

Document 6.9a&b: Excerpt from “Our Misery and Despair” by Denis Kearney of the California Workingmen’s Party and a letter in response by Kwang Chang Ling, published in the *San Francisco Argonaut*, 1878

Kearney had written:

...To add to our misery and despair, a bloated aristocracy has sent to China—the greatest and oldest despotism in the world—for a cheap working slave. It rakes the slums of Asia to find the meanest slave on earth—the Chinese coolie—and imports him here to meet the free American in the Labor market, and still further widen the breach between the rich and the poor, still further to degrade white Labor.

These cheap slaves fill every place. Their dress is scant and cheap. Their food is rice from China. They hedge twenty in a room, ten by ten. They are wipped [*sic*] curs, abject in docility, mean, contemptible and obedient in all things. They have no wives, children or dependents.

They are imported by companies, controlled as serfs, worked like slaves, and at last go back to China with all their earnings. They are in every place, they seem to have no sex. Boys work, girls work; it is all alike to them.

The father of a family is met by them at every turn. Would he get work for himself? Ah! A stout Chinaman does it cheaper. Will he get a place for his oldest boy? He can not. His girl? Why, the Chinaman is in her place too!...

Kwang Chang Ling responded:

You are continually objecting to [the] morality [of the Chinese]. Your travelers say he is depraved; your missionaries call him ungodly; your commissioners call him unclean... Yet your housewives permit him to wait upon them at table; they admit him to their bedchambers; they confide to him their garments and jewels; and even trust their lives to him by awarding him supreme control over their kitchens and the preparation of their food. There is a glaring contradiction here....

The slender fare of rice and the other economical habits of the peasant class [of China], which are so objectionable to your lower orders and the demagogues who trumpet their clamors, are not the result of choice to Chinamen; they follow poverty. The hard-working, patient servants that you have about you today love good fare as well as other men, but they are engaged in a work far higher than the gratification of self-indulgence; they are working to liberate their parents in China [from poverty].... When this emancipation is complete, you will find the Chinamen [*sic*] as prone as any human creature to fill his belly and cover his back with good things.

Source: Dennis Kearney, President, and H. L. Knight, Secretary, "Appeal from California. The Chinese Invasion. Workingmen's Address," Indianapolis *Times*, 28 February 1878. Rpt. American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (City University of New York) and Center for History and New Media (George Mason University), *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5046> for complete text.

Kwang Chang Ling's response can be found at *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*, PBS. http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/ce_witness2.html