians could not compete with the wages of so-called degraded labor which threatened their ideals of a home and family.<sup>5</sup> What undergirded this sentiment was not merely the fact that Chinese could provide cheap labor, but rather the thought that a civilization like China could even provide such labor to begin with. At the heart of anti-Chinese sentiment in California was the belief that they were “willing” to be the lowest rung of society by working and living cheaply in the U.S., thereby degrading the standard of white working class living.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Violent Acts*

In the 1870s and throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, violence directed at Chinese laborers erupted throughout California and the West coast. On October 24, 1871 a mob of nearly five hundred rushed into Negro Alley in a shoddy part of Los Angeles and lynched seventeen Chinese—the largest mass lynching in American History.<sup>7</sup> In ensuing prosecutions, eight men were convicted but eventually all verdicts were thrown out and no

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<sup>5</sup> Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: The University of Illinois, 1939).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> John Johnson Jr., “How Los Angeles Covered Up the Massacre of 17 Chinese,” *LAWeekly.com*, <https://www.laweekly.com/news/how-los-angeles-covered-up-the-massacre-of-17-chinese-2169478> (accessed April 1, 2019).

one was ultimately held responsible for the murders even though the crime occurred in front of hundreds of people. Six years later in 1877, the economic crisis known as the Long Depression caused unemployment rates in San Francisco to skyrocket. At the discontent of the people, the Workingmen's Party of the United States called for a meeting in front of City Hall where eight-thousand people showed up. The meeting eventually turned into a riot when anti-coolie vigilantes attacked a passing Chinese immigrant and led the mob to continue the attacks in Chinatown. The 2-day riot killed four Chinese and caused over \$100,000 worth of property damages to the city's Chinese population.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile in the mid-West, tensions had been brewing for over a decade starting in 1875 between white and Chinese workers in Rock Springs, Wyoming. Chinese immigrant workers who had originally worked on the railroads in Wyoming eventually became employed by the Union Pacific Railroad as coal miners. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1885 labor disputes sparked a fight between two white men and two Chinese men. Hours later the fight turned deadly as one-hundred and fifty armed white men killed twenty-eight Chinese men and caused \$150,000 worth of damage to the settlement's Chinese population.<sup>9</sup> Almost always spurred by labor

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<sup>8</sup> John Rogers Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States: Nationalisation (1860-1877)* (The Macmillan Company, 1921), Chapter 5: The Anti-Chinese Agitation in California (Selig, Perlman), 253.

<sup>9</sup> Diocese of Cheyenne, "*National Register of Historical Places Inventory*," [DioceseofCheyenne.org](http://www.dioceseofcheyenne.org), <http://www.dioceseofcheyenne.org/pdfs/history/rsscnpilotbutte1885-1973.pdf>. 37 (accessed April 1, 2019).

tensions and the perturbation of working for lower wages which thereby lowered the standard of white living, the violence perpetuated by the white American laboring class towards the Chinese in California and on the West coast lasted for many decades.

Moral and social objections also persisted in tandem with the economic objections Californians had against the Chinese. Of the moral objections, the Chinese were accused of having no sanctity of oath, the vice of opium smoking, and prostitution. In addition, they were also charged with falsifying tax records, loathed for filthy living conditions in Chinatown, and accused of infecting the Anglo-Saxon population with venereal diseases.<sup>10</sup> Socially it was claimed that the Chinese were unwilling to adopt American customs and ideals and that Chinese had no inclination of making the U.S. their permanent home. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1877 in an address to Congress, the State of California officially declared that the Chinese “have never adapted themselves to our habits, modes of dress, or our educational system...[they have] never desired to become citizens or to perform the duties of citizenship...[and] they remain the same stolid state Asiatics that have...slaved in the fields of China for thirty centuries of time.”<sup>11</sup> Because of the constant reminder of the economic competition, moral practices, and site and sight of Chinatown, by 1882

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Memorial of the Senate of California to the Congress of the United States and an address to the people of the United States. *Journals of the Senate and Assembly California Legislature* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1877).

Californians ultimately convinced the rest of the nation that the Chinese needed to be excluded.

### *The Exempt Student Class*

Yet during a time when Chinese people faced the greatest hate and restrictions in immigrating to the U.S., Chinese students were the most numerous among foreign students in American universities.<sup>12</sup> The United States Bureau of Education reported that in 1920-1921, 1,443 out of 8,357 foreign students studying in American colleges and universities came from China—the highest ratio of all countries sending students to the U.S. during that time.<sup>13</sup> Rather than being portrayed as degraded and inferior like the Chinese laboring class, students were characterized by the U.S. and Chinese governments as harbingers of a better and stronger China attaining the knowledge necessary to usher China into the modern 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> As California senators such as John F. Miller were claiming that the “oriental” civilization was “incompatible to the United States and threatened to corrupt the nation,” on the other side of the country, University of Florida students were praising a fellow classmate from China for his ability to master the English language and correspond with university professors so eloquently.

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<sup>12</sup> Hongshan Li, *U.S.- China Educational Exchange: State, Society, and Intercultural Relations, 1905-1950*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 178.

<sup>13</sup> Teresa Brawner Bevis and Christopher J. Lucas, *International Students in American Colleges and Universities: A History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 177.

The master narrative of Chinese immigrants during the period of Chinese Exclusion that described the Chinese as heathen and dishonest to the American public, becomes porous when we consider how Chinese students entered this conceptual space as well as when they physically entered the United States. The idea that all Chinese immigrants were said to have brought unfair economic competition, immorality, and disease among other things, falls short when we consider how for one-hundred years between 1854-1954, institutions of higher education, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, awarded 734 degrees to Chinese students. In looking at Chinese students who attended American universities, their acceptance on an institutional level did not necessarily reflect the attitudes the American laboring class had towards Chinese laborers. While the Chinese Exclusion Act barred entry of Chinese laborers into the country, students along with teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats were all exempt from this law.<sup>15</sup> This legal exemption not only illuminates how experiences of the exempt class are diminished in the master narrative, but also points to how the master narrative of Chinese American history can be broadened and deepened when we incorporate student history.

#### *Living in a Contradictory Environment*

While students were exempt from the law, it did not make them exempt from the complexities of attitudes towards class and racial formation in the United States. Following the lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan during the Exclusion Era allows us a greater

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<sup>15</sup> Lee, *The Making*, 94.

understanding of their lived-experiences of being Chinese in the U.S. beyond our understanding of the Chinese laboring class. Although Chinese students were driven by different reasons for coming to the U.S. compared to Chinese laborers, once they arrived, they were inevitably affected by the pervasive racial tensions and anti-Chinese sentiment in the country. At the University of Illinois for example, Chinese students often times felt outright hostility from white students and the local community members. Although not part of the laboring class of Chinese immigrants, these students were still held to the heathen depictions that characterized the working class. Although students were part of an exempt class who were granted legal protections and promised a cordial welcome to the university, they nonetheless were considered part of an “inferior” race continually targeted by university students and broader American society.<sup>16</sup> In one instance at Colorado College’s commencement ceremony in June 1924, graduating seniors walked in mix-gender pairs to receive their diplomas. For the six Chinese students who were graduating, because no female student was willing to accompany them, they marched in the very front—three pairs of six men. For them, their graduation ceremony was filled with disgrace and humiliation and their race outweighed all of their accomplishments.<sup>17</sup>

As upper-class Chinese, the students’ arrival to the U.S. were generally well-received by educated Americans, but at times the former found themselves placed in

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<sup>16</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 1631.

<sup>17</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 1613.

peculiar and precarious situations as they were at the mercy of strong anti-Chinese sentiment. In China, class differences between the educated elite and poor laborers reified systems of social hierarchy, but in the U.S., they were bound to each other by race and national identity.<sup>18</sup> The students' ambivalent relationships to their laboring counterparts in the U.S. were not only rooted in race and class differences, but also in regional and linguistic differences as well. As much as some students wanted to blame laborers for the poor image Americans had of the Chinese, students still found themselves inextricably linked to the laborers by virtue of the importance of race in the U.S. Whereas some students sought to provide general welfare work for their laboring compatriots by helping to improve their working and living conditions, generally most students had little contact with laborers on a daily basis.

Although an exempt class according to the Chinese Exclusion Act, students were still treated poorly by immigration officials as they tried to enter the country. Laborers, students, and sometimes even diplomats alike were detained in filthy living conditions until they could prove their status to enter the country. Before the establishment of the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship in 1910 that brought thousands of students to America's universities, students chose to study abroad in other countries—instead of the U.S.—as a way to avoid the dreaded processes of the U.S. Immigration Station.<sup>19</sup> Educated Americans and

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<sup>18</sup> Ye, *Seeking*, 1633.

<sup>19</sup> Ye, *Seeking*, 1750.

diplomats took note of what was happening to Chinese students attempting to enter the country and urged the State Department to revise immigration practices. By 1906, President Roosevelt instructed the new secretary of labor and commerce to “prevent harshness being done to merchants and students,” while still excluding laborers.

To some Americans, it was conceptually difficult for them to comprehend Chinese immigrants as individuals other than laundrymen or restaurant workers. Images of a yellow peril also consistently invaded American popular culture which depicted the Chinese as villains with a queue and long nails. Sometimes mistaken for Japanese or non-Asian nationalities, Chinese students were clearly not exempt from racial prejudice. By contrasting the anti-Chinese sentiment towards Chinese laborers with the experiences of Chinese students, we see how students lived in a contradictory environment. The ambivalent and mixed nature of Chinese students in comparison to Chinese laborers exemplifies the interstitial nature their experience in the U.S. and disrupts what we know of the Chinese in the U.S. at that time. Even the site of Chinatown to some students generated mixed feeling as smells and sounds reminded them of home, but the sight of the filthy streets and dingy shops reminded them of national disgrace.<sup>20</sup> While historian Hongshan Li cites that little sources are available to analyze this aspect of a Chinese student’s life in the U.S., this area of research nonetheless merits further excavation. The lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan as they made their way through the university system

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<sup>20</sup> Ye, *Seeking*, 1913.

and eventually to the University of Florida should give us more reason to conduct this research.

### *Conclusion*

Anti-Chinese sentiment and violence towards Chinese laborers blanketed much of California and the West coast for decades before and throughout the period of Chinese Exclusion. However, when Chinese students entered the U.S. in pursuit of higher education, they complicate our understanding of this master narrative. Chinese students who came to the U.S. to pursue a university education during Chinese Exclusion were on the one hand accepted and welcomed by U.S. colleges and universities, but on the other hand also faced with the anti-Chinese sentiment their laboring counterparts received. The Chinese students' time and tenure at these U.S. institutions were predicated on the understanding that they would return to modernize and usher China into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, little did they know how contradictory and challenging it would be.

## Chapter 2

### Chinese Students in the U.S

This chapter reveals that even though the history of Chinese students in the U.S. disrupts the master narrative of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. during the exclusion era, the history of Chinese students in the U.S. itself can be further complicated. In order to challenge this subsequent “master narrative” of Chinese students in the U.S., I first recover the genealogy of Chinese students in the U.S. by presenting a historical viewpoint of how, when, and why Chinese students came to the U.S. for higher education. Next, I place both Y.K. and L.B. in this narrative spectrum and present the different external factors, economic and social conditions, and influences that brought them to study in the U.S. I complicate and disrupt the master narrative of Chinese students in the U.S. by examining elements of their arrival, schooling in the U.S., and attendance at universities in the Midwest.

#### *Genealogy of Chinese Students in the U.S.*

When we look at the history of Chinese students in the U.S., the exchange of knowledge and education between China and the U.S. has been occurring since the 1800s. This history can be divided into three distinct phases: the first phase takes place from 1830-1844 when the southern part of China, Guangzhou in particular, began seeing missionaries and witnessed the effects of their influence on education and religion. The second phase takes place from 1844-1904 under the protection of signed treaties between the Qing

Dynasty and the U.S. that allowed educational interaction to increase. The students I will be studying came to the U.S. in the third phase which takes place during 1904-1950 when educational exchange was deeply and directly influenced by government intervention.

One of the best biographical sources of understanding the intimate details of the lives of Chinese immigrant students in the U.S. during the mid-1800s is the autobiographical memoir of Yung Wing titled *My life in China and America*.<sup>1</sup> Yung, the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university in 1854, begins with his own educational journey of studying English in Macau and then his experience studying in the U.S., first at Monson Academy and then at Yale University. The rest of his memoir is devoted to the development of his educational scheme to give a select group of young boys in China the same life-changing experience he had gone through while studying in the U.S. Known as the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM), by 1872, Wing had convinced the Qing Court to send 120 boys to the U.S. for training in Western education. Averaging around twelve years old, each boy was to start their Western education at the elementary level and matriculate to the university level. Due to Wing's prior time spent in New England, the boys were housed with white American families sprinkled throughout Springfield, Massachusetts. Among Qing officials who visited a few years later and saw the boys living in American homes, wearing Western-style clothes, and going to church with American families, there was growing concern that the boys were being corrupted and

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<sup>1</sup> Wing Yung and Joseph Hopkins Twichell. *My Life in China and America* (New York: H. Holt, 1909).

demoralized. In 1878, by the time some of the boys achieved the educational level to apply to universities, it was expected that they should be admitted to military and naval academies based on their abilities.<sup>2</sup> However, when the academic institutions rejected their applications on the basis that there was “no room for Chinese students,” Qing officials brought the CEM to an immediate end, recalling all 120 boys in 1881. Though the young men did not receive a warm welcome upon their return to China, many did go on to make contributions to China’s government and infrastructure. The experiences of these young men demonstrate not only the Qing Dynasty’s ability to control student immigration to the U.S. but also illustrate the students’ ability to thrive in a foreign environment.

By the end of the 19th century, foreign power and presence in China were threatening the Qing dynasty and its 250-year rule over China. Heavily influenced by expanding Christian missionary activity, the Chinese began to fight Western encroachment and colonization by directly attacking Christian churches and those who practiced Christianity. Supported by the imperial court and the Empress Dowager Cixi, this became known as the Boxer Rebellion. On June 21st, 1900, the Empress officially declared war on the foreign powers only to be defeated two months later by the Eight-Nation Alliance.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Treaty of 1901 or the Peace Agreement between the Great Powers and China

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<sup>2</sup> West Point in New York and Naval Academy in Annapolis.

<sup>3</sup> The Eight-Nation Alliance was a coalition set up in response to the Boxer Rebellion. The eight nations included: Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary.

was signed, which required the Qing Empire of China to pay an indemnity of 450 million taels of silver (\$333 million at that time) to the eight nations involved over the course of 39 years.

Shortly after the peace treaty was signed, it became known that the indemnity that China was required to pay to the U.S. had been overestimated. Through the negotiations between Liang Cheng, the Chinese ambassador to the U.S., and the U.S. Secretary of State, John Hay, the U.S. committed to returning the excess indemnity funds. Though several ideas of how and when the remission of this money would occur, the idea of educating Chinese students in the U.S. prevailed.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship was created and financially supported the education of thousands of Chinese students studying in the U.S. for many decades. Students on this scholarship, as well as governmental, provincial, and private scholarships, came to the U.S. by the hundreds. Generally, these students came from affluent families and were graduates of elite missionary schools. A high percentage came from the more developed provinces along the seaport regions of China—Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong.<sup>5</sup> In order to become a strong and powerful nation, China believed that training in military affairs, shipbuilding, mathematics, and manufacturing would all need to be mastered. On the other side of the Pacific, President Roosevelt believed that by receiving and educating Chinese students at top universities, the

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<sup>4</sup> Carroll B. Malone, *The First Remission of the Boxer Indemnity*, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Oct. 1926), 65, 67.

<sup>5</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 241.

U.S. would be able to “open China to American influence and commerce,” strengthen its tie to China, and to minimize conflict in the future by “implant[ing] its ideals in the Orient.”<sup>6</sup>

Historian Hongshan Li illustrates how through the establishment of the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship, both the Chinese and U.S. governments drove educational expansion and “transformed educational exchange from a private enterprise into a state function.”<sup>7</sup> It is often referenced that America’s influence on Chinese students studying in the U.S. came vis-à-vis Edmund J. James, president of the University of Illinois from 1904-1920, through a letter to President Roosevelt stating: “...the nation which succeeds in educating the young Chinese of the present generation will be the nation which for a given expenditure of effort will reap the largest possible returns in moral, intellectual and commercial influence.”<sup>8</sup> While many students at the beginning of the 1910s attended Ivy League universities such as Yale, Cornell, and Columbia, by 1914, through the recruiting efforts of Edmund James, well over fifty Chinese students attended the University of Illinois.

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<sup>6</sup> Stacey Bieler, *"Patriots" or "traitors"?: A History of American-educated Chinese Student* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund James, *The School Journal. Volume 72*. (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1906), 315.

*Enter Y.K. Wong*

The story of Y.K. Wong illustrates my attempt to claim his interstitiality between student-class Chinese immigrants and laboring-class Chinese immigrants. Following the creation of the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship program in 1910, many students received preparatory education in China before entering U.S. universities.<sup>9</sup> Because deep and direct governmental involvement characterized this time period of Chinese students studying in the U.S., we hear little about students who were self-supported and received their preparatory education in the U.S. Y.K. Wong was one of these students who entered the university system at the same time governmental students were coming to the U.S. His story, which begins with the story of his father's arrival to the United States, is an anomaly that departs from the master narrative of Chinese students in the U.S and reveals how self-supporting Chinese students already in the U.S. entered the U.S. university system.

Because of Y.K.'s father's wealth and merchant status, Y.K. came to the U.S. as a teenager and received adequate preparation for his university schooling in San Francisco. His father's rise in social status also afforded Y.K. a type of social mobility that enabled him to access education in the U.S. with China's elite. Although he received the same education as these elite students, when they returned to China, he lived out the rest of his life in San Francisco. He stood out from the rest of his peers at the institutions he attended and stood out even further when he attended the University of Florida. To understand what

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<sup>9</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 64.

undergirded Y.K.'s ability to move from the (son of a) merchant class to the student class, we examine Y.K.'s father's history as a laborer and how he became a merchant.

*Background of Wong Kee, Y.K.'s Father*

Arriving twenty years prior to his son's arrival, Wong Kee, Y.K.'s father, hailed from Tai Hao Chung village located in Heung Shan District in the Canton Province of China. Members from his village were arriving in San Francisco as early as 1876. Heung Shan district as a whole was one of the first districts in southern China to start sending immigrants to the U.S. during the Gold Rush starting in 1847. Due to the numerous natural disasters in southern China that had caused extreme difficulties in living, many turned towards Gold Mountain for a better life and future. By 1851, over 10,000 people from Heung Shan district and two neighboring districts, Dongguan and Zengcheng were already living in San Francisco. After receiving a sum of money from his father who sold off their ancestral land, Wong Kee left his village to make a living in the U.S. Arriving right before the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, he like other Chinese laborers who came at that time, worked at manufacturing factories to make ends meet. In San Francisco, they worked in factories that expanded into emerging industries such as shoes, textiles, and cigars. Wong Kee's cheap and industrious labor was at the heart of the anti-Chinese sentiment ravaging the state. Because employers welcomed cheap Chinese labor, "white boys would not engage in it."<sup>10</sup> With the violence happening in California and the West coast, Wong

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<sup>10</sup> Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese*, 30.

Kee needed to keep himself safe while earning enough to support his family back in China and to prepare for his future.

In three years, Wong Kee saved enough money to return to China to marry and start a family. He stayed in China until the birth of Yick Kuen (Y.K.) and did not return to China until eleven years later in 1899. After marrying and returning to the U.S., he eventually started his own business in 1890 that he named Kwong On and Company in the most bustling part of Chinatown at 714 Jackson Street. As a general merchandise store, Kwong On and Company sold rice, liquor, tea, and small amounts of clothing. By 1893, Wong Kee's reported financial interest in the firm amounted to \$500, approximately \$14,000 in today's time (2018). Half of the firm's members had the same surname Wong (黃) and the firm had ties to the same village where he came from. According to historian Madeline Hsu, this kinship network provided the foundation for most businesses. Clansmen employed fellow clansmen who not only built financial networks but also constructed social and support networks as well.<sup>11</sup> By the time of his son's arrival in the early 1900s, the firm's value increased and had a reported consistent capital value of \$11,000, a little over \$300,000 in today's time (2018) and 15-20 active and silent members in China and the U.S.<sup>12</sup> The Kwong and Co. became the American counterpart to a firm he established

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<sup>11</sup> Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 60-61.

<sup>12</sup> Kwong and On and Company business papers from the National Archives.

in Hong Kong known as the Yong Xin Tai Gold Mountain Firm.<sup>13</sup> For the next twenty years, Wong Kee remained the general manager of Kwong On and Co.

Six months prior to his son's arrival, Wong Kee, began filing the necessary paperwork to bring Y.K. to the U.S.<sup>14</sup> He applied for a landing certificate called a Treasury of Regulation for the Landing in the United States of Merchant's Children. With the application he attached two letters from the Swayne, Hoyt & Co., Custom House Brokers and Forwarding Agent affirming his identity and that Kwong On and Co. was a legitimate business that had no connection to a laundry, lottery joint, barbershop or restaurant. The proving of legitimacy was not just required but also extremely burdensome for merchants. This was even more so for merchants attempting to bring another individual to the U.S. The Commissioner General of Immigration reported in 1902 that the merchant class was

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<sup>13</sup> 永信泰金山庄 Gold Mountain Firms were businesses that allowed for Chinese goods to be exported to Chinatowns all around the world. Usually ran by people from the same village, each Gold Mountain Firm also made it possible for overseas Chinese immigrants to send letters and remittances back to their family members and villages. All Gold Mountain Firms charged a service fee of 2 percent and though nominal, allowed for the owners to make a large amount of profit.

<sup>14</sup> Under the treaty that was affirmed by the Supreme Court in October 1899, a Chinese merchant in good standing could have his wife and/or children come live with him in the United States. The application explicitly stated that said son would not be a laborer and could not work for the undersigned as a laborer, but it did not prohibit the son from becoming a student or part of the father's company.

the most severely scrutinized class in order to prevent the fraudulent entry [of coolie laborers].”<sup>15</sup>

*Y.K. 's Arrival to the U.S.*

On November 9th, 1902, Y.K. finally landed at the port of San Francisco. Newly arriving immigrants were subject to primary inspections on board their steamships and a medical examination. Immigrants were asked anywhere from two hundred to one thousand questions during their interrogations and if the details did not match their witnesses, they were detained for longer and possibly sent back to China. In order to be let out of immigration holding, Y.K. needed to prove that his relationship to his father was genuine and Wong Kee needed to prove his exempt status as a merchant. Luckily, Y.K. was only kept at the Pacific Mail Steamship Company Wharf for 10 days until his father and family friend were interrogated by the U.S. Immigration Service. All three were interrogated in a similar fashion and with the aid of Y.K.'s father's attorney, G.A. McGowan, Y.K. received a certificate of landing as the son of a merchant and lawfully entered the country. Two years after Y.K. Wong's arrival in 1904, he was listed as a partner in his father's firm with

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<sup>15</sup> Kitty Calavita, "*Chinese Exclusion and the Open Door with China: Structural Contradictions and the 'Chaos' of the Law, 1882-1910*," *Social & Legal Studies* Vol. 10, no. 2 (2001): 211, Due to the lack of a standardized passport system, it was difficult to tell whether Chinese immigrants seeking to enter the U.S. were bona-fide merchants. In addition to counterfeit documents, some Chinese would travel in first-class cabins and wear flowing silken robes to display markers of merchant status in order to evade the exclusion laws.

an investment of \$500 and was most presumably attending secondary school. Y.K. was listed as a partner of his father's company most likely as a strategic move to maintain his own merchant status and to have the same privileges and rights as his father. From the time of his arrival until his entrance to the University of California in 1910, Y.K. spent the next eight years of his life under the influence and protection of his father and community members. These eight years would be an important time period for the development of Y.K.'s life in the U.S. and his entrance into the university system. Y.K.'s status—son of a merchant—made his entrance to the university system very different from other Chinese college students.

#### *Y.K.'s Entrance to the U.S. University System*

At age 25, after having spent almost a decade in the United States, Y.K. Wong began his pursuit of higher education in the U.S. when he entered the University of California for a summer session in 1910. Y.K. entered the university system at a time when many students came from China to the U.S. on government-sponsored funds. The selection of these government-sponsored students was extremely rigorous. Over 600 students from all over China gathered in Beijing in August 1909 to take qualifying examinations. The first set of exams measured Chinese and English language proficiency. Those who had passing scores then moved on to final exams that covered the natural sciences, other foreign languages, foreign history, and geography. The final number of students who passed all examinations was forty-seven. This first group of Boxer Indemnity Scholars began

attending American universities in 1911 that included Harvard, M.I.T., Princeton, Columbia, Cornell, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Illinois.

Because he was not sponsored by the Chinese government, Y.K. had no governmental obligation to return to China and was fully financially supported by his father. Due to the success of his father's business, Y.K. was in a class of his own. To borrow Peter Kwong's bifurcation framework of highly educated "uptown Chinese" immigrants versus poor and low-skilled "downtown Chinese" immigrants<sup>16</sup>, Y.K.'s positionality could be considered "mid-town." He was different from his peers but could still be read along the spectrum of Chinese students in the U.S. Y.K.'s roots in the laboring class (when his father first came to the U.S.) and the social mobility his father gained by becoming a merchant allowed Y.K. himself to not only gain his own social mobility by becoming a student, but to also gain a traveling mobility that allowed him to go much farther than most immigrants who lived in San Francisco could travel at the time.

#### *Y.K. Leaves California*

After a short summer session at the University of California, Y.K. left California and headed to the Midwest. Whether to evade the strong anti-Chinese sentiment on the West Coast or simply because he had the means to attend an institution outside of California, Y.K. entered as a freshman at the University of Missouri on Sept. 18, 1911. With only eight students from China out of 3,500 total students, Y.K. quickly started to

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 59.

feel the loss of the security he had while living in San Francisco. Nevertheless, he stayed for almost two years studying within the College of Agriculture where he received fundamental training in general agriculture as well as practical work and experimentation in forestry. Like his government-sponsored peers, he majored in a “practical” field that was strongly emphasized by the Qing government. These fields included engineering, agriculture, and natural sciences and were believed to be able to modernize China and can be traced to a “pragmatic strand in Chinese’ intellectual tradition.”<sup>17</sup> For nearly two decades, half of all government-sponsored students studied in these fields. Socially Y.K. also seemed to be engaged with the government-sponsored students as he joined the Chinese Students’ Alliance of the U.S. He appeared in the 1911-1912 edition of the Chinese Students’ Directory and also served as treasurer of the Cosmopolitan Club. However, in the spring of 1913, he left for the University of Illinois.

Y.K.’s interest in the University of Illinois might have come from his involvement in the Chinese Student Alliance and by the fervor of the president of the University of Illinois, Edmund James. In 1914 the Fourth Conference of the Chinese Students Alliance was held at the University of Illinois and received national attention among Chinese students studying in the U.S.<sup>18</sup> Due to the huge success of the conference and touted by

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<sup>17</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 1063.

<sup>18</sup> Poshek Fu, "Across the Pacific: The University of Illinois and China." In *The University of Illinois: Engine of Innovation*, 187 (Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 191.

president James for its relatively low fee and living expense in central Illinois, more Chinese students began enrolling at the University of Illinois. By the time of Y.K.'s arrival on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1913, he was surrounded by as many as 50 other students from China. Continuing his study of agriculture, the University of Illinois was also an institution whose agricultural college was of high repute during that time.<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that unlike his peers he was the son of a merchant, educated in the U.S., and had no constraints from the Chinese government, Y.K. seemed to enjoy his collegiate life at the University of Illinois. Furthermore, what cannot be overlooked was his mobility in permeating the student class from merchant class, his mobility in moving from institution to institution, and his mobility to travel across the country, as we will see in the next chapter.

Analyzing Y.K. not only allows us to disrupt the master narrative by looking at the space in between student-class Chinese immigrants and laboring-class Chinese immigrants, but also engenders an interstitial and theoretical space for incorporating his story into our understanding of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. From his father's transition from the laboring class to the merchant class, to his own transition from being the son of a merchant to being a student, we see how his social mobility is linked to his father's and affords him physical mobility to traverse the country in pursuit of his studies. This challenges what we know of Chinese laborers who became merchants and what that meant for the children of these merchants. In the next section, L.B. Tan with no origins or connections to the laboring

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<sup>19</sup> Carl R. Woodward, *Curriculum of the College of Agriculture*, Bulletin, 1920, No.40 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 58.

class will demonstrate how his diplomatic status produced a mobility that allowed him to traverse the Pacific and the transcontinental U.S.

*L.B. Tan's Diplomatic Departures*

Following a similar path from California to the Midwest, many aspects of L.B. Tan's personal journey mirrors Y.K. Wong's. Also entering the U.S. as part of a different class, L.B. challenges the master narrative of Chinese students in the U.S. and compels us to again make room for another subject of interpretation. His story illustrates another pathway for a Chinese immigrant to become a student in the U.S. university system; but unlike Y.K., L.B.'s origins stemmed from the diplomatic class and not the laboring or merchant class. L.B. came to the U.S. with the assistance of a relative. He was the nephew of Sheuh Hsu Tan, the vice-consul of the Qing Dynasty who was stationed in San Francisco, California sometime before 1910.

On January 21st, 1910, the Angel Island Immigration station officially opened and all subsequent newly arriving Chinese immigrants were no longer directed to the Pacific Mail Steamship company wharf to be processed by the U.S. Immigration Station but instead were sent to an island in the middle of San Francisco Bay.<sup>20</sup> Coincidentally, in that

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<sup>20</sup> Judy Yung, *"America's Other Immigrant Isle: On Angel Island, Exclusion, Not Admission, Was the Name of the Immigration Game," American History* 51, no. 5 (2016): 56. After the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, immigrants had to be inspected and approved before being allowed to enter the U.S. From 1898-1910 inspections took place in a dilapidated, overcrowded, and unsanitary two-story building called the Pacific Mail Steamship dock. By 1910 a new building, the Bureau of Immigration Station, was constructed on Angel Island and modeled after New York's Ellis Island. The Immigration

same year, Manchurian Prince Zaitao, uncle to the last emperor of China who was charged with the affairs of military consultancy, began a world tour of 8 countries to examine the military technology of the time in an effort to strengthen China's own military. On April 22, 1910 aboard the S.S. Chiyo Maru, the Prince and his 16-member suite disembarked in San Francisco. In two short weeks, Prince Zaitao made his way through the continental United States to Washington D.C. and quickly departed for Great Britain thereafter. When the Prince and his suite continued their tour around the world, one member of his suite, a young 16-year-old boy by the name of Len Bo (L.B.) Tan stayed behind in San Francisco with his uncle and did not return to China until more than a decade later.

#### *Settling in the U.S.*

As the youngest member of the Prince's suite, L.B. landed with no official papers and did not partake in any type of interrogation to enter the United States. After landing, he was met by his uncle, Sheuh Hsu Tan, and bypassed the immigration process by virtue of arriving with the Prince. While all other Chinese arrivals were subjected to strict immigration policies and were oftentimes forced to endure long, excruciating, and even humiliating interviews and interrogations, L.B. Tan endured none of that. He did not need to make any case for admission and had no burden of trying to survive in in the U.S. like other Chinese laborers did. He came to the U.S. through his uncle's connection to

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Station on Angel Island became known as a place to keep out Chinese immigrants often detaining individuals for weeks, month, or even years.

diplomacy and remained fully financially supported by the Chinese government for the next decade.

Shortly after his arrival and for the next seven years, he would call 5424 Dover Street in Oakland, California his home and Mr. Frederick Hill and Mrs. Barbara Hill his guardians. Again, through his uncle's connections, L.B. had an experience that very few Chinese immigrants had during that time had. He stayed with the Hills, a white American couple, who cared for him as one of their own and who sent him to school to receive an American education. Shortly after settling in with the Hills, L.B. entered the second grade at Longfellow Grammar School. After two years at Longfellow and quickly gaining rudimentary skills in English, he began attending Oakland High School and graduated from Oakland Technical High School in 1916. The following year he was admitted to the University of California in Berkeley, California.<sup>21</sup> While being a Chinese student enrolled at the University of California was not rare at this time, what was unusual was the seven years of schooling he had in Oakland, opposed to the Chinese students who received preparatory education in China before arriving in the U.S.

For those students who received their primary and secondary schooling in China before arriving in the U.S., a preparatory school was specifically created for this purpose. Through a joint collaboration between the Qing Court and the United States Bureau of Education, on April 1, 1911, the Qinghua Academy, a preparatory school for students to

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<sup>21</sup> Taken from his Immigration Interview on May 28, 1919.

be sent to the United States opened its doors to 468 students.<sup>22</sup> Though shut down for a period of time because of the Revolution of 1911, it re-opened in May of 1912 and continued selecting, educating, and sending Chinese students to the United States.<sup>23</sup> Modeled after an American school system, Qinghua hired American teachers, used American textbooks, and also ordered desks and blackboards to mimic the schools in the U.S.<sup>24</sup> Students followed a strict schedule and led sheltered lives; however, they were encouraged to participate in extracurricular clubs and sports. For some students who began attending Qinghua as young adolescents, some of them studied at Qinghua for as long as 8 years before attending school in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> In comparison, L.B. seemed to have fast-tracked his way to the U.S. through diplomacy and did not need to live in an environment created to prepare students for schooling in the U.S. He presents a positionality in opposition to Y.K.—whereas Y.K. assumed the position of the son of a merchant from the lower position of the laboring class, L.B. approached it from the upper position of a diplomatic class.

*L.B.'s Entrance to the U.S. University System*

While some Chinese government-sponsored students usually moved from one institution to another to pursue a master's degree or Ph.D., L.B. did not need to wait to

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<sup>22</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> Also known as the Xinhai revolution, revolutionaries from southern China overthrew the Qing Dynasty and established the Republic of China in its place.

<sup>24</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Bieler, "*Patriots*", 56.

transfer. His diplomatic tie to the Chinese government allowed him to attend whichever university he found most suitable to him. After one semester at U.C. Berkeley, Tan decided to leave California to attend the University of Minnesota. Though it is uncertain why L.B. chose to attend the University of Minnesota, perhaps it was his interest in agricultural studies that brought him there. By the end of the 1910s, the University of Minnesota had specialized courses that were adapted to the needs of students who had not had “sufficient preparation for college work.” To travel to Minnesota during those days, it would have cost him approximately \$60 by railroad.<sup>26</sup> Traveling to the Midwest to attend the University of Minnesota, L.B. went from one of many Chinese students to now just a handful, less than 10, out of a student body population of about 5,500.

*Falling Ill, Recovering, and Going to Hawaii*

Only five months after attending the University of Minnesota, L.B. fell ill and returned to California to receive treatment. During that time in San Francisco, ill Chinese immigrants would typically go to The Tung Wah Dispensary located on 828 Sacramento Street. The dispensary opened in 1900 and provided healthcare to the Chinese who were denied admittance to the hospitals in San Francisco. From leprosy scares in the 1870s to the bubonic plague in 1900, the Chinese were medical scapegoats condemned as carriers

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<sup>26</sup> Samuel Paul Capen, *Facilities for Foreign Students in American College and Universities*. Bulletin, 1920, No.39 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 50.

of an alien disease.<sup>27</sup> In 1881, when the Chinese consul petitioned the Board of Health on behalf of an ailing Chinese immigrant to be admitted to city and county facilities for treatment, the board passed a resolution that all Chinese seeking medical services be directed to the Twenty-Sixth Street hospital. As a result, this essential “ban” to the City and County Hospital contributed to its low admission rate of Chinese patients, admitting less than 0.1% from 1870 to the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> When the bubonic plague hit Chinatown in 1900, the Chinese Six Companies knew it was crucial to open a facility of their own.<sup>29</sup> The Tung Wah Dispensary later became the predecessor to the present-day Chinese Hospital located at 845 Jackson Street. As for L.B. however, there was no cost too much or barrier in language that stopped him from receiving care under an American physician by the name of Dr. Henry Meyer. In six months, L.B. recovered to the point where he could return to school and by the summer of 1918, he once again enrolled at the University of California in Berkeley.

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. Joan B. Trauner, “*19<sup>th</sup> Century Medical Self-Help, Part II*,” FoundSF.org, [http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=19th Century Medical Self-Help. Part II](http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=19th_Century_Medical_Self-Help_Part_II) (accessed April 1, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Joan B. Trauner, “*19<sup>th</sup> Century Medical Self-Help*,” FoundSF.org, [http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=19th Century Medical Self-Help](http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=19th_Century_Medical_Self-Help) (accessed April 1, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Chinese Six Companies was formed to assist and serve Chinese immigrants coming to America from China. [http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=The Six Companies](http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_Six_Companies)

This time he stayed for four semesters until the following summer in 1919, until he decided to visit his uncle who was appointed in April of that year as the new consul of the Republic of China in Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii. In order for L.B. to leave the continental U.S. to Hawaii, he needed to submit an application for a return certificate also known as a Form 431. This form was specifically designated for Chinese students, merchants, or teachers—immigrants exempt from the Chinese Exclusion Act—if they planned on returning to the United States after leaving for China. In L.B.'s case however, he sought to return to the U.S. after visiting his uncle in Honolulu.

*Form 431*

Through the connections of his uncle, L.B. had the protection and assistance of the Chinese government at his disposal. Each submission of a Form 431 required a departure interview with the applicant as well as two witnesses other than Chinese who could testify on the applicant's behalf. The two witnesses were also allowed to submit letters and affidavits in place of testifying. Once all of the applicant's materials were received and all interviews conducted, upon the favorable recommendation of the immigrant inspector processing the application at the time, the applicant would receive a return certificate allowing him to legally return to the United States. In L.B.'s case, he listed himself as a "Government Student" and named Thomas Hunt, Dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of California and Barbara M. Hill of Oakland as his two witnesses who could testify on his behalf. Along with his Form 431 was a document from The Consulate-General of the Republic of China in San Francisco that permitted him to travel to Honolulu

in the Territory of Hawaii “safely and freely...without let or hindrance.” This was signed by the Consul-General Chao Hsin Chu. Along with his application, L.B. submitted a personal memorandum to the Immigration Service stating: “I first arrived in the United States April 22, 1910, on the Chiyo Maru, second voyage, under the name of Tom Bo Lim, with the Chinese Prince Tao, as a student.”

Two weeks after L.B. submitted his application his witnesses were called in to testify. While L.B. only listed Mrs. Hill on his application, both Mr. and Mrs. Hill arrived at the United States Immigration Service in San Francisco to testify on his behalf. Mrs. Hill stated that they had known L.B. Tan for 9 years and that he lived with them for 7 of those years (1910-1917). Mr. Hill stated that they were acquainted with L.B. through his uncle, Hsu Shueh Tan, the former Vice-Consul of China in San Francisco. They stated that ever since they have known him, he has always been a student. Mrs. Hill stated that L.B. Tan was a Chinese Government Indemnity scholar and that he wished to go to Honolulu but absolutely had intentions of returning.

After Mr. and Mrs. Hill testified, L.B. Tan was requested to appear at the Angel Island Immigration Station to be examined on May 27th. However, Tan wrote back saying that he was unable to appear in person because of his university examinations and that he might be able to appear on the 28th in the afternoon. Furthermore, in his letter, he gave four reasons as to why he thought it did not seem reasonable that he should go through all these “troubles” to attain a return certificate. He argued that his records authorized by the Dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of California, Mr. Thomas F. Hunt,

should be enough proof that he was in fact a bona fide student. Secondly, he stated that he was simply going to visit his uncle in Hawaii and not returning to China. Third he argued that because Hawaii is a part of the United States there should not be a need to go through the trouble of interviewing. Lastly, he stated that the "Great War" (WWI) is over and that all of this was unnecessary. Much of the written material of government-sponsored students were captured in a publication called the *Monthly* of the Chinese Students' Alliance. These publications acted as a political platform that tied the Chinese students in The U.S. together and was at times used to dispute foreign writers.<sup>30</sup> Rather than using the platform of the Chinese Students' Alliance to voice his consternation, he addressed the source directly. Whether he felt that he did not need to conform to the standards that the U.S. Immigration Service had for all Chinese immigrants at the time or that because he was neither a laborer nor a student of non-diplomatic origins, L.B. attempted to reconcile himself the uncompromising stance of the U.S. Immigrant officials.

After going through the trouble of writing the letter, he arrived on Angel Island on the 28th and had his interview. Perhaps this was the first time during L.B.'s time in the U.S. that he encountered difficulties that other Chinese immigrants had been facing for decades. For the last nine years, L.B. had been able to receive a type of American education that other Chinese immigrants, particularly the laboring class or even other Boxer Indemnity Scholars, did not have access to. After his interview, the Immigration Inspector wrote a

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<sup>30</sup> Ye, *Seeking*, 564.

letter to the Commissioner of Immigration stating that in view of his testimony, the testimony of his witnesses, his application, and a certificate issued by the Recorder of Faculties from the University of California, he recommended that the applicant be granted a return certificate as a student. L.B. departed one month later on June 28th, 1919, on the S.S. Colombia to Honolulu. For a very small period of time while he visited his uncle, L.B. attended the College of Hawaii. At the time L.B. attended, it was still two years away from becoming the University of Hawaii. Out of approximately 600 students at that time, 3 were from China. Nonetheless, the college had special facilities for the instruction of agriculture of tropical countries. This was probably of great interest to L.B. as he continued the study of agriculture later at the University of Florida. By the new year, approximately 6 months later, he boarded the S.S. Tenyo Maru on Jan. 8th, 1920 bound for the Port of San Francisco and arrived one week later on Jan 14, 1920. He successfully re-entered the continental United States and on his admittance documents (Form 2502 & Form 2527), it stated that he was returning to attend the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.

By examining in detail the lives of Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan, I have attempted to disrupt the narrative of Chinese students studying in the U.S. at the time. In both of these individuals' stories, we see how their origins did not belong to the student class. It was their kinship networks that brought them to the U.S. as the son of a merchant, in Y.K.'s case, and a diplomat, in L.B.'s case. Both students spent a substantial period of time in the U.S. receiving a secondary education. Unlike other Chinese students, their social and monetary capital provided them the opportunity to attend multiple institutions throughout

the country. Whether moving from institution to institution was a result of their attempt to negotiate their feeling of belonging among other Chinese students in the U.S. or a further expression of their mobility, their journeys were nonetheless divergent from other Chinese students in the U.S. and will continue to diverge in Chapter 3.

### Chapter 3

#### Interstices in the South

In the Introduction and Chapter 1, I discussed the anti-Chinese sentiment and violence that ravaged California and the West coast. This sentiment that was viciously targeted towards Chinese laborers—or coolies—has origins in the Caribbean by way of the British West Indies, Cuba, and by extension to the U.S. South.<sup>1</sup> Tied to the global production of sugar, the importation of coolie laborers to the U.S. South during the antebellum and postbellum era had long-lasting effects in the formation of race and U.S. empire. In Chapter 3, I consider what it would mean for Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan, given their background, education level, and trajectory towards the University of Florida, to enter this region as students. The ambiguity of the Chinese laborer in the South situated between slavery and freedom, black and white, drives us to consider how these two individuals might be perceived and treated at the University of Florida, as well as how they might have impacted the impressions people had of them. In this chapter I shift the paradigm of Chinese American history that begins in California with the Gold Rush to look at what was happening during the same time in the South. By doing so, I consider how the Chinese laborer and the Chinese student might be interpreted and received differently within Southern racial politics.

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<sup>1</sup> Moon Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), Kindle edition, 88.

*Coolies in the U.S. South*

For decades before President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, coolies came to represent the system of importing and employing Asian laborers on sugar plantations that were formerly worked by African slaves.<sup>2</sup> Originally conducted by the British as an experiment of “apprenticeship” for South Asian laborers to be brought to the West Indies, it ultimately became known that the importation of these laborers was more or less a new version of slavery. Meanwhile in Cuba, Spanish merchants were importing Chinese slaves to supply labor for Cuba’s sugar plantations. The U.S., engaged in its own struggles of slavery, saw coolies as a way to attain robust labor that was so-called contracted. Touted as a way to benefit “both the Chinaman and the Negro,” coolies were propagandized by Caribbean planters as contracted laborer that was neither forced nor voluntary. After the abolition of slavery, former slaveholders sought the labor of coolies to work on sugar plantations. By 1862, the U.S. passed the Anti-Coolie Law that prohibited “the coolie trade by American citizens in American vessels.”<sup>3</sup> But for decades before and after the act was passed, coolieism legally and culturally stood between slavery and freedom, leading the U.S. to pass more legislation in the name of liberation, nation,

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<sup>2</sup> Moon Ho Jung, *Outlawing “Coolies”- Race, Nation and Empire in the Age of Emancipation*, *American Quarterly* 57, no.3 (2205), 679.

<sup>3</sup> Jimmy Vong, Summary of “1862 Anti-Coolie Law (An act to prohibit the “coolie trade” by American Citizens in American vessels,” library.uwb.edu, [http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1862\\_anti\\_coolie\\_law.html](http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1862_anti_coolie_law.html) (accessed April 1, 2019).

and empire. The history of coolies in the U.S. South would go onto justify the passing of the Page Act of 1875 and ultimately the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>4</sup>

After the Civil War ended in 1865, Florida like other Southern states, legislated discriminatory laws against Blacks as an attempt to reinstitute the slave system.<sup>5</sup> By 1887, a series of Jim Crow laws continued the subjugation of Blacks and by 1890, they were no longer able to vote. Furthermore, in the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Florida led the country in lynchings—“twice the rates in Mississippi, Georgia, and Louisiana, three times the rate in Alabama, six times the rate in South Carolina.”<sup>6</sup> While Southern White conservatism took hold of the state, Florida also attracted investors and immigrants that brought on the rapid development and growth of the state’s population and economy.<sup>7</sup> Chinese labor, with its history of coolieism in the U.S. South in tow, entered the reconstruction era of Florida and the ever-ambiguous spectrum of Jim Crow laws.

#### *Racial Politics of the Southeast*

By the turn of the century, white Floridians were becoming wary of the arrival of Chinese immigrants to the state claiming that while “importation might give a temporary relief where labor is now scarce, it would bring in its wake, in the future, many vast and

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<sup>4</sup> Jung, *Outlawing*, 699.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Gannon, *Florida: A Short History*. Columbus Quincentenary Series (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 47.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

complex problems which the South has not yet had to face.”<sup>8</sup> These complex problems were undoubtedly issues of race and segregation. Although the Chinese population in Florida was extremely miniscule (120 Chinese as reported by the 1900 U.S. Census), Chinese immigrants still managed to find economic opportunities among racial lines in laundry, truck farming, grocery stores, and restaurants in Jacksonville, Pensacola, Tampa, and Miami.<sup>9</sup> Chinese immigrants who ran small groceries stores held a strategic racial “middleman” position where they provided goods and services to blacks that were otherwise ignored by white retail merchants.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, Blacks in Florida also viewed the immigration and mobility of Asians in the state as shocking, as they witnessed Asians traveling freely in the South.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, to a white or black person it seemed that any type of mobility that an Asian had in Florida was unsettling. Bow argues that stories of Asians in the South were not deliberately repressed so much as they presented an ambiguity of interstitiality that allowed the subject’s racialization to be characterized in both black and white ways. This chapter considers how the arrival of Y.K. in 1915 and L.B. in 1920 to Gainesville disrupted the master narrative of postbellum racial history that blanketed the South and Florida.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, *Asian Immigration to Florida*, The Florida Historical Quarterly Vol.74 No.3 Winter 1996 (Melbourne, Florida: Florida Historical Society, 1995), 266.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 267

<sup>11</sup> Bow, *Partly*, 37.

*Gainesville, Florida*

In the early 1900s, Gainesville was the fifth largest city in the state with a population of over 5,000. After the Buckman Act of 1905, which consolidated several institutions of higher education into one, Gainesville became the site of what we know as the University of Florida today. By 1913, Gainesville's population increased to 13,000 and the University served as an important economic factor in supporting the city during World War I. As the population of the city rapidly expanded, so did the attendance of the University of Florida in the 1910s. The school's enrollment grew from 186 in 1910 to over 2,000 by 1927. By the time Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan arrived at the University of Florida, 5 undergraduate colleges including the College of Agriculture had already been established. Furthermore, U.F. had already become a land-grant institution when the Florida Agricultural College at Lake City became part of the U.F. and the College of Agriculture in 1906. Under the Morrill Act of 1862, President Lincoln signed into law legislation that granted each state 30,000 acres of public land. States had the ability to sell, raise funds, and establish endowments that would be perpetually invested to provide support for the colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts in each state.

*Y.K Wong at U.F.*

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915, the University of Florida school newspaper *The Florida Alligator* announced Y.K. Wong's arrival stating, "The Agricultural department has been increased by the addition of...Mr. Yick Kuen Wong who registers from San Francisco. Mr. Wong has recently been pursuing work in the University of Illinois. His real home is in

Hang San Kwongtung, China.” Though we have no concrete reason as to why Y.K. made the decision to transfer from the University of Illinois to the University of Florida, he leaves an institutional and cultural record that entertains a new site of interpretation of the instability of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. South. In this section I examine the archives of the school newspaper and school yearbook to piece together and examine his time at U.F.

In yearbook entries and newspaper articles, Y.K. is described and depicted as an outgoing and respected member of the U.F. community. By the time the school yearbook *The Seminole* was published in 1915, Y.K. is listed as a junior studying agriculture as well as a member of the Flint Chemical Society where he is featured front and center of the group. This can be read as a gesture of welcome



Fig. 1. *Flint Chemical Society*; The University of Florida 1915 Seminole Yearbook, p. 155, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022765/00006/148j>

and acceptance. Given his arrival in February 1915, Y.K. had probably been at U.F. no more than a semester when this photo was taken. Compared to the yearbook picture taken at the University of Illinois where Y.K. was surrounded by fifty other Chinese students, this photo taken at U.F. stands out because he is featured as part of a group of white students. Depictions of Chinese students at other universities usually show all of the Chinese together separated as their own entity and seldom with their white classmates. Because there was no population of Chinese students at U.F. at this time, the fact that he was not excluded from the picture is meaningful.

By the following year, Y.K. is mentioned three times in *The Florida Alligator* newspaper. Through the first mentioning of him we see that he is actually not the only

Asian attending U.F. but has a Japanese classmate by the name of Yamaguchi. It was stated that "Yamazuchi and Woung [sic] are getting ready to organize an Oriental Club. Guess there will not be any wrangling over the important offices."<sup>12</sup> Because the single-digit attendance of Asian students was non-threatening, the editors of the school newspaper did not have any hesitation about humorously pointing out this fact. However, if there were any hint of a sizeable number of more Asians to come to the U.F. community, I surmise the sentiment would not be the same. In his western-style suit and tie, Y.K. did not present as a Chinese laborer that the rest of the country so loathed to his white classmates. Situated as inconsequential to the social functioning of the students, Y.K. was merely an anomaly, an intriguing site of interpretation for his white male classmates at U.F. and also for scholars today. In that same month, another blurb in the newspaper about Y.K.'s Japanese classmate Yamaguchi stated: "It is with regret we note the departure of our Jap, Mr. Yamaguchi, for parts unknown. 'Yam' was quite a congenial chap, and an excellent student as well."<sup>13</sup> The entry here does not represent any kind of tokenism that might be associated with making it seem as if the editors mentioned Yamaguchi so as to not underplay his presence at the school; but rather, genuinely expressing regret at the departure of a classmate who happened to be Japanese.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, January 4, 1916.

<sup>13</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, January 28, 1916.

Though racially isolated, Y.K. continued to appear in the school newspaper characterized in socially and academically positive ways. On March 17, 1916, it was written that when a handful of classmates made a trip to Silver Springs<sup>14</sup>, by the time they arrived, they “found Y.K. Wong already [there] engaged socially.”<sup>15</sup> On May 26, 1916, Y.K. presented a paper on “‘The Agriculture of China,’ which he read to the enjoyment of all” to the Agricultural Club.<sup>16</sup> Although it would be hard to know for sure whether his lived-experiences reflected what was written about him in the school newspaper, the articles nonetheless portrayed Y.K. as an engaged member of the U.F. community. Whether his classmates knew or focused on the fact he was the son of a merchant or how bad the anti-Chinese sentiment was on the West coast, the editors of the school newspaper had a positive impression of Y.K. that they made sure to write about.

Featured as a senior in the 1916 Seminole yearbook, Y.K. Wong is listed as having a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with the quote underneath his picture: “As rare as a white crow.” While this quote was used by former prime minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, to lament the scarcity of discipline in the church in his day, here what is emphasized rather is the rarity of the white crow. By comparing Y.K.’s presence at U.F. to a “rare white crow,” the editors of the yearbook highlight not only him being a rare

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<sup>14</sup> Opened in 1852, Silver Springs was an attraction famous for its “Glass-bottom boats.”

<sup>15</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, March 17, 1916.

<sup>16</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, May 26, 1916.

individual at U.F. but also point to the true rarity of his existence within the master narratives I have discussed so far. We see how his mobility not only allowed him to reach U.F. but also allowed him to reach a space uncharacteristic of his experiences before. While “rarity” may be associated with being “one-of-a-kind,” there is also the story of L.B. Tan which can also be considered rare.

*L.B. Tan at U.F.*



Fig. 2 *Len Bo Tan*; *The University of Florida, 1921 Seminole Yearbook*, p.45,  
<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022765/00012/47i>

L.B. Tan entered the University of Florida as a junior on February 6th, 1920 four years after Y.K. Wong graduated. In less than two years, L.B. became an esteemed member of the community and was respected and admired for his ambition. After having studied agriculture at the University of California and the University of Minnesota, like Y.K., L.B. continued the study of agriculture at U.F. During that time, the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station was a major artery of the university’s College of Agriculture. Directed

by Professor Peter Henry Rolfs, the Experiment Station's purpose was to make "useful scientific discoveries on agricultural subjects" and to report on the results. One of the major topics in regard to agriculture at the time especially in Florida was the proliferation of a citrus disease called Citrus Canker. Appearing in the citrus groves of Florida as early as the 1910s, citrus canker was heavily focused on for two decades until it was considered eradicated for the first time in 1933.

While L.B. studied agriculture at U.F., he was highlighted in *The Florida Alligator* school newspaper for his positionality as an "oriental" and his stance on the politics of China. It was probable his classmates were aware of his diplomatic status and journey from China to Florida via California and Hawaii. The first mention of him in the school newspaper occurred five months after his arrival on Thursday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1920 where L.B., regarded by his classmates as "our oriental friend," delivered a speech to the Peabody Club<sup>17</sup> on the problem of "Shantung" (Shandong). In his speech, he stated that the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in Paris allowed Japan to be a menace to China.<sup>18</sup> His nationalist rhetoric resonated with the recent May 4<sup>th</sup> (1919) movement that spurred much of the shaping of modern China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The report of the speech demonstrates that L.B. was an ardent young nationalist ready to object any "direct stabs at the people of China

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<sup>17</sup> The Peabody Club was a social and literary club open to all students enrolled in the College of Education. The University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, *A Guide to the Peabody Club Records*, Library.ufl.edu, <http://www.library.U.F.l.edu/spec/archome/ms45.html> (accessed April 15, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, July 15, 1920.

and their right of self-determination” and his fellow classmates were in full support of his endeavors. Be it sympathy or support for L.B., his classmates admired his resolve for the betterment of China and her people.

L.B.’s passion continued to be documented in the school newspaper as the second mention of him occurred on November 5, 1920 stating: “Following Sr. Sampaio was Mr. Tan on the subject ‘Wherein Lies China’s Salvation.’ There were three main points he brought out and the interrelation of all. First, the economic development; second, improvement is government; third, military preparation in order to protect her economic development and her natural right-now being endangered by foreign powers.”<sup>19</sup> L.B.’s consistent speeches about the political state of China are echoed by other students in China and in the U.S. Yet even at an institution like U.F. that is located geographically far from China and L.B. who is geographically isolated from other Chinese students in the U.S., he still had the space, will, and agency to voice his political views to the interest and acceptance of his white classmates.

One year after L.B.’s arrival to U.F., the school newspaper takes a turn in writing about him and on February 18, 1921 stated: “L.B. Tan is reported to be improving rapidly at the infirmary, where he has been confined quite a while. We hope he will continue to improve and hurry back to his classes.” Perhaps it was a recurring illness that plagued L.B., but whatever it was, he had to receive that treatment in Gainesville. Why he did not return

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<sup>19</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, Nov. 5, 1920.

to San Francisco at that time like when he was at the University of Minnesota and fell ill could have been for many reasons, but it is clear that L.B.'s presence on the U.F. campus was known and felt as all anticipated his speedy recovery and a return to his studies.

On July 8, 1921, *The Florida Alligator* wrote: "Mr. Tan was the star speaker of the evening. With all the rhetorical ability of a Demosthenes he told us of China's great fight for democracy. This was the only serious talk of the evening and everyone added to his store of information on 'the great' republic of the Orient. A rising vote of thanks was given to Mr. Tan for his excellent presentation of his subject." The way the writers of the school newspaper praised L.B. for his presentation and the reception of the presentation by the listeners is in total opposition to characters in Ye's book who express: "After my return [to China] I would rather advocate friendship and alliance between China and Japan against the Americans than advocating friendship between China and the United States against Japan."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it was the regional difference of the locations of where these students went to school, but like Y.K. Wong, only public sentiments of friendship and endearment are expressed about L.B. and Y.K. at the University of Florida. In the 1921 school yearbook, L.B. Tan was featured as a senior and listed his hometown as Canton, China. The yearbook states that "Our little Oriental<sup>21</sup> has endeared himself to all with whom he has come in

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<sup>20</sup> Ye, *Seeking*, 2111.

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note the usage of the term "our little Oriental" as a parallel to the term "our little brown brothers" coined by President Taft to refer to Filipinos during U.S. colonial rule over the Philippines. Because it only appeared once in written form, it was difficult to ascertain whether L.B.'s white classmates treated him patronizingly or

contact for he has all of the qualities that go to make a friend. We expect to hear of him as a professor in one of the colleges of his native land in a short time for that is his ambition.”<sup>22</sup> On August 12th, 1921, he graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture. Afterwards, L.B. left Gainesville and headed back to San Francisco.

For L.B. his connection to the university continued for a while longer, particularly with his correspondence with the university president, Dr. A.A. Murphree. L.B.’s most heartfelt letters that exist in the archives are the letters he penned to Murphree, who served from 1909-1927. Murphree was an individual who possessed a certain charm and magnetism whom everyone was very fond of. The type of relationship expressed through these letters do not speak to the discriminatory nature that other Chinese laborers and other Chinese students in other parts of the country experienced. The reciprocal nature of the care and endearment sent with each letter illustrates a gap in our understanding about the nature of Chinese students at the University of Florida. The year following L.B.’s graduation from U.F., L.B. responded to a letter Dr. Murphree wrote informing him that he was improving in health and that he would continue to stay in Hawaii for the meantime.

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condescendingly in person as well or only in written form. However, it would be interesting to re-analyze the archives of Y.K and L.B. for stronger undertones of subtly patronizing racism.

<sup>22</sup> The University of Florida, *The Seminole Yearbook* (Gainesville, Florida: 1921), 45, University of Florida Digital Archives Collection, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022765/00012/471> (accessed on January 31, 2017).

L.B. kindly requested Dr. Murphree to write a recommendation letter to be sent to the University of Hawaii in order to attain a teaching position in either the Oriental Department or in the Agricultural Department. He closed his letter by writing: "Should you favors [sic] me with the request I shall be greatly appreciated. Hoping to hear from you soon. Very sincerely yours, Len B. Tan." As the correspondence continued, Dr. Murphree responded: "I am writing such a letter as you request to Dr. Dean of the University of Hawaii, and I hope it may be of assistance to you in securing a position in that institution. Let me hear from you at any time when I can be of service to you. With kindest regards. Sincerely your friend. President."

The University of Florida was undoubtedly a very different place not only for Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan, but also for our understanding of Chinese American history and Chinese students in the U.S. Given the anti-Chinese sentiment in the West and the history of coolies in the South, the sentiments expressed about Y.K. and L.B. in school publications were arguably unexpected. While the purpose of this chapter was to understand how Y.K. and L.B. negotiated their time in the South and the University of Florida, had they not reached Gainesville, Florida in pursuit of higher education, we would have less understanding about how the South negotiated their presence and existence. By presenting and highlighting the lives of Y.K. and L.B. through an interstitial framework, I have exposed the complexity of analyzing them as subjects who complicate the racial binary of the South and have offered a way to understand how the South complicates our understanding of Chinese American history.

## Conclusion

### *Y.K. Leaves Florida*

In the months after his graduation from the University of Florida, *The Florida Alligator* newspaper stated, “Y.K. Wong of ‘Yamaguchi-Wong’ fame is on the campus for a few days. Yick has been ‘Cankering’, since his graduation for the State Plant Board.”<sup>1</sup> Although Y.K. does some post-graduate work after he finished *cankering*<sup>2</sup> he does not complete a master’s degree and departs Gainesville and goes back to San Francisco. Y.K.’s arrival to and departure from Gainesville, Florida represents the rupturing of the master narrative of Chinese American history. It produces an interstice left open to interpretation and eventually to suture. Through Chapter 3, we see how the ruptures created by the stories of Y.K. and L.B. become legible when we use our understanding of the South to suture the punctured narrative of Chinese American history.

By summer of 1917, Y.K. applied for a return certificate of departure (Form 431) back to China. This was his first time returning to China after 14 years. His Boxer Indemnity Scholar peers were also returning to China not only because they wanted to but because they had to. While their time in the U.S. helped them to get away from the difficult political situations in China, they knew their time in the U.S. was limited and eventually

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<sup>1</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, September 26, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> The process of eliminating citrus canker.

they would have to return.<sup>3</sup> These scholars eventually went on to become the politicians, engineers, and scientists of China. When Y.K. was asked at the end of his immigration departure interview whether he had anything further he wanted to state, he replied: “Yes, in case I get married in China I might bring my wife [back] along with me.” The immigration inspector remarked on his application that “[t]he applicant speaks excellent English. His statement having been taken in English, I recommend that he be given the desired certificate.”<sup>4</sup> He departed for China on the S.S. Juliana August 1917.

Fifteen months later, Y.K. returned on the S.S. Nanking on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1918 with wife, Chan Shee and 4-month old newborn son William “Bill” Wong. With the assistance of his father’s attorney, Y.K. and family seem to have very little difficulty entering the country. After their return to San Francisco, Y.K. is listed as a silent member of the firm Kwong On and Co. and briefly became the bookkeeper for the store in 1923. Y.K.’s return to the U.S. with his wife and child represents the richness of migrant lives that scholars Chih-ming Wang and Madeline Hsu refer to in strengthening the place of students from Asia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the field of Asian American studies. For Y.K., the reconciliation of his in-betweenness, given his background and time spent in the U.S. university system, is exhibited by his continued stay and the raising of his family on American soil.

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<sup>3</sup> Li, *U.S.-China*, 184.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from his departure interview on July 26, 1917.

By the 1930 census, Y.K. is listed as the head of household with a wife and 6 children. His occupation is listed as agent in the grocery industry. A decade later, the 1940 census listed Y.K.'s occupation as a worker in a restaurant. At the start of WWII two years later, Y.K. registered for the 4<sup>th</sup> draft and listed his mailing address as 745 Clay Street San Francisco, California. A year after the Chinese Exclusion Act was lifted, Y.K. Wong attained a Certificate of Admission that was used to certify "a correct record and statement of facts relative to the admission to the United States". Afterwards, he filed his Declaration of Intention to naturalize as a U.S. citizen. Immigrants wanting to become citizens needed to file this Declaration of Intention also known as *first papers* which was then followed by a two-year waiting period before one could filing a Petition of Naturalization. Two and half years later, on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1947, Y.K. Wong submitted a petition for naturalization and took an oath of allegiance. One month later on August 25, 1947, Y.K. became a U.S. citizen.

#### *L.B. Leaves Florida*

On L.B.'s journey back to San Francisco, his train crashed on August 24th, 1921 in between De Beque and Cameo, Colorado leaving him stranded in the wilderness for two days. The accident was reported to have been caused by a washout where an area that was usually not prone to flooding was under 6-9 feet of water. This resulted in the partial collapse of the bridge as the train crossed and subsequently caused the derailment of the train. The only reason this crash was known was through a letter L.B. sent to Professor Major Floyd, at the University of Florida that was given to the school newspaper to be published. The letter reads:

“After I left Denver the next morning at daybreak, the train wrecked off Cameo, Colorado. I was very fortunate not being killed [sic] or injured because I was in the Pullman...the train was delayed in the wilderness for a period of two days awaiting for repairing...After I stopped at several large cities seeing the country, my humble education is greatly broaden [sic].”

After finally being rescued, L.B.’s transcontinental journey back to San Francisco finally ended on September 2, 1921. After arriving, L.B. submitted another Form 431 to depart the continental United States for Honolulu. L.B.’s continued correspondence between him and members of the U.F. community presents a reconciliation of his in-betweenness. Because of his decade-long sponsorship by the Chinese government, his eventual return to China is characteristic of all other government-sponsored students. Although he did not remain on American soil, like L.K., it is clear that his identity as an Asian/American was an interactive dynamic that had him truly “engaged on both ends of the Pacific.”<sup>5</sup>

On the dime of the Chinese government and through his uncle’s position as vice-consul in Honolulu, L.B.’s ability to move first across the country and then across the ocean is unparalleled to most other Chinese immigrants at this time. On his Form 431, he listed the Dean of the College of Agriculture and the Director of the Physical Department, Major W.L. Floyd and Dr. A. Sweet from the University of Florida as his two white witnesses. Like Y.K. Wong, L.B. had no reservation in listing university professors as his white witnesses; the professors, in return, spoke highly of these two students. During his departure interview, L.B. stated that he is unable to tell how long he will stay in Honolulu and that if he returned to the United States it would be to obtain a Ph.D. The Angel Island

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<sup>5</sup> Wang, *Transpacific*, 16, 18.

Immigration Station Commissioner wrote to Dean Floyd and Dr. Sweet at the University of Florida to confirm L.B. Tan's enrollment, attendance, and graduation. Both wrote back confirming the requested information and Dr. Sweet responded additionally: "I can also state that he devoted himself faithfully to his studies and is entitled to his student's return certificate. It was his intention upon leaving Florida to visit Honolulu." On September 16, 1921, the Immigrant Inspector wrote in a memorandum to the Commissioner: "...it would seem that the assurance of those men (Dean Floyd and Dr. Sweet) more than equal the usual testimony of white witnesses. In that view favorable action is recommended." Shortly thereafter, L.B. Tan departed San Francisco for Honolulu on the S.S. Ventura.

Not long after returning to Hawaii, L.B. wrote to Dean Floyd expressing his "hearty appreciation for the kindness [Floyd] rendered [him]." The school newspaper published his letter and stated: "Last spring Len Bo Tan of the Class of 1920 (Agr.) had an extremely serious illness. Major Floyd, as usual, was sympathy [sic] and helpful inspiration incarnate... We are led also to ask this question: How many American boys who had been in China for but four years could write back in Chinese as interesting, clear and as appreciative a letter as this one? How many of them would ever think to do it?" Even after L.B.'s departure from Gainesville, the editors of the school newspaper wished to remember him for his great talent and also the strong connection L.B. developed with the university, professors, and peers. Later that year, Tan departed Honolulu on September 23, 1922 for Shanghai. The following year in the alumni section of *The Florida Alligator* newspaper, it stated: "Len B. Tan is a Horticulturist at the Kwungtung Agricultural and Forestry

Experimental Station in Canton, China.”<sup>6</sup> By 1951, L.B. Tan is reported to be a professor at Hunan Agricultural University in Changsha, China.

In attempting to render Y.K. Wong and L.B. Tan visible within the master narratives of Chinese Exclusion history, Chinese students in the U.S., and the postbellum racial history of the U.S. South, I produce two new sites of excavation for Chinese and Asian American history. Their mobility is captured not only in their traversing of the country in pursuit of higher education, but also in their immigrant statuses and kinship networks. Though they followed similar trajectories, the ways in which they reconciled their in-betweenness were quite different. Our understanding of their time in the U.S. and in the university system should not just be based on whether they stayed in the U.S. or returned to China, but rather that they both provide a valuable archive of “bilateral transpacific engagement” in which modern America was developed.<sup>7</sup> I sought to highlight their stories not because they existed outside of the framework of our historical imagining, but to remind us to always critically question the master narratives we are told.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Florida Alligator* Newspaper, February 17, 1923.

<sup>7</sup> Wang, *Transpacific*, 3.

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