

The Plague Incident in San Francisco's Chinatown and the Correspondence of Overseas Chinese at the Turn of the 20th Century

Hsu, Hsiu-Hua

In the 1850s, there were drought and natural disasters, thieves arose numerously, made people lived in chaos society in mainland China. At this time, people found gold in the United States and need a lot of laborers. A large number of Chinese decided to go to San Francisco in order to earn money and support their China family.

After the gold mine exhausted and the Pacific Railroad completed, the Chinese laborers lost their jobs and gathered together in Chinatowns. In the late 1860s, the inexpensive and industrious Chinese laborers were favored by white employers in California labor market, therefore, caused the unemployment among other ethnic groups. In this case, the attacks and exclusions of Chinese laborers were set off everywhere in California. Chinese laborers, so called "Yellow Peril", were been discriminated and chased away. In 1882, Chinese Exclusion Act was signed to prohibiting all immigration of Chinese laborers. The United did not abolish the bill which showed racial discrimination until the military cooperation between China and the United States in 1943.

However, in 6th March 1900, the first suspected plague occurred in San Francisco's Chinatown. San Francisco Health Bureau took racial discriminative measures immediately before waiting for the result of the test, and the same measures in 29th May brought the inconvenience to the residents in Chinatown. Through the measures of the plague in Chinatown, the United State Government, Medical Officials, and Americans' attitude toward racial discrimination, and injustice of the Chinese was shown in evidence during the exclusion period. For example, the United State Government intended isolating the Chinese in Chinatown, chasing them away and possessing the Chinatown by plague. The Government blamed the dirty and uncleanness Chinese for the epidemic of plague. In the society of the United States, people slandered and vilified Chinese people through the newspapers and magazines in America.

The Chinese Government and society solid, because of the unfair treatments, was

supported the overseas Chinese. Wu Tingfang, the ambassador to the United States, He You, the consul of San Francisco, and The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) sued San Francisco Health Bureau and Dr. Kinyoun to fight for the rights that Chinese in Chinatown deserved. Furthermore, because of being treated inequality and oppression, Chinese launched a boycott of American products from 1905 to 1906. Despite the failure, Chinese showed an admirable strength of unity.

Chinese consciousness was awakened through the plague of the Chinatown in San Francisco. The Chinese fought for equal status with the Americans, the rights for ethnic groups, Chinese self-consciousness, and basic respect. The exclusion of Chinese from the United States made the result of the unfair treatment toward Chinese in the United States.

From this thesis, I try to reconstruct the neglected and important evidences of the racial discrimination of the Chinese in the United States, through the historical archives and data, Chinese and Western daily newspaper, and the related cases and so on. I hope can through this topic to arise people to concern the topic of overseas Chinese immigrants in America.

Keywords: Chinatown in San Francisco · Plague · Dr. Joseph J. Kinyoun · Wu Ting-Fang · Ho Yow · The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA)