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THE GOLD MOUNTAIN THEATER RIOTS
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF CHINESE THEATER RIOTS IN SAN FRANCISCO
DURING THE 1870s AND 1880s

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Morgan Gerard Boyd

December 2012

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

THE GOLD MOUNTAIN THEATER RIOTS
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF CHINESE THEATER RIOTS IN SAN FRANCISCO IN
THE 1870s AND 1880s

by

Morgan Gerard Boyd

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE, RADIO-TELEVISION-FILM,
ANIMATION & ILLUSTRATION

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2012

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ABSTRACT

THE GOLD MOUNTAIN THEATER RIOTS A SOCIAL HISTORY OF CHINESE THEATER RIOTS IN SAN FRANCISCO IN THE 1870s AND 1880s

by Morgan Gerard Boyd

During the 1870s and 1880s, San Francisco's Chinese theaters were scenes of tumultuous riots, which this thesis has designated as The Gold Mountain Theater Riots. City petitions and ordinances restricting the performances of Chinese theaters, police raids on Chinese theaters when they did not comply with these ordinances, stampedes caused by panics, and tong and Chinese theater rivalries were all catalysts for violence in America's first Chinese theaters. The Gold Mountain Theater Riots attempts to gain further knowledge of why these extra-theatrical events occurred, through the examination of Chinese audiences and the police involved in these theater riots as reported in San Francisco Newspapers during this era.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The task of presenting a full and complete record of the lives of San Francisco Chinese is not a simple one. The Chinese have maintained an autonomous little colony in the heart of the city, and understanding of their minds and hearts by Occidental neighbors has been rare. (Chu and Foster 17)

... Chinese opera becomes a double for Chinese Culture (Lei 4).

Critical Approach to the Research

The Gold Mountain Theater Riots attempts to answer the question: Why were Chinese audiences in San Francisco rioting in Chinese theaters during the 1870s and 1880s? While there has been a reasonable amount of documentation and research on these remarkable theater riots, this composition addresses their social causes.

The term “Gold Mountain” was the name given to California by sojourning Cantonese men during California’s mid-nineteenth-century gold rush. Chinese actors, traveling from Guangzhou to San Francisco to perform on Chinese stages in California, also called their diasporic theater Gold Mountain Theater (Lei, Production and Consumption, 294). Therefore, in this disquisition the theater riots occurring in San Francisco’s Chinese theaters during the second half of the nineteenth century will be referred to as the Gold Mountain Theater Riots.

The main sources for this research were various California newspaper reports written during and about San Francisco’s Chinese theater riots, late nineteenth-century magazine articles, travelogues from American and European tourists, scholarly journals, popular histories of San Francisco, and population statistics from the 1870s and 1880s.

This chapter primarily focuses on how the research for this project was synthesized, a brief history of San Francisco's Chinese theater in the nineteenth-century, and the reconstruction of the interior of a San Francisco Chinese theater based on primary accounts, for the purpose of understanding the riotous audience members' immediate environment. The second chapter examines San Francisco's entertainment ordinances, the police officers enforcing these ordinances in Chinatown and the effects these ordinances had on Chinese theater audiences. Chapter three examines the various riotous panics during this time period within San Francisco's Chinese theaters as well as the causes of these theater panics. Chapter four examines the tong wars and the Chinese theater rivalries in the 1870s and 1880s. Chapter five offers a brief summary of subsequent Chinese theater riots in San Francisco from the 1890s to the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and beyond, and concludes by acknowledging the limitations of this thesis.

In terms of theater history, this research deals mainly with the element of theater least examined: the audience. Generally, the other three main elements of theater (actor, stage and story) have taken up the most space in the annals of drama. The lack of historical information regarding theater audiences is unfortunate, because studying theater audiences has the ability to yield new information about the society from which a theater audience was derived. The lack of documentation of theater audiences in history is the intrinsic fault of the theater itself. The actor, stage and story are parts of the active spectacle, while the passive audience beholds the spectacle. While the audience views and listens to the staged performance, nobody views or listens to the audience with the

exception of the critics, and the critics' observations are external: that is to say their commentary on audiences reflects taste, and not social cause and effect. However, there are times in history when theater audiences and not the theatrical productions become the active spectacle, causing critics and historians to turn their attention from the stage to the audience. Theater riots have the remarkable ability to transform a theater audience from passive spectators to active spectacles, which allows for primary and secondary accounts of a riotous audience to be recorded by eyewitnesses and the media.

What is a theater riot? A theater riot is an extra-theatrical event. In direct or indirect relation to a theatrical production, a theater riot functions as another theatrical incident occurring within or near the theater's house. A theater riot causes a paradigm shift: the riotous audience members in the house become the theater's players, while the actors on the stage and the society surrounding the theater become the audience. When a commotion occurs in the house that is severe enough to halt the storytelling on the stage, a new and violent story unfolds in the audience. No longer is the theater presenting the audience with an entertainment or a social problem, but rather the opposite: the audience presents the theater and the society from which it was derived with a social problem. Researching the circumstances of a theater riot can yield new historical narratives in regard to a society and its theater.

This research focuses on Chinese theater riots in San Francisco's 1870s and 1880s, but it is important to note that while these particular theater riots are remarkable; they are in no way an isolated phenomenon within the world of theater. Throughout the history of the stage, there have been theater riots. The *New York Times* reported on July

1, 1888 that as early as 1679, a theater riot occurred at the Lincoln's Inn Theatre in London when two men attempted to set fire to the theater building because their enemy, the Duchess of Portland, was inside attending a performance ("An Early Theatre Riot"). In 1849, the Astor Place Riot, the deadliest of American theater riots, occurred in New York City. At least 25 people were killed when pro-American audiences rioted during the British star William Charles MacReady's portrayal of Macbeth. The scholar Joan FitzPatrick Dean's book *Riot and Great Anger: Stage Censorship in Twentieth-Century Ireland* chronicled riotous theater houses in Ireland throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (Dean 22). John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* caused theater riots in Ireland when audience members thought Synge's play depicted Irish peasants in a negative fashion. Subsequently, the Playboy Riots followed the *Playboy of the Western World* to New York and Philadelphia. While all of these theater riots occurred in various times and locales, they shared several similarities beyond simple tumult within a theater's house. Each of these theater riots had its own social, political, and cultural underpinnings that ran deeper than the initial fracas that sparked each riot's physical violence. Each of these theater riots allowed historians remarkable glimpses into a society's social problems.

Theater riots function as markers of social upheaval. Several researchers have used these markers to uncover new information about problems within past societies. W.J. Slater's essay "Pantomime Riots" examined several theater riots in Rome in 14 and 15 A.D. that occurred at large outdoor festivals. By close examination of these Roman theater riots, Slater was able to delve deeper than the physical commotion that transpired

during the riots and gain a unique insight into the various embittered factions of Roman society present in the audience (Slater 120-144). Susan C. Harris's article, "Outside the Box: The Female Spectator, The Fair Penitent, and the Kelly Riots," investigated the incidents surrounding Dublin's Gentleman's Quarrel of 1747. The traditional narrative of this extra-theatrical event generally examined the rights of the gentry in the theater, but Harris used this theater riot as a means to examine the gender politics of eighteenth-century Dublin to show how women were disenfranchised in Irish society (Harris 33-55). Marc Baer's book, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London*, analyzed the theatricality of the spectators in the Covent Garden riots in London in 1809 to gain a better perspective of (paradoxically) the pacification of early nineteenth-century British society. While a handful of scholars have used theater riots to help them gain a deeper understanding of a particular societal problem, there are still many theater riots throughout the annals of history that require further examination.

In regard to the Gold Mountain Theater Riots, several scholars have touched on these extra-theatrical events. Peter Chu and Lois M. Foster's unpublished manuscript *Chinese Theatres In America* was written in the 1930s for the Federal Theatre Project, and it is the first and seminal document regarding late nineteenth-century Chinese theater in San Francisco. Chu and Foster's third chapter dealt with what they called "the middle period" of Chinese immigration to the United States, which occurred from the 1870s until the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Chu and Foster's research in this chapter unearthed several newspaper accounts of the various Chinese theater riots of the late nineteenth century. In the 1940s, Lois Foster Rodecape reworked the Federal Theatre

Project's unpublished manuscript and tried to publish it again to no avail. Both of these unpublished manuscripts function as the blueprints for researching the Gold Mountain Theater Riots. Donald Riddle's book *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams: Music in the Life of San Francisco's Chinese* is also a seminal book in regard to researching Chinese theater riots. Chapter two in Riddle's manuscript examines several major Chinese theater riots in the 1870s and 1880s. Daphne P. Lei's scholarly article, "The Production and Consumption of Chinese Theatre in Nineteenth-Century California," and her novel *Operatic China Staging Identity across the Pacific*, are critical scholarship in terms of comprehending the literature surrounding performances in the first Sino-American contact zone in the United States. Two other valuable scholarly works essential to the history of Chinese theater audiences in San Francisco's late nineteenth-century are Annette Ke-Lee Chan's dissertation, "A Performance History of Cantonese Opera in San Francisco," and Helen V. Cather's thesis, "The History of San Francisco's Chinatown." In popular non-fiction, Richard H. Dillon's book *Hatchet Men: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco's Chinatown* and Herbert Asbury's book *The Barbary Coast* are also important works of research in this field.

Most primary research of the Chinese theater in nineteenth-century San Francisco comes in the form of travelogues written by North American and European tourists. In these travel accounts, tourists visiting San Francisco provide descriptions and occasionally illustrations of the interiors of Chinese theaters, actors, costumes, make-up, musicians, music, the stage, and, most importantly, descriptions of the audience. These descriptions are invaluable to the social narrative of Chinese theater audiences because

they are the only primary accounts of Chinese theater audiences outside of a few descriptions from the daily San Francisco newspapers. The problem with these primary accounts, however, as the historian Raymond W. Rast points out in his journal article “The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco’s Chinatown, 1882-1917,” is that these tourists’ portrayals were skewed by the San Francisco tourist industry’s depiction of Chinatown as exotic and primitive in comparison to the city’s white society (Rast 32). While these travelogues are invaluable to the historical narrative of the Chinese theater, unfortunately none of these tourists’ accounts described riots in the Chinese theater.

The only accounts given of Chinese theater riots during this time period are found in newspaper articles. These descriptions are the lone surviving stories contemporarily written about these tumultuous affairs. It is tempting to call their data primary research, but unfortunately for the most part these are secondary accounts of San Francisco’s Chinese theater riots. The newspaper reporters who wrote these articles were generally not on location when the theater riots occurred. Their accounts were taken secondhand from eyewitnesses and police reports, and much of the reporters’ narratives of these extra-theatrical events were facetious, biased against and misrepresentative of Chinese audience members.

Most of our records of Chinese theatres in this city are grotesque colorations of fleeting visits by amused sight-seers, or occasional newspaper items forced into print by reason of indisputably news-valuable occurrences or a temporary paucity of subjects for reporting. The records are in many cases almost inaccessible, since the post-earthquake fire of 1906 destroyed the valuable collections of both the San Francisco and Mechanics’ Libraries, creating a void which long and diligent labor has not entirely filled. (Chu and Foster 17-18)

Generally the local newspapers ignored San Francisco's Chinese theater, but when the Chinese theater audiences rioted, it gave white San Franciscans a platform to decry the Chinese as uncivilized. The sensationalism created by these theater riots by the press was used to maintain preconceived and racialized tropes about the Chinese, but these accounts of the Chinese theater riots also indirectly functioned as historical archives for an often forgotten theatrical tradition in American history. Although these reports of San Francisco's Chinese theater riots were facetiously written, and laden with bigotry, they revealed more than just the racialization of the Chinese by white society. These derisive accounts unintentionally recorded a war of assimilation into American society in the houses of San Francisco's Chinese theaters. A war fought between the city's white population, who wanted the Chinese to leave, and the city's Chinese population, who wanted to maintain their traditions far from their native land.

A Brief History of the Chinese in San Francisco in the Late Nineteenth Century

Chinese sojourners had no idea what to expect when they first arrived in San Francisco. Everything was foreign to the Cantonese men who came to Alta-California in search of gold in the second half of the nineteenth century—everything except the small Chinese settlements developing in California, which brought Chinese theater to the United States for the first time.

The first permanent Chinese settlers arrived in California in 1848 (Cather 2). Gold had been unearthed at Sutter's Mill in Sacramento, and the discovery of this precious metal in Alta-California triggered a mass immigration west for many North Americans and Europeans. Westerners were not the only treasure hunters to travel to

Northern California in search of gold. Men from Guangzhou traveled east across the Pacific in search of fortune. The meeting of these two cultures in San Francisco in the second half of the nineteenth century created the first trans-pacific east-meets-west Sino-American society on the United States' west coast (Lei 25). The San Francisco Bay functioned as an ideal port for the Chinese, and soon a small enclave of Chinese travelers settled in San Francisco. To westerners, these new immigrants appeared otherworldly, and they referred to the Chinese as "Celestials" (Chu and Foster 5).

The sojourning Chinese arriving in California had no intention of conforming to western society and culture. The ethnomusicologist Ronald Riddle in his book *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams: Music in the Life of San Francisco's Chinese* stated, "Chinese immigration in the nineteenth century was a special character. The new population was almost totally male, and its individuals had no intention of settling permanently outside of China" (Riddle 4). Richard H. Dillon pointed out in his popular non-fictional book *Hatchet Men: Tong Wars in San Francisco* that Chinese immigrants traveled east across the Pacific with the hope of making enough money on the Gold Mountain to return home to Canton wealthy (Dillon viii-ix). As a result of the treasure seeking Chinese, a small Chinese community developed in the heart of San Francisco. Herbert Asbury in his informal history *The Barbary Coast* stated that originally the Chinese section of San Francisco was called little China, but in the 1860s it became known as Chinatown (Asbury 140).

When the sojourning Cantonese men arrived in San Francisco, they found California not only foreign but also hostile. Hoodlums waited near the docks for newly

arriving Chinese immigrants, so they could beat and rob the foreigners (Dillon 14). “The most industrious persecutors of the Chinese in San Francisco were the hoodlums, young thieves and brawlers who were a veritable thorn in the flesh of the police for more than a quarter of a century” (Asbury 150). The Chinese had no legal recourse, and they fell victim to the hoodlums’ assaults. The Chinese also faced angry labor agitators who claimed the Chinese were stealing their jobs. It became vital that newly arriving Chinese immigrants had some form of recourse and means of protection, and so several wealthy Chinese merchants set up benevolent societies for newly arriving Chinese immigrants. While these benevolent societies aided the Chinese travelers, these organizations were not free. Members had to pay dues, but in return they received food, lodging and work. These benevolent societies were known as the six companies.

The 62,000 Chinese who resided in California by 1858 were members, with very few exceptions, of one or another of the six companies which grew out of the Kong Chow Company. The six were the Sam Yup Company, the See Yup Company, the Ning Yuen Company, the Yeung Wo Company, the Hop Wo Company and the Hip Kat Company. (Dillon 40)

During the 1850s and early 1860s, Chinese labor was welcomed for the most part with open arms into the west: “Chinese labor was cheap, docile and efficient. For a few years this immigration was encouraged enthusiastically” (Chu and Foster’s 6-7). Much of early San Francisco and the western railroad were built by Chinese labor: “It was Chinese labor which contributed to the miracle of the trans-continental railroad, completed in 1869” (Chu and Foster 6). Many Chinese settled in San Francisco in the Dupont circle, which stretched from Sacramento Street between Kearny Street and

Dupont Street (present day Grant Street), Jackson Street from Kearny Street to Stockton Street, and Dupont Street between Sacramento Street and Jackson Street.

This era became known as “the honeymoon” for the Chinese in California (Lei 27), and a wave of Chinese immigration occurred. Chinese immigration jumped from 323 individuals arriving in California in 1849 to 18,434 Chinese immigrants arriving in 1852. (Cather 16). Peter Chu and Louis Foster categorized the immigration of the Chinese into three categories: Chinese pioneers (1850s through the 1860s), the middle period (1870s until the 1906 earthquake), and the modern day (post 1906 earthquake) (Chu and Foster 18). This study focuses on riotous Chinese audiences in California in a section of the middle period (the 1870s and 1880s).

On May 10, 1869, Leland Stanford drove a golden spike into the first completed trans-continental railroad tracks in the United States. The effect of the new railroad, coupled with a depression in the east, caused a flood of laborers to pour west in search of work. The result was an excess of working men in California. As a result, Chinese laborers and the immigration of this workforce became a target of contempt for labor agitators in San Francisco.

[The] Chinese became increasingly subject to verbal and physical abuse on the streets and in the countryside, as white miners, laborers, and farmers alike rallied to the political cry “The Chinese Must Go!” Now vilified for his alien demeanor and dress, his “paganism,” and a variety of fantasized immoral, unsanitary, and treacherous ways, the hard-working Chinese became essentially a victim of his virtues. The very attributes of industriousness, frugality, and self restraint that had been admired by the welcomers of the 1850s became a collective thorn in the side of the white unemployed. (Riddle 7)

Despite some hostilities, Chinese immigration to California continued to flourish. The United States Census Bureau estimated that in 1870 there were approximately 63,254 Chinese living in the United States (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 8). Of the 63,254 Chinese living in the United States, the Census Bureau estimated that 49,310 Chinese lived in California (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 8). Seventy-eight percent of all Chinese in the United States during this time period lived in the golden state. Of the aggregate population of approximately 149,473 persons in San Francisco County in 1870 (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 15), 12,030 persons living in San Francisco were Chinese (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 16).

By 1880, the United States Census Bureau estimates that 105,405 Chinese were living in the United States (United States *Tenth Census* 379). While the aggregate population of California in 1880 jumped to 864,694 (United States *Tenth Census* 378-79), the population of Chinese living in California in 1880 climbed to 75,132 (United States *Tenth Census* 379). The aggregate population of San Francisco County in 1880 moved up to 233,959 (United States *Tenth Census* 382). The Chinese population in San Francisco County rose from 12,030 to 21,790 (United States *Tenth Census* 382).

Unfortunately a fire in 1921 in the United States Commerce Building destroyed most of the United States 1890 census data before Congress had created a national archive to preserve these statistics, so much of the United States statistical census data on the Chinese during this time period has been lost. What is known is that due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which sought to halt Chinese labor, immigration from China to the United States was slowed. The Chronologist William L. Tung shows in his

book *The Chinese in America 1820-1973: A Chronology & Fact Book* that in 1883, “The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was chiefly directed at laborers. Chinese of other professions could still come to the United States. While the total number of Chinese immigrants was 8,031 this year, it dropped considerably in the following years” (Tung 17). The surviving statistics from the *Eleventh United States Census* revealed there were 107,475 Chinese living in the United States in 1890 (United States *Eleventh Census* 401). In 1870, Chinese immigration had grown exponentially from the previous two decades, but by 1890, the Chinese Exclusion Act had effectively halted Chinese immigration. In California, the Chinese population declined from the previous decade’s population of 75,132 down to 72,472 (United States *Eleventh Census* 437). However, as the historian Raymond Rast points out in his article *The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco’s Chinatown, 1882-1917*, San Francisco’s Chinese population grew during the 1880s:

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 sparked a short-term transformation in San Francisco’s Chinatown that the law’s proponents had failed to foresee. The federal policy denying entry to Chinese laborers caused the Chinese population in the United States to stagnate and then decline, as expected. Chinatown’s status as the economic capital and preeminent refuge of Chinese America, however, spurred an actual increase in the quarter’s population. Growing at a rate of more than 20 percent during the 1880s, the number of Chinatown residents surpassed 30,000 before the end of the decade. (Rast 34)

The 1870s and 1880s represented a liminal period for the Chinese living in San Francisco. Slightly different from Chu and Foster’s categories of Chinese immigration, Tung classified Chinese immigration in the United States into four periods:

Free immigration (1820-1882), when Chinese labor was much needed for the exploitation of natural resources and construction of railways;

Discriminatory restrictions (1882-1904), covering the period from the passing of the first exclusion act on May 2, 1882, up to the enactment of the 1904 act; Absolute exclusion (1904-1943), beginning with the act of April 27, 1904, which extended all Chinese exclusion laws then in force indefinitely and applied to all insular possessions of the United States, until the repeal of all Chinese exclusion laws on December 17, 1943; and Gradual liberation (1943--), achieved by several congressional acts after the repeal of all Chinese exclusion laws in December 1943, particularly the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. (Tung 6)

Between what Tung identified as the free immigration period and the discriminatory restrictions period is a gray zone for San Francisco's Chinese. The 1870s and 1880s propelled San Francisco's Chinese into flux. During this time period, the popular opinion of white society in regard to the Chinese changed from the Chinese being valuable members of the city to the Chinese being a plague on San Francisco.

Of the estimated 63,254 Chinese living in the United States in 1870, only seven percent were female; 58,680 of the Chinese population were male, and 4,574 were female (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 609). The majority of these women had no occupation, except as sex slaves in the various houses of prostitution in and around Chinatown.

The *United States Ninth Census* estimated that of the 68,352 jobs in San Francisco during 1870, 9,054 were held by the Chinese (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 768). Of the 1,000 persons employed in the occupation of agriculture, the Chinese workforce consisted of approximately 5 agricultural laborers, 5 dairymen, 1 farmer or planter, and 23 employed as gardeners, nurserymen and vine growers (United States *Ninth Census Volume I* 799).

Of the 27,760 persons employed in the occupation of professional and personal

services in San Francisco, the Chinese workforce consisted of approximately 158 barbers and hairdressers, 40 boarding and lodging housekeepers, 2 clergymen, 1,256 domestic servants, 20 hotel and restaurant keepers and employees, 1 journalist, 2,128 laborers, 1,333 launderers, 1 livery-stable keeper, 1 employee of the civil government, 24 physicians and surgeons, and 3 teachers (United States *Ninth Census Volume I 799*).

Of the 17,558 persons employed in the occupation of trade and transportation, the Chinese workforce consisted of approximately 322 traders and dealers, 135 hucksters, peddlers, and commercial travelers, 96 clerks, salesmen and accountants in stores, 1 banker, 7 employees of railroad companies, and 75 sailors, steam boatmen and watermen (United States *Ninth Census Volume I 799*).

Of the 22,034 persons employed in the occupation of manufactures and mining, the Chinese workforce consisted of approximately 15 bakers, 2 blacksmiths, 296 boot and shoemakers, 14 butchers, 60 carpenters and joiners, 1,657 cigar makers and tobacco workers, 1 clerk in a manufacturing establishment, 1 confectioner, 253 cotton and woolen mill operatives, 145 fishermen and oystermen, 1 iron and steel worker, 30 lumbermen, rafts men and wood choppers, 5 machinists, 20 milliners, dress and mantua makers, 343 miners, 4 painters and varnishers, 110 tailors and 8 tanners (United States *Ninth Census Volume I 799*).

While it would be useful to have a United States census list of occupations held by the Chinese in San Francisco from 1880 to 1890, these statistics were not readily available. Given the rise of Sino-phobia and anti-Chinese labor movements in California—most notably in San Francisco—coupled with the rise of the Chinese

population in San Francisco as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act, legitimate work for the Chinese in San Francisco must have been increasingly hard to find. Yet this era is replete with evidence of San Francisco's working class Chinese spending their hard earned money on the Chinese theater.

A Brief History of the Chinese Theater In San Francisco

The Cantonese who immigrated to California brought more than just cheap labor. They brought their culture, which included theater. "Almost as soon as they arrived in this country, the first immigrants set up a theater. Moreover, this was no amateur attempt, but a full-fledged professional venture which from the first received enthusiastic patronage and support" (Chu and Foster 9). The first accounts of Chinese theater occurred in San Francisco in 1852 (Lei, *Production and Consumption* 289).

On the night of 18 October 1852, San Francisco saw its first Chinese opera, presented by the Hong Took Tong ... a company that had recently arrived from Canton with 123 performers ... The company gave performances for five months, opening at the American Theater for a week's run, then performing continuously at a theater of their own construction from December until March of the following year. (Riddle 18)

This is significant because not only do we have the first Chinese theater production staged in America, but also the first Chinese theater audiences in America, consisting of both Chinese and white patrons.

In the following decades, several Chinese theaters located in the Dupont circle had enormous houses, seating upwards of one to three thousand patrons at any given event. At the peak of Chinese theater in nineteenth-century California, these Sino-American theatrical houses were filled with Chinese immigrants. Although Chinese

theater in San Francisco afforded nightly relief from the hardships endured by the Chinese on the Pacific Slope, as well as offering the sojourning men of Guangzhou a remembrance of their native culture, the Chinese theater of nineteenth-century San Francisco was also, occasionally, a perilous venture for many patrons.

In the 1870s and 1880s, City ordinances aimed at the Chinese theater in the form of amusement curfews meant that if the performance ran past the allotted time, the risk of police raids was probable, and the favorite means for police officers to break up a production and clear the audience was by clubbing Chinese patrons on the head with cudgels. Other more serious hazards included being trampled to death by stampeding crowds attempting to flee the theater in fear of police brutality or as a result of somebody yelling, “fire!” The tong wars (warring Chinese gangs) were also raging in San Francisco at this time, and occasionally highbinders (paid assassins) murdered rival tong members in the audience. The Chinese theaters themselves were also at war with each other and would employ violence to empty a rival theater’s house. Despite the tumultuous upheaval that at times surrounded the diasporic Chinese theater in San Francisco, Cantonese drama during the era of the Gold Mountain Theater Riots remained tenacious and defiant against a largely Sino-phobic western society.

Inside San Francisco’s Chinese Theater

This subchapter is a compilation of various published accounts of tourists attending the Chinese theater during the 1870s and 1880s in San Francisco. These paraphrased and quoted statements include descriptions from The Victorian Romance novelist Lady Duffus Hardy’s (1825-1891) travelogue *Through Cities and Prairie Lands:*

Sketches of an American Tour written in 1880; the American publisher and author Mrs. Frank Leslie's (1836-1914) travelogue *California: A Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate* written in the late 1870s; the English journalist and author George Augustus Henry Sala's (1828-1895) travelogue *America Revisited: From the Bay of New York to the Gulf of Mexico, and From Lake Michigan to the Pacific* written in the early 1880s, as well as the Englishman W. G. Marshall's travelogue *Through America or Nine Months in the United States*. While much of these accounts reveal a misunderstanding by these wealthy Caucasian tourists in regard to San Francisco's Chinatown, their depictions of the interiors of the Chinese theaters during this time period are an important part of the history of Chinese theater in San Francisco.

The most famous of San Francisco's Chinese theaters during this era was the Royal Chinese Theater located on Jackson Street. During the heyday of the Royal Chinese Theater, there were also several other Chinese theaters operating in the Dupont circle. All of these theaters were large commercial buildings, whose interiors had been converted into playhouses (Hardy 198-201). The facades of these Chinese theaters were indistinguishable from neighboring buildings except for Chinese calligraphy written in red on the doors, a flag hung off the balcony, a row of paper lanterns over the doorway, and the sound of gongs and Chinese fiddles emanating out onto the street from within (Hardy 198-201). A ticket taker sat in front of the door to the Chinese theater and charged an admission price: "Within a few feet of the entrance door a moon-faced Mongolian sits receiving custom, fifty cents for admission at the beginning of the evening, the charge dwindling down to five cents as the hours roll on" (Hardy 198-201).

Beyond the front door of the Royal Chinese Theater, there was a long narrow hallway that led to the entrance of the house. “Entering from the street we passed through a long passage where a Chinaman behind a counter was selling delicacies, such as figs, dark-looking sweetmeats, sugar-cane, betel-nuts wrapped in green leaves and decorated with red paint and slices of citron” (Leslie 155-56). At the end of the long hallway, a paper curtain was drawn back, revealing a flight of stairs that led up to the theater’s house (Hardy 198-201).

It is divided into two parts, the pit or parquette, which slopes upward from the footlight to the back of the house; above that is a gallery, which extends over and seems ready to fall on the heads of those below, and rises steadily backwards till the last row of Mongolian heads seems to touch the ceiling. (Hardy 198-201)

The pit was unadorned, and filled with “rude” wooden benches (Leslie 155-156). “There is no attempt at ornamentation anywhere; the walls are whitewashed; benches, etc., are all of the roughest description” (Hardy 198-201). The gallery above had on one side several private boxes “... partitioned off, breast high ...” for distinguished audience members (Hardy 198-201), as well as a smaller segregated gallery for women (Leslie 155-56). “The stage was a mere raised platform like that in a lecture-room with a flight of steps at each end descending to the parquette. There was no scenery of any kind, but at either wing a red-curtained doorway, through which exits and entrances are made quite without disguise or ceremony ...” (Leslie 155-156). At the back of the stage, the musicians sat in a row, and played gongs, cymbals, Chinese fiddles, horns, drums, reed organs, and lutes (Chen 31).

The pit held from eight hundred to a thousand patrons (Salsa 241). These patrons were Chinese men who wore “black low-crowned hats” (Salsa 241-242). “One-third at least, of the audience are smoking cigars or cigarettes ...” (Salsa 245-46). The women in the segregated gallery also smoked: “In almost every case they [Chinese women] were smoking, either cigarettes or small reed pipes, gaily ornamented” (Salsa 247). Young vendors also wandered through the house silently selling sweetmeats and sugarcane from baskets on their heads (Leslie 158-59). While the patrons of the Chinese theater snacked on food and smoked tobacco, they did not laugh or give applause (Marshall 299-300).

The audience also used the stage at times:

On either side of the performers on the stage there sat, stood lounged, or loafed about a group of Chinamen, smoking and munching, even as their *confreres* in the parquette did. They would cross the stage from time to time in the most unconcerned manner, threading their way through the ranks of actors, of whom there might be as many as thirty on the stage at a time, and who, on their part, took not the slightest notice of these interlopers ... (Salsa 249)

Inside the Chinese theater, smoking and snacking with his fellow countrymen, the Chinese theater audience member was transported back to Guangzhou. The hardships and foreign customs of California disappeared for a few hours in the Chinese theater, and were replaced with the familiar traditions of China. The reminder of and the illusion of being home were reasons why the Chinese theater was so popular with the Cantonese in the United States, but sometimes the illusions of home were shattered by outside forces that reminded the Chinese theater audience members that they were in a hostile land far from home.

CHAPTER TWO: MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE VIOLENCE

1:15, and still open. Come on boys [Police Captain William Y. Douglass] (“Mongolian Theatricals”).

Petitions and Ordinances

Guangzhou’s theater is musical theater. The term Chinese Opera was coined as a result of the musicality of Cantonese plays; however, Chinese Opera is a problematic term. Opera is a distinctly western genre of musical theater, and the use of the word “opera” after the word “Chinese” forces a Eurocentric concept of theater onto Chinese drama (Lei 8). Similar to western opera, Cantonese theater requires music to aid in the performance unfolding on the stage; however, the Cantonese musical scales, as well as the musical instruments required for Chinese drama, differ from western music and orchestration so drastically that the western ear hears Cantonese music as cacophonous rather than melodious. On September 25, 1869, the *San Francisco Chronicle* offered an example of this misinterpretation by the western ear in regards to Cantonese music:

Imagine yourself in a boiler manufactory when four hundred men are putting in rivets, a mammoth tin shop next door on one side and forty-stamp quartz mill upon the other, with a drunken charivari party with six hundred instruments in front, four thousand enraged cats on the roof, and a faint idea will be conveyed of the performance of a first-class Chinese band of music. (“Chinese Theatricals. Comedy”)

Numerous accounts of Cantonese music in San Francisco’s Chinese theaters were hyperbolically described in similar metaphors in local newspapers. “The noise was the same as might have been produced with a Scotch bag-pipe, a dozen Tyrolean flageolets, several frying pans, a copper [sic], bones, banjos, and cymbals all in violent and indiscriminate use” (“The Board of Trade”). Although they were unable to comprehend

the music of the Chinese theater, the real problem white neighbors had with the Chinese orchestra was not the sound but rather the volume. The musical orchestrations of the Chinese theater were extremely loud. As a result of the carrying audibility of Chinese theater music, a series of petitions were written by surrounding neighbors appealing to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in respect to the volume of the music emanating from the Chinese theaters.

On September 5, 1878, a letter from various citizens of San Francisco appeared in the Board of Supervisors column of the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

To the Honorable Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco: the undersigned, citizens of said city and county and residents in the block surrounded by Kearny, Jackson, Dupont and Pacific streets and Montgomery avenue, respectfully represent that the Chinese theater building structure on the northerly side of Jackson street, between Kearny and Dupont streets, has recently been repaired and altered by the construction of several new windows and openings, which have greatly increased the noises and discordant sounds emanating from said building during the theatrical performances therein ... ("Chinese Nuisances")

Petitions similar to this one appeared in San Francisco newspapers occasionally during the 1870s and 1880s, which laid the groundwork for various anti-Chinese theater ordinances that were to go into effect in the city. Although annoyed white citizens' letters to the local authorities comprised the majority of the petitions in regard to the Chinese theater, pro-Chinese theater petitions also surfaced in the dailies after entertainment ordinances took effect.

On January 19, 1869, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, "A regular meeting of the Board of Supervisors was held last evening ... A large number of petitions and protests were read and approved" ("Board of Supervisors: Chinese Theater"). On the

agenda, among such issues as “Pest-House, Finance, the Burial of the Indigent Dead, and the Gas Contract,” was a protest under the title “Chinese Theater.” This complaint was not against the Chinese theater, but rather a petition from the Chinese theater on Dupont Street against the inequality of the entertainment curfew: “A protest was read from the owners of the Chinese Theater on Dupont Street against the late action of the Board requesting them to close up at 12 o’clock, unless the same rule should be applied to all other similar institutions in the city” (“Board of Supervisors: Chinese Theater”). Although the entertainment curfews were mandates for all of the city’s theaters, the ordinances were only enforced on the Chinese theaters.

One pro-Chinese theater petition in particular revealed a curious ordinance directed against the Chinese theater. On May 3, 1870, in the *San Francisco Chronicle’s* Board of Supervisors’ column, an article titled “Chinese Theater Music” stated:

Mr. Story offered a communication from Glazier & Seligsberger, representing that they owned the property occupied by the Chinese Theater Company; that the use of the gong was absolutely necessary to the proper conducting of Celestial tragedies, and that the recent order prohibiting the pounding of gongs in the city had resulted in the entire demoralization of the Mongolian drama in this city, and the performances were necessarily suspended ... Mr. Story introduced a resolution rescinding the original order. (“Board of Supervisors: Meeting Last Night”)

Glazier and Seligsberger’s petition revealed that at some point in the first half of the year 1870 or at sometime in the late 1860s, a petition had been passed into ordinance by the Board of Supervisors banning the banging of the gong within the city limits of San Francisco. Although this was a citywide ban, the ordinance was only enforced (and probably only for a short time) at the Chinese theaters.

Individual Chinese theaters pleaded with city officials to repeal the gong ordinance, but to no avail. On May 24, 1870, in an article titled “Board of Supervisors: Regular Meeting ... Chinese Gongs”, the Board of Supervisors reported: “Mr. Badism of Committee on Health and Police, reported adversely to petition for repeal of ordinance prohibiting the banging of the Celestial gong at the theater on Jackson street (“Board of Supervisors: Regular Meeting”). It is unclear how long the anti-gong ordinance lasted in San Francisco’s Chinatown, or if the ordinance was ever stringently enforced, but Chinese theaters probably ignored the law in this instance, and occasionally had to pay fines as a result.

While the banging of the Chinese gong became a criminal act in San Francisco, and while the Guangzhou orchestra sounded foreign to and affected the sleep patterns of neighboring San Franciscans, the duration of Chinese theater performances were just as foreign to San Franciscans as the Chinese music that accompanied the plays. Although the banning of the Chinese gong dampened the music as well as caused inadequacies within the constructs of the Sino-drama, it did not completely silence the productions like the entertainment curfew sought to do. At times, Cantonese theater performances ran from early evening until the early hours of the morning. “At 7 o’clock the [Chinese theatrical] performance will be resumed and continued until 4 o’clock on the following morning” (“The Chinese New Year”). While Chinese theater performances ran much longer than conventional western theater performances, whites tended to believe Cantonese dramas ran episodically from night to night for up to a year. “The length of the average Chinese-play is unknown. A long one runs for a year, and a short one for

from eight to twelve hours” (“An Indignant Audience”). While the duration of a single performance might last all night, the storyline of a Chinese drama was broken up into several performances lasting several days at the most. Despite the misunderstandings inherently placed upon the conventions of the Chinese theater by whites in the second half of San Francisco’s nineteenth-century, the combination of the booming sounds of the Chinese gongs and other Chinese instruments, coupled with the running time of Chinese theater performances, which ran into the early morning hours, caused the city of San Francisco to petition for and pass an ordinance against the Chinese theaters known as the entertainment curfew. Again this was a citywide ordinance that was only enforced in Chinatown.

About two months ago the Board of Supervisors enacted a law requiring all places of amusement, such as theaters, to close at or before 1 o’clock A.M. The ordinance was especially directed at the Chinese theaters one on either side of Jackson street, where the performances, with their excruciating accompaniments, as those instruments of torture, the Chinese gong and fiddle, were prolonged until the early hours of the morning, to the infinite annoyance of the white sleepers in the vicinity. (“Disarming the Chinese”)

The various petitions and ordinances in San Francisco aimed at making life difficult for the Chinese tested the patience of the sojourning Chinese. Continual harassment of the Chinese without consequence by hoodlums was considerably aggravating for the San Francisco Chinese. Far from home, the Chinese generally acted with temperance in regard to their white aggressors. However, when city officials began banning the full duration of an evening performance at the Chinese theater, the Chinese audience members had had enough maltreatment, and they began to reciprocate violence against oppression. In order to produce and see their theater in San Francisco, the

Chinese continued to break the curfew laws. The entertainment curfew directed at the Chinese theaters might seem innocuous on the surface, but the biased ordinance created a toxic catalyst between Chinese theater audiences and the San Francisco police enforcing the Chinese theater curfew.

Police Raids

The San Francisco police force during the 1870s was the most understaffed police department in any major city in the United States (San Francisco *Municipal Reports* 81). According to the *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year of 1870-71*, the aggregate population of San Francisco was 150,361 persons (San Francisco *Municipal Reports* 82). The police force during this time period consisted of 4 captains, 1 clerk and 99 officers (San Francisco *Municipal Reports* 82). In terms of police per capita, the number of inhabitants to each policeman was 1,445 (San Francisco *Municipal Reports* 82). San Francisco police chief, Patrick Crowley, noted this discrepancy between San Francisco's booming population and the low number of police officers charged with enforcing the city's laws in the *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year of 1870-71*.

The number of Police Officers employed and paid by the City is the same as at the date of my last annual report-namely, four Captains and one hundred Policemen. This number is not sufficient for the wants of the city, and many applications from citizens or property owners for the extension of Police patrol protection to districts outside the present fields of patrol duty, have necessarily remained unsatisfied from the fact that the officers could not be taken off the beats already established in the more thickly settled portion of the city, without injury to the public service. Upon comparison of the number of our police and population with the police and population of other large cities, I find that our police force is far below the strength found to be required on other places.

New York has three policemen to our one, and London has three and one half, and Dublin five times as many policemen as we have, proportionally to population. (San Francisco *Municipal Reports* 81)

The exact salary for a San Francisco police officer was not stated in the municipal reports for San Francisco during this time period. Other city departments, such as the fire department, gave a yearly salary for their employees, but the municipal reports only mentioned the number of police officers and the total of all their salaries combined. The total San Francisco police salary for 1870 was \$157,218.12 (San Francisco *Municipal Reports* 3). However, the *San Francisco Directory from 1854 to 1872* provided the salaries for the police force. “Number of Captains provided by the law, four; salary, \$1,800 per annum, each; number of policemen limited by law to one hundred and fifty; salary, \$1,500 per annum, each. Salary of the Chief’s Clerk, \$1,800 per annum; of Property Clerk, \$1,800 per annum” (San Francisco *Directory* 53).

As well as listing salaries for the police department, the *San Francisco Directory from 1854 to 1872* included the names of the persons in the police department. The four police captains listed in 1873 were Isaiah W. Lees, William Y. Douglass, Henry H. Ellis and John Short (San Francisco *Directory* 53).

Another piece of useful information that the *San Francisco Directory from 1854 to 1872* revealed was in relation to San Francisco’s local and special officers. “In addition to the regular force of the Department, there are a number of local officers deputized for duty in particular sections of the city, who are paid by the owners of property on their respective beats” (San Francisco *Directory* 53). It is unclear as to the salaries these local and special officers received by the owners of local business, but the

San Francisco Directories listed the names of these deputized men. By adding the names listed under the local and special officers, the estimated total number of local and special officers enforcing the law in San Francisco in 1873 was approximately 148. Some of these special officers were employed by the Chinese theaters, but other special officers walking beats in Chinatown apparently relished in enforcing the city's ordinances directed against the Chinese theaters.

The entertainment curfew, designed to shorten the length of the dramas in the Chinese theater, went into effect in the mid 1870s, and shortly thereafter newspapers began printing sensational articles about curfew raids by the police on the Chinese theaters. On October 25, 1875, in an article titled "Mongolian Theatricals: The Police Pounce Upon The Royal China Theater," the *San Francisco Chronicle* described one such police raid on a Chinese theater. According to the article, the Royal Chinese Theater on Jackson Street was ignoring the curfew, and its productions were continuing on into the early hours of the morning, which drew the attention of law enforcement ("Mongolian Theatricals").

Last night at 12 o'clock, Captain Douglas detailed about a dozen police officers to meet at 1 o'clock on the corner of Jackson and Kearny streets, to be in readiness for a raid on the theaters if they should remain open longer than 1 o'clock. At that hour a single file of officers stole silently up Jackson street in the shadow of the buildings under the leadership of the corpulent Captain and took up their places in a capacious doorway adjoining one of the theaters. All was silent on the street, except one or two jabbering heathens who were holding excited converse with each other across the street in their native tongue, calmly heedless of police surveillance. ("Mongolian Theatricals")

Apparently, somebody was heedful of the hidden police officers because an alarm was sounded, causing a panic in the Chinese theater ("Mongolian Theatricals").

Suddenly a low shrill whistle was heard in an alley adjoining the new Chinese theater, and simultaneously a chorus of yells emanated from that building itself, followed immediately afterward by a scrambling of the audience, which had been panic-stricken by the warning whistle and were crowding and rolling down stairs from the second and third stories in wild confusion and to the imminent danger of the lives of most of them. Many crawled through narrow windows in the third story, and getting on the roofs of the adjoining building, hurriedly made their escape in the gloom. When they reached the pavement they crowded in front of the door, blocking up the street and wondering what had caused the stampede. (“Mongolian Theatricals”)

The police were still in hiding, so when the crowd dispersed, Captain Douglass turned his attention to the other theater on Jackson Street (“Mongolian Theatricals”).

The Captain glanced at his watch and remarked, “1:15, and still open. Come on boys.” He followed up his remark by darting into the long hallway leading to the theater, followed by his officers. When they reached the door the cry was raised and a rush was made for the door, but two stalwart policemen closed and barred them tightly, and the audience found themselves prisoners. (“Mongolian Theatricals”)

Captain Douglass and several of his men then made their way to the stage and arrested over a dozen actors and a dozen audience members (“Mongolian Theatricals”). “The dozen auditors and fifteen actors were secured by their tails to each other, and the whole body was marched to the City Hall” (“Mongolian Theatricals”). Despite the cruel and humiliating way by which the Chinese theater audience members were led to their incarceration, there were many strategic problems created by the raiding police that evening that could have caused serious bodily harm to the spectators at these Chinese theaters. In the first instance, a sentry gave out a cry when the police approached, causing a panic and a hazardous stampede among the audience members. In the second instance, when Captain Douglass raided the theater across the street, another stampede ensued, but this time, the police barred the front doors, trapping the panic stricken

audience inside the theater. It was fortunate that nobody was trampled or crushed to death. The next day the *Alta California* reported on the audience members who had been arrested:

The Chinese theatrical case was disposed of in part in the Police Court yesterday. Seven of the twenty-six persons arrested on Sunday night forfeited their bail. Nine others were convicted of being present as spectators, and doing mischief, and ten cases were continued until Thursday. The validity of the Supervisor's ordinance is to be questioned for the defense. ("The Theatre Ordinance")

Police raids on Chinese theaters were dangerous to the welfare of the audience members caught in the chaos. The *San Francisco Chronicle* took note of this in 1876, after the worst stampede in the history of San Francisco's Chinese theater happened:

The police themselves have at various times caused panics by making raids on the theaters after 1 o'clock A.M., the hour at which the theaters are required by law to close, and terrifying the audience with fears of imprisonment. At these times, however, the police were numerous and found no great difficulty in keeping the crowd back. ("The Theater Tragedy")

Later in the year 1875, another police raid occurred at a Chinese theater. This raid though was for a different reason than breaking the curfew. Although the curfew was used as a legal excuse to storm the theater, the reason reported for the invasion was to check audience members for concealed weapons.

On Saturday night Captain Douglass decided to raid the Chinese theaters on Jackson street and search every Celestial in the audience for concealed weapons. As the officers reported at 12 o'clock, the Captain called out the names of about thirty of them, whom he directed to return at 1 o'clock. At that hour the posse of officers assembled in the Police Office and were detailed into two watches, one under the command of Captain Douglass and the other under that of Sergeant Sharp. The latter watch was assigned to the new theater on the south side of Jackson street, and the Captain chose the one opposite. An ordinance which was recently passed, prohibits the continuance of theatrical performances after 1 o'clock, and as

the Captain and his posse would have no right to enter the theaters for the intended purpose before that hour, they waited until some minutes had elapsed. (“Disarming the Chinese”)

When the Chinese theaters did not comply with the entertainment curfew, Captain Douglass and his men struck, and again his raid created a panic and a stampede.

Upon the entrance of the officers the portly form of Captain Douglass was recognized, and a scene of the wildest confusion followed. The cry of alarm was passed from mouth to mouth, and the actors on the stage increased the panic by retreating hastily into the dressing-rooms. The audience mounted on the backs of benches and swarmed to the door, scrambling over one another’s heads and pushing each other aside, eager to reach the door. The large doors had been closed. However, and but a small space remained, through which the Celestials were required to pass one by one. The scene about this small doorway was one of the wildest confusion and defies description. The crowd roughly pushed those in front towards the exit, where they encroached on the officers, who beat them back, clubbing them over the heads and shoulders in cases where they were inclined to resist. (“Disarming the Chinese”)

While fear of arrest, citation and incarceration for violating the curfew law was a real concern for Chinese theater audiences, an even greater and more present fear of a police raid was the possibility of being assaulted by police or special officers. One special officer in particular seemed to take sadistic delight in beating Chinese audience members with his club.

One officer named Hamlin, a Chinese special, singularly [sic] was particularly demonstrative, and achieved wonderful success in the [sic] line. He faced the crowd of quivering Chinamen and launched forth his fists at regular intervals in time with the ticking of his watch, and every blow caused the blood to flow from a Celestial nose or added a darker shade to the copper hue about a Celestial eye. The aggrieved Chinamen, who had attended their theater for the purpose of being amused, accepted the treatment resignedly, and with but half-uttered mournings. (“Disarming the Chinese”)

While special officer Hamlin was inflicting physical harm on Chinese audience members, police officers were individually searching each patron as they left the theater.

On either side of the door was an officer who searched upper garments of the Chinamen as they passed out. Seated on a lower step were two other officers, who caressed the Chinamen's legs and groped in the canoe shoes for concealed knives. For over an hour the Chinamen were in procession departing from the house and during that time the crowding and pushing continued, and when the last of the audience had reached the street the officers were bathed in perspiration. ("Disarming the Chinese")

The police officers found no concealed weapons on any of the audience members who were beaten, forced out of the theater single file and searched ("Disarming the Chinese"). Audience members carrying concealed weapons simply discarded their arms on the floor as soon as the raid commenced ("Disarming the Chinese"). After the theater was emptied of patrons, the officers searched under the benches, finding six bowie knives, two pistols and several iron bars ("Disarming the Chinese"). Sergeant Sharp's raid on the other Jackson Street Chinese theater created no panic and caused no stampede due to the lack of the rival theater's patronage ("Disarming the Chinese").

Two days after the account of the egregious police raid on the Jackson Street Chinese theater, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published its disapproval of the incident:

What right have the police to invade a public house of amusement, where there is no disturbance, where nothing calls for their presence, and search every man, woman and child who has been unfortunate enough to pay his or her money for an evening's entertainment on this particular night? ... Suppose, as has often been the case, that the California Theater should prolong its performance beyond the time allowed by statute. Would Chief Ellis dare to search every man in the audience to see whether he carried a concealed weapon? We answer, no. Then why should he dare to search the Chinamen who visit the Chinese theaters? The special officer named Hamlin ... seems to us to have played the part of a cowardly ruffian, and we have but little admiration for that prudent prowess which distinguishes

itself by beating the frightened crowd with clubs when they were endeavoring to escape. (“The Raid on the Chinese Theaters”)

Many whites maintained the stereotype that the Chinese were docile, and willing to passively endure physical assault. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that on the evening of September 30, 1876 special officer Hamlin discovered that the Chinese were not quite so submissive.

Last evening officer Hamlin, who has charge of one of the aristocratic temples of the Chinese drama on Jackson street, had a difficulty with a Celestial in the theater, and ejected him with considerable trouble, clubbing him pretty severely. Half an hour afterward, as the officer was standing within the doorway, the aggrieved Chinaman sneaked up behind him and fired a shot, which took effect in the officer’s hip. Limping to the door the policeman followed the treacherous Celestial, and sent two bullets after him, one of which he thinks took effect. The Chinaman, however, escaped. The officer will be laid up for several days. (“An Officer Shot”)

In early February of 1877 it was reported by the *San Francisco Daily Morning Call*, that the Royal Chinese Theater on Jackson Street was producing a new comedy by a popular Chinese playwright named Wang Chong, and as a result the theater had been breaking the curfew law (“Row in a Chinese Theatre”). Three police officers named Houghtaling, Gaynor and Love arrived at the theater at one o’clock in the morning to halt the performance (“Chinese Theater Disturbance”).

The players wanted to obey the order, and were about leaving the stage, when a portion of the audience scrambled on the stage and demanded that the play should go on. The police at the same time demanded that it should cease. The latter demand was respected, which so enraged some of the audience that they tore up the benches. (“Row in a Chinese Theatre”)

Destroying the theater's benches was an immediate way for angry audience members to vent their frustration. Benches could also function as missiles as the officers involved in this Chinese theater riot discovered:

Some of the highbinders in their disgust tore up several benches, and one fellow in the gallery threw the back of a seat down at officer Houghtaling, narrowly escaping his head and crushing in a seat near him. The excitement became intense and the officers were compelled to exhibit their revolvers to quiet the belligerent propensities of some of the heathen, who were crying "taglah!" their word for "fight." ("Chinese Theater Disturbance")

Again in 1878 a *Daily Morning Call* article titled "Riot In The Chinese Theatre: An Officer's Experience in Enforcing the Midnight Amusement Ordinance" reported that in October of that year audience members at a Chinese theater became bellicose after a police officer tried to stop the show:

Last Saturday night, a benefit was given at the Chinese theatre on Church Alley, near Washington street, and it was announced that the show would run until two o'clock in the morning. About eighteen hundred Chinamen attended the performance, and everything went very well until one o'clock in the morning, when Officer Brown walked into the theatre and attempted to enforce the ordinance which requires that theatres shall close at one o'clock in the morning. The officer rapped on the back of a bench, and exclaimed in stentorian voice, that "the Chinese must go," but the Chinese would not budge. He then went behind the scenes and drove the actors and musicians from the stage. As he did this, the audience raised the cry of "Tah Kive Lah," which means "Strike him." Some of the audience made for the stage, probably with the intention of striking the officer, but the arrival of reinforcements and the exhibition of firearms caused the advancing party to retreat. The audience or rather a major portion thereof, then took to tearing up the benches, and everything movable in the premises, destroying the same. They also hurled missiles at the officers on the stage and then tore down the doors, which they used as battering rams to demolish the box office. The proprietors of the theater will be required to expend at least \$800 to repair the damage done. While the riot was in progress, several special officers came up and fired several shots over the crowd, which caused it to disperse. Officer Brown arrested one On Goon, while he was in the act of demolishing a bench and marched him down to

the Central Office, where he locked him up for malicious mischief. Goon was convicted in the Police Court of the offence charged against him, and to-day he will be sentenced. (“Riot in the Chinese Theatre: An Officer’s Experience”)

The Chinese audience members who fought the police in the Chinese theater were displaying their determination to maintain their culture in San Francisco. However, what was unclear about these theater skirmishes was why the most understaffed police force in the United States was so concerned with raiding Chinese theaters? “The combination of tong troubles, continuing hoodlumism and anticolonialism taxed the law-and-order power of the city to the breaking point” (Dillon 65). If San Francisco’s police force was so overworked, why was enforcing the amusement curfew on the Chinese theaters a priority? The answer might lie in Richard H. Dillon’s book *Hatchet Men* in an article he found in a London magazine:

The correspondent of London’s *Cornhill* magazine who signed himself “Day,” visited California in the 80’s and wrote that he never saw a street fight or other disturbance in some thirty trips to Chinatown, but he noted many opium dens operating openly in spite of the law prohibiting the sale of the drug for smoking. He observed wryly, “Occasionally, when the police are short of funds, they make a descent on some of the dens but, as a rule, the proprietors are left unmolested.” (Dillon 28)

Although this reference does not relate to Chinese theaters but rather to opium dens, it depicts the San Francisco police department’s finances as depleted. The means by which they would refill their coffers in this instance was by shaking down the Chinese. The Chinese theaters were mostly filled with working class Chinese men who had paid the price of admission for an evening of entertainment. If the Chinese had enough money to attend the theater, it meant that they had enough money to pay a fine for breaking the entertainment curfew. A police raid on a Chinese theater opened past curfew with a full

house meant that the police could easily apprehend a dozen or more audience members and actors, and march them down to the police station where the offenders would be briefly incarcerated, charged with breaking the curfew ordinance and most importantly fined.

Gagging

The entertainment curfew created a conundrum for the managers of the Chinese theaters. If they kept the theater open beyond the allotted time, the police might arrive and try to stop the performance, which would cause a riot in the audience. If a Chinese theater manager tried to comply with the city's ordinance, or cut or "gag" the production, the audience might become truculent.

On February 10, 1883 the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on a gagging incident in a Chinese theater:

Yesterday afternoon, for some reason unknown, the managers of the Jackson-street theater attempted to turn the audience out at 3:30 o'clock half an hour early, and for about ten minutes the exasperated heathen did some of the liveliest demolition in a place of amusement ever recorded. The benches were upset and torn up, the walls [sic], and an assault on the stage was imminent when Sergeant Birdsal and a posse of officers rushed to the rescue. Of course they could not arrest the entire audience, numbering about four hundred, and as the acts of violence ceased on their entrance, the officers contended themselves with clubbing the turbulent mob out of the place. One burly pagan, named Ah Lun, was so full of fight and liquor that he imagined he could exterminate the entire police force, and attempted to show fight, striking out from the shoulder like a veteran. In a brief space of time, however, he was knocked silly with a club, and locked up on charges of drunkenness, obstructing the street and battery. No other resistance was offered and after half an hour's hard work the officers succeeded in emptying the theater. Never again will the proprietors of the wrecked theater attempt to defraud the audience out of a half-hour's dramatic enjoyment. If they do they will be prepared for

trouble, but it is believed that hereafter the dramas will all be at least twelve hours long. (“An Indignant Audience”)

It is not clear in this instance why the manager “gagged” the performance. The play had already run for several hours past the entertainment curfew. Perhaps the theater’s manager did not want to press his luck in regard to running the show further past the regulated closing hour. Regardless of the reasons for stopping the entertainment early, the gagging versus police raids conundrum made running the Chinese theater difficult for the managers, and sometimes fatal for the patrons.

On February 16, 1885, an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* titled, “A Theater Riot. The Chinese Audience Refuse to Go Home at Midnight” stated that the night before in the Chinese theater on Jackson Street, “The house was packed with pleasure-loving Celestials. Together with quite a number of Caucasian sight-seers, and the performance proved so entertaining that when the legal time to close—12 o’clock—came the Mongolian audience raised a howl for “more show” ...” (“A Theater Riot”). The *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* contradicted the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s claim that the performance in question proved entertaining. “The trouble is variously reported to have been caused by the fact that the play was considered “no good”” (“Mongolian Wrath”). Either way, the house was full. Along with the *Evening Bulletin*, the *Daily Morning Call* reported that the performance was in the forty-fourth act of a 250-act drama (“Riotous Pagans”), and then the clock struck midnight, or so the audience thought.

The tragedians and comedians that tread the boards of the Jackson-street Theatre having been playing through five-hour matinees and six-hour

evening performances ever since the commencement of the New Year festivities, by last night were pretty thoroughly worn out. To their tired frames were added dissatisfied minds at not being able to participate in the celebration of the Emperor's birthday, and the combination of disorders induced them to attempt "gagging" last night. The cutting was judiciously scattered all through the play, and the audience did not detect it until time was called for the wind up at 11:30 P.M. Then the patrons realized that they had been swindled out of half an hour's worth of tragedy. They, the audience, protested in a body, and scattered their disapproval on the stage in the shape of chairs, sections of benches, cobble stones, stale fruit, small cobbles, and missiles that happen to be at hand. ("Contumacious Chinese")

The ensuing riot alerted the special officers in charge of keeping order in the Chinese theater, and they were soon on the scene wielding their clubs. The *Alta California* reported that "The numerous explosions attracted the attention of Officers Roberts, Linsky and McLaughlin, and Specials Ned and Tom McLaughlin, and by lively clubbing they succeeded in reducing the turbulent mob to quietude" ("Contumacious Chinese"). According to various other newspapers, quelling the boisterous audience was not as easy as the *Alta California* alleged:

The special officers in charge of the theatre, Ned and John McLaughlin as is their custom, were entering to take charge of the place when the riot occurred. John McLaughlin was in advance and got up the stairs before the grand hubbub occurred, and was in the midst of the riot. Ned, as soon as he heard the shouts and cries, marched up the steps to assist in stopping the trouble and had just got to the top when a surging mass of the better class of the audience seeking to escape, met him and he was rushed down the stairs. ("Riotous Pagans")

Special officer Ned McLoughlin then ran around to the back of the theater through Washington alley, and reentered the building at a side door in an attempt to assist his engulfed brother ("The Theater Riot").

When he reached the stage his brother, John McLaughlin, who is also a special officer, was endeavoring to keep back the crowd from attacking

the actors whom they evinced a desire to kill. One of the Mongolians in the gallery threw a heavy stool and struck John McLaughlin on the head, felling him to the ground. Half dazed, he regained his feet just as a second stool was hurled at him from the gallery. He held up his hands to protect his head and was struck on the right side, and was again knocked to the ground. He then drew his revolver and fired a shot into the air in the hope of drawing assistance from the outside. (“The Theater Riot”)

In an article written the day before in regard to this Chinese theater riot, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that although shots had been fired, no person had been wounded by the gunfire, and that the only thing discovered to have been hit by a bullet was the bass gong (“A Theater Riot”). Unfortunately this account was not accurate. While special officer John McLaughlin was seriously injured in the ordeal—“Mr. McLaughlin is quite ill with a broken rib and a severe contusion on the chest and back” (“The Theater Riot”)—another wounded man was discovered after the house had been physically cleared. “Lying on the floor there was also found a badly wounded pagan. He was removed to his lodgings and placed under the care of a Chinese physician, and will probably die. He was hit by one of the bullets, which took effect in the left breast” (The Theater Riot”).

The labeling of the Chinese theater as opera was not the only western construct whites imposed on the Chinese favorite form of entertainment in the late eighteenth century. Petitions and biased ordinances directed at San Francisco’s Chinese theater by citizens, city officials and police officers tried in vain to constrict the conventions of the diasporic Chinese theater. The results of these ordinances caused a series of Chinese theater riots that could have been avoided. The media sensationalized the accounts of these extra-theatrical events in the dailies. The reporters who wrote these articles usually

praised the police for their violence against riotous Chinese theater audiences, while they simultaneously condoned and vilified the actions of the rioting audience members.

CHAPTER THREE: EXITING EN MASSE

We have offered a reward to find out who cried “fire”
[Yee Teen, a manager at the Royal Chinese Theater] (“The Chinese Tragedy”).

Check Grubbers

While curfews and police officers caused Chinese theater riots, there were other perils Chinese theater audiences occasionally encountered. Although the Royal Chinese Theater and its rivals were capable of seating thousands of audience members, the immense popularity of Chinese theater in San Francisco frequently caused the houses to sell out. Generally this was due to a renowned Chinese actor touring San Francisco, or a particularly riveting storyline. Regardless of the reason for the full houses in Chinese theaters, Chinese audiences flocked to the diasporic theater of their native land. When a house sold out, it was fortunate for the owners of the theater, but unfortunate for those who could not procure a ticket for the evening’s entertainment.

When a riot occurred at a packed Chinese theater, the threat of being beaten by an angry spectator or an aggressive police officer was a danger, but an even greater danger was that of being injured in the melee that ensued in the audience’s attempt to escape the mayhem. In this sense, stampedes were a very real and dangerous threat to the lives of Chinese theater audiences. When the police arrived with cudgels in hand to enforce the entertainment curfew, it usually meant that any Chinese patron unlucky enough to be within striking distance of the police officer’s club was going to be struck. To avoid mistreatment, the inclination of the Chinese theater patron in these instances was to flee.

One popular escape route from the policeman's truncheon was the window. Various newspaper accounts of Chinese audience members fleeing police raids described spectators crawling through windows onto rooftops to escape. Other audience members were not so lucky. If a spectator was in the pit during a police raid, he had to make his way to the exit at the front of the building, where a police officer would be waiting with a bludgeon. If a spectator was in the gallery and unable to procure his or her departure through a window, he or she had to navigate down a set of stairs, and collide with other fleeing patrons, who were all trying to exit through a narrow hallway. There were probably more twisted ankles and sprained knees than fractured skulls among the audience members in the ensuing panic that a police raid created inside the Chinese theaters.

Police raids were not the only stampede starters in the Chinese theaters. A *San Francisco Chronicle* article published November 1, 1876, describes a phenomenon called "the "check grubber's" dodge." A ticketless Chinese theater enthusiast known as a "check grubber" would climb onto the roofs of the adjoining shops next to the theater, and peer in through the windows. "At such times, when a favorable opportunity offered itself a "check grubber" would yell in through the window the startling cry of "fire," which would be taken up and repeated at the other windows with more terrifying emphasis" ("The Theater Tragedy"). The check grubbers' chorus of "fire!" created panic in the audience. Fear of being trapped in a burning building caused pandemonium. The terror-stricken audience stampeded for the exit.

The policeman, who was watchful would quickly swing open the closed doors, and, drawing his club, would push his way in until he reached a

bench, where he would stand frantically waving the crowd back and applying his club vigorously to the ones in front. The sight of the officer would immediately allay the fears of the Chinamen in the rear, and lead them to look around to see whether there was really any fire. In a few moments the entire audience would be reseated and the play would continue in its shrieking way. (“The Theater Tragedy”)

As order was being restored, the “check grubbers” would slip into the crowd of returning patrons, and procure free seats for the entertainment (“The Theater Tragedy”). The etymology of the term “check grubber” is unclear. Perhaps the word “check” was slang for a ticket or the cost of admission, so a “check grubber” might be somebody searching for a way into the theater for free.

Stampedes

What the *Alta California* called “The Chinese Horror” began on October 30, 1876. That ill-fated evening began as a benefit performance for a popular actor at the Royal Chinese Theater. Although the name of the actor and the tragedy unfolding on the stage are unknown, the *San Francisco Chronicle* gave a brief description of the play’s plot:

A young man is suspected of a crime of theft, is arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to various degrees of punishment. First, he is publicly whipped, then racked, and finally brought to the gallows, or rather the beheading block. Between these punishments a term of imprisonment intervenes, during which the mother and sweetheart of the condemned man frequently appear before the hard-hearted Judge with pitiful appeals for mercy and clemency, all of which seem to be of no avail. (“Trampling Everything Down”)

The *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported that the audience filled the house from “pit to dome” (“A Terrible Accident”). It is estimated that from 2,000 to 3,000 patrons filled the Royal Chinese Theater’s house that evening. The majority of the audience members were

Chinese men. However, a small portion of the gallery was packed with women, and there were also a few curious whites in attendance (“Crushed to Death”). Until midnight the tragedy on the stage was progressing without a problem, and then an audience member raised an all too familiar cry. Yee Teen, the Royal Chinese Theater manager, who witnessed the travesty, later testified in regard to the incident in question:

Monday evening, about 12 o’clock, I heard the people run and heard somebody cry, “fire.” I went out to the front of the stage and could see no fire at all. I heard that there was a little smoke from a cigar some man threw away. It was benefit night, and there was a great crowd. There were probably 2,000 persons in the theatre. We have ordinarily about 1,500 persons present, but the person who had the benefit had the privilege of selling as many tickets as he wished. We have offered a reward to find out who cried “fire.” (“The Chinese Tragedy”)

While the identity of the person who infamously raised the cry of alarm was never discovered, various San Francisco newspapers gave conflicting accounts of the occurrences and moments just before the panic. Both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported in their October 31 newspapers that a piece of matting in the gallery caught fire due to some sparks from a cigarette or cigar. If a small fire started in the gallery, it might be why Yee Teen saw no flames when he walked onto the stage. The *San Francisco Chronicle* delved further into the matter stating, “... the premature fire, which made no headway, was summarily quenched by a Christian Chinaman named Adam Quinn, who besides stamping upon it, took off his coat and covered it” (“Crushed to Death”). The *Alta California* reported on November 1, 1876 that a small article caught fire in a box near the stage, and that it was extinguished with a bucket of water (“The Chinese Horror”). The *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported this first-hand account later at the coroner’s inquisition:

E. C. Stock testified that after the debris had been cleared away special Officer Langdon, the officer of the theatre, stated to him that a box near the stage contained some pieces of paper and rubbish. He noticed a smoke arising from this box. He took a basin of water and threw it into the box and extinguished the fire almost immediately after the cry of fire was raised. The officer supposed that a lighted cigar had been thrown into the box. ("The Chinese Tragedy")

Regardless of whether there was a fire or not, where it started and how it was put out, the effect of a person yelling fire in the over capacity house of the Royal Chinese Theater created an instant panic. "The effect was electrical and a perfect stampede of the audience was the result" ("A Terrible Accident"). A mass of Chinese theatergoers, terrified of being trapped in a burning building, rushed over the benches and lunged for the exit. The exit led down a short flight of steps and into a narrow corridor ("A Terrible Accident"). The narrow corridor created a bottleneck, impeding the audience members' escape. At the same time, the patrons in the gallery fled down a narrow staircase leading to the bottleneck at the tapered corridor.

Large double doors, each about twelve feet high, at the base of the stairs leading to the corridor of the vestibule were closed. The two fleeing crowds collided at this juncture, and the narrow stairs leading down from the gallery became congested. The gallery's baluster broke, and the stairs collapsed under the weight of the throng, toppling many patrons to the ground ("Crushed to Death"). "The surging crowd behind came tumbling over these prostrate forms until the doorway was completely choked up" ("A Terrible Accident"). Several patrons at the front of the crowd had slipped through the large closed doors leading to the vestibule, and were moments away from obtaining freedom from the stampede when the twelve-foot doors became unhinged:

To add to the horror of the situation, the swinging doors opening to the narrow vestibule were wrenched off and fell forward upon the unfortunate crowd ahead, mashing a number of them to the floor. The surging mass struggling outward precipitated itself upon the fallen doors compressing the helpless beings beneath to death. Still others crowded upon those on the doors and trampled them to death. (“Frightful Accident”)

The horrific cries of those being crushed to death under the doors alerted pedestrians outside and several policemen (“Trampling Everything Down”). An article in the November 1, 1876 *Daily Evening Bulletin* printed several eyewitness’ accounts of the scene unfolding outside of the Royal Chinese Theater:

Oli Stein testified that he resides at the Olympic Lodging House corner of Jackson and Kearny streets. At about a quarter to 12 o’clock Monday night I was standing at the corner of Kearny and Jackson streets and heard police whistles blown. I ran up to the Chinese Theatre and found the Chinamen in great confusion. Those in the theatre were attempting to get out and other Chinamen were trying to get in. There were a number on the floor by the steps leading from the Theatre into the alleyway. They were covered up by the door and a portion of the partition which had been carried away by the crowd. There were from forty to fifty Chinamen on the top of these. I ran down to the City Hall and informed the police. A number of officers came and the Chinamen were taken from under the boards and carried to the street, when it was found that nineteen of them were dead. (“The Chinese Tragedy”)

Peter Munson testified as follows: I keep an express wagon on the corner of Sacramento and Dupont streets. I was on Jackson street opposite the theatre about 12 o’clock Monday night. Heard a police whistle blown. I went to see what it was, and heard a great noise inside the theatre. Someone said there was a fire in the theatre. Went into the entrance and saw the people trying to get out, but the passage was blocked up by boards and a portion of the partition, with people under it. The crowd behind pressed upon the people who were down. They would not move until some police officers drove them back. I pulled some of the men out from under the planks. (“The Chinese Tragedy”)

One of the first patrolmen on the scene was a special officer named Duffield (“Trampling Everything Down”). Special officer Duffield and half a dozen police tried

to enter the building in an attempt to quell the panic, but the mass was still trying to escape, so the police officers began using their clubs to beat back the fearful audience members (“Trampling Everything Down”). Special officer Duffield also gave a statement about the incident at the coroner’s inquisition:

Was on the corner of Jackson and Dupont streets Monday evening about 12 o’clock. Heard a police whistle blown, and upon going to the theatre found the passageway blocked by the people. I told the Chinamen to go back but they would not until driven back. When we got them back we commenced taking the Chinamen out from under the boards and lumber. (“The Chinese Tragedy”)

The production continued through the stampede: “The actors upon the stage were entirely ignorant of the cause of the panic, and did not stop to inquire concerning it, but continued with their performance ...” (“Trampling Everything Down”). After the police had beaten back the Chinese audience members at the forefront of the rush, and the panicked audience members trapped inside the theater realized there was no fire, the stampede came to a stop. The fear of not being able to escape a burning building was replaced by the benevolence of trying to help those trapped under the doors. At this time during the incident, the police officers were able to enter the building, and raise the fallen doors: “The tide having been checked, the officers raised the prostrated door and removed the dead and dying from beneath it. Some were stone dead, while all under it were more or less injured” (“Trampling Everything Down”).

Two audience members, who had been at the front of the panic, narrowly escaped death when the top of the door clipped them, knocking them forward down a set of stairs in the lobby (“Trampling Everything Down”). The *San Francisco Chronicle* gave an account of the ordeal these two theatergoers underwent directly after the disaster:

One was placed at the front entrance in a sitting posture against a box of fruit, and the other a young man of high degree was taken into Yu Hum Choy's—the manager of the theater—office. A few moments later Dr. Stivers, the city and country physician, arrived and examined him. As the unfortunate fellow lay upon a low bench covered with matting at one side of the room, he was turning over and over and groaning in agony. As the doctor felt his limbs to ascertain the nature of his injuries, he yelled, "Oh, no, no; me no hurt." As if fearing that his excruciating agonies were to be increased. The other man, somewhat older, who had been placed near the doorway, sat in stolid silence, his pale face, under the flickering rays of a gas jet, recording the most excruciating suffering. ("Trampling Everything Down")

Other audience members crushed under the fallen doors were not as fortunate:

One stalwart Chinaman, weighing about 170 pounds, was brought out and laid upon the walk, his clothes torn and his body lacerated by the many feet that had tramped relentlessly over him. His face was black with suffocation and the crimson fluid was running in a stream from his nose and ears. Life had not yet left him, but in his dying agonies he writhed and crawled about the pavement, swinging his bare arms in the air, and shrieking for the relief that could not come. ("Trampling Everything Down")

Other descriptions were as equally gruesome:

Some faces were convulsed into a haunting distortion and rough men turned shudderingly away from the wide eyes which were staring in the fixity of death. Short, quick gasps in some indicated that life, though fast ebbing away, still retained a hold of the mashed body, while in others only the practiced ear of the physician could detect the faint sound of breathing. Within the now cleared hall, amid the debris of the splintered doors and stairs, lay a mass of shoes, hats and shreds of clothes, with many a dark stain of congealing blood, and among the few Chinamen gathered about the spot an hour after the disaster were two or three members of the theatrical troupe, with the paint still on their cheeks. ("Trampling Everything Down")

By now word had spread through Chinatown and the outlying areas that a disaster had occurred at the Royal Chinese Theater on Jackson Street, and large crowds of Chinese and whites began to gather at the scene.

The actors and actresses rushed in a body to the doorway to discover what had transpired, indulging in many guttural exclamations of terror at the long line of dead bodies placed upon the pavement. With much trouble the crowds which had assembled upon Jackson street were driven by the police up to Dupont street, where an unsuccessful effort was made to disperse them. (“Trampling Everything Down”)

Captain Douglass and his men brought out the dead. Out of the twenty-eight bodies removed, nineteen corpses were taken from the entrance of the theater, and placed on the sidewalk (“Trampling Everything Down”).

Dr. Stivers examined several who betrayed no outward signs of injury, and said they seemed to have been suffocated to death. Eight or ten bore marks of violence, several bleeding at the nose and ears, the crimson stream running across the walk into the gutter, while the faces of three or four others turned upward in the light were black and discolored. (“Trampling Everything Down”)

Many of the Chinese in the crowd watched the bodies being carried out with concern that one of the dead might be a friend or relative. The whites for the most part crowded the scene due to morbid curiosity. One white man in the crowd was said to have attacked anybody Chinese within his reach: “Is any white man killed? ... No—no white man hurt ... Good ... it don’t matter about these” (“The Chinese Horror”). While this man’s actions were deplorable, not all of the white spectators at the scene of the disaster were behaving nefariously. The *San Francisco Chronicle* quoted white spectators offering their condolences to the grieving Chinese as the injured were taken away to the city’s prison hospital for treatment: “Don’t yell, John, he is all right ... He’s worth a dozen dead men yet, John ... Now don’t make a fuss, the doctor will fix him all right” (“Trampling Everything Down”).

The coroner's assistant arrived to remove the dead ("The Chinese Horror"). Makeshift stretchers were fashioned from the debris to transport the deceased ("Trampling Everything Down"). The *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote that the Chinese were reluctant to help with the removal of the dead until the police beat the bereaved Chinese into submission ("Trampling Everything Down"). The bodies were then moved to the coroner's house on Sacramento Street ("The Chinese Horror"). At the makeshift morgue, the curious throngs gathered to see the bodies, so the police had to be stationed outside to keep the crowds from trying to force their way inside the coroner's house. The coroner posted a sign on his front door that read, "No admission for the present except the Chinese" ("The Chinese Horror"). The proclamation outraged the morbidly curious whites in the crowd, and they began to voice their contempt. A deputy coroner explained to the angry crowd that only the Chinese would be admitted because they were needed in helping to identify the dead ("The Chinese Horror"). Some sightseers departed. "Others refused to see it, and the vast amount of spread-eagle eloquence about the rights of free citizens in a free country, etc., would have sufficed to run a small Presidential campaign" ("The Chinese Horror"). Another note was placed on the door that read: "None but Chinese need apply" ("The Chinese Horror"), which greatly angered the white crowds wanting admittance. At one point approximately 500 whites demanded to be able to view the dead before the Chinese. Police were stationed outside the morgue until the crowds dispersed. After the angry whites dispersed, thousands of Chinese poured into the coroner's house to view and identify the dead Chinese audience members ("The Chinese Horror").

The dead men were identified, and a deputy coroner wrote down the name, age and company of each of the deceased (“A Terrible Accident”). On November 1, 1876, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published this information:

Ning Yung Company:

Parm Ah Kew, 17
Chin Ah Chew, 30
In Wan, 21

Wong Quack On, 46:
Kow Moon, 36
Lee Sing Kong, 38
Ok Fong, 44
Wong Ah Haw, 20.

Hop Wo Company:

Qaok Pon, aged 34 years (druggist and married)
Ah Chue (age unknown)
Ah Sne, 18.

Yan Wo Company:

Ah Kong, age 38 years
Ug Gee Plu, 45

Kong Chow Company:

Ah Chow, age 34
Ah Cheung, 22
Ah Yea 40

Yeung Wo Company:

You Wong, 24

The age of one of the deceased, and the company to which he owed allegiance, was unknown. While nineteen Chinese audience members died in this horrific tragedy, many others were injured:

Five of the wounded men who were conveyed to the City Prison Hospital have been taken to their homes, not being dangerously wounded. Four yet remain there under the treatment of Police Surgeon Stivers, and are in no immediate danger of death. One suffers from a broken leg: a boy was severely injured in the breast, and one is injured internally. The remainder are not specially injured. (“The Theater Tragedy”)

The coroner’s inquisition rendered this verdict of the incident by a jury:

We the jury find that the aforesaid deceased persons came to their deaths on the 30th day of October, 1876 at the Chinese Theatre, 618 Jackson street, in this city and county, by being crushed and suffocated during a stampede, caused by a needless alarm of fire raised by some person unknown, and we further find that the deaths were accidental, and we call the attention of the Grand Jury to the construction of said theatre as regards its means of egress. (“The Chinese Tragedy”)

After the deceased audience members had been examined by the coroner and identified by friends and family, they were prepared for burial. “Through all of yesterday the vicinity of the Morgue and different points in the Chinese quarter presented funeral scenes of a strange character, 14 of the victims being entombed with heathen rites” (“The Chinese Calamity”). Several newspaper articles gave facetious accounts of these solemn funeral ceremonies.

A congregation of devout Chinamen assembled in the morgue last evening to celebrate the [sic] of the dead in accordance with their barbarian customs. Most of the bodies had been coffined, their coverings for grave being plain black boxes with no ornamentation. The Chinamen had provided a rough wooden headboard for each of the deceased, each of which contained a Chinese scroll painted in extravagant Chinese letters. For the Chinese physician, who met an untimely death, the [sic] were more extensive. Two headboards had been provided for his grave, the inscriptions being more elaborate. Numerous bowls of nuts and candies were placed around the coffin, and a large black bottle filled with vilely-scented liquid partaking of a mixture of alcohol and turpentine, reposed in grim solemnity at the head of the body. An [sic] of small red yellow candles burned with a sickly glare on the floor around the coffin and filled the apartment with a disagreeable odor. The mourners gathered around the doctor’s coffin and consumed a few moments in mourning wailing and

bowing their bodies up and down in grim unison. They then passed the black bottle around the circle and each took a long draught, completely filling his mouth. When the last mourner in the circle had partaken of the decoction, they stood silently for a moment with distended cheeks when suddenly at a signal of the person superintending the ceremonies each mourner ejected his mouthful of liquid in a slow stream into the coffin over the body of the deceased physician, completely saturating his clothing. (“The Theater Tragedy”)

The death rites being given by the Chinese to their fallen brethren were ridiculed and misunderstood by San Francisco newspaper reporters. Similar to their disparaging commentary about the conventions of the Chinese theater, San Francisco’s journalists mocked the Chinese burial processions, as did the city’s hoodlums:

The corteges comprised a few [sic], but were mainly composed of express wagons, all of which were laden to their full capacity, and each party being supplied with large quantities of red candles and other sacred pyrotechnics to light the dead on their way to join the innumerable caravan that moves to the heathen paradise. In front of the Morgue there was an incessant jabbering, and the scene at times was one of boisterous grief. The occasion afforded an opportunity for a few exhibitions of the genuine spirit of San Francisco hoodlumism, when the grief-stricken Mongols were jilted and persecuted in their affliction by large gangs that gathered in front of the Morgue, incapable of realizing the respect due to poor dead humanity in whatever guise. The bodies were all temporarily interred in the Chinese plot until [sic] for packing and shipment back to the native heath. (“The Chinese Calamity”)

One year after the tragic panic in the Royal Chinese Theater on Jackson Street, the proprietors of the theater halted the performance in progress, and held a mass for the dead. Again the media took the opportunity to propagate the illusion that the Chinese were heathens from an exotic culture:

As Chinese prayers and incantations are designed to appease the devil, rather than invoke the favor of benevolently-disposed deities, the ceremonies on the occasion were unique and diabolically interesting. A lot of the most villainous-looking idols, borrowed from the various temples, were arranged upon the stage, surrounded with burning punk

sticks, fantastic paraphernalia and profuse offerings of roast hog, and a large deputation of heathen priest attended to conduct the solemn rites. There was also a mammoth Mongol orchestra mustered for the occasion, embracing fiddles, tomtoms, gongs and [sic], and the music perpetrated was sufficiently atrocious to appease the devil or any other man. No doubt the felicity afforded his Satanic majesty incited him to the benevolence of ordering a fresh distribution of brimstone to that precinct of the informal domain set apart for the exclusive occupation of fiddlers and musicians generally. The ceremonies in the theater were terminated about midnight, after which a bonfire was started in an adjacent alley, a large quantity of red-paper invocations transmitted to the gods by combustions, and a barrel or two of crackers and bombs exploded. The faithful heathen meanwhile regaled themselves on the bountiful supplies of roast hog which the devil had neglected to appropriate. (“Heathen High Mass”)

One of the last major Chinese theater stampedes of the 1880s occurred around 6 PM on June 22, 1884 (“A Riot in Chinatown”). The Chinese Boot and Shoemaker’s Association was holding a benefit at several theaters in Chinatown. Over six thousand tickets had been purchased (“A Riot in Chinatown”). Before the afternoon show ended around six PM, a group of 500 to 600 persons gathered in front of the theater. “They had no admission tickets, but sought to rush into the theater as the others were coming out and thus obtain choice seats for the evening performance” (“A Riot in Chinatown”). Two thousand ticket holders also hovered around Jackson Street hoping to obtain desirable seats for the evening’s entertainment (“A Riot in Chinatown”). When the doors to the theater opened to let out the afternoon audience, the two crowds outside stampeded for the theater’s entrance (“A Riot in Chinatown”). The throngs outside and inside collided, and a riot ensued (“A Riot in Chinatown”).

Some of the weaker ones were knocked down and in a short while a general riot was in progress. Officers Shaw, Johnson, Bowlen, Mehan, Maher and Roberts attempted to quiet the men and one of the heathen, named Fat Choy, struck Officer Shaw with his fists and then assaulted him with a cobble-stone. Shaw caught the treacherous Mongol and proceeded

to take him to the city prison. Choy struggled to free himself from his captor, and failing in that he gave vent to a loud cry in Chinese. This outburst was the signal for all the Celestials to assault the officers. They gathered up the cobble-stones which were loose on the street and hurled them at the officers, who, in turn, drew their clubs to protect themselves. One huge stone luckily missed Shaw's head, for had it struck him his skull would have been fractured. Word was sent to the old County Hall that officers were in danger, and Sergeants Houghtaling and Flemming and Officers J.C. Hall, Whitman, Harper and others ran to their comrades' assistance. When they arrived on the corner of Dupont and Washington streets they were met with a volley of cobble-stones. They drew their clubs and commenced to batter on the heathen, and in a short time had almost cleared the streets. About 500 Chinamen were then endeavoring to overpower two officers at the door of the theater. The squad of officers then turned their attention in that direction and proceeded to disperse them. This was the signal for the concentration of the forces that had been scattered but a moment before. They came on a rush on the officers and the air was tilted with cobble-stones. The officers then made another sally with their clubs on their assailants and in a short time had them dispersed. The clubs were too much for the Chinamen and they retreated in bad order. ("A Riot in Chinatown")

Although Chinese laborers in nineteenth-century California were generally considered docile by whites, and while hoodlums harassed Chinese immigrants without fear of reprisals, within the confines of the Chinese theater, Chinese theater audiences refused to back down from the hostilities and injustices that befell their place of amusement. Many Chinese immigrants were afraid to retaliate against their white aggressors for fear of pogrom. However, the Chinese theater was a representation of the Chinese immigrants' native land. The same Chinese audiences that panicked and stampeded in the theater's houses could also unite, and create a formidable adversary for those who tried to deprive them of their theatrical traditions and culture.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRIME IN THE CHINESE THEATER

*By this red drop of blood on finger tip, I swear
The secrets of this tong I never will declare,
Seven gaping wounds shall drain my blood away,
Should I to alien ears my sacred trust betray*
[A tong member's initiation oath] (Dillon 122).

Highbinders and Tongs

The risk of being injured in a theater riot as an audience member caused by a police raid or a stampede in San Francisco was a hazard of the Chinese theater, but another dangerous element came from within the audience. Although most Chinese audience members were of the working class, the Chinese theater housed every echelon of the sojourning Cantonese society in San Francisco's Chinatown in the latter half of the nineteenth century. An array of Chinese theater audiences occupied various rungs on the Sino-American social ladder, including a class of professional assassins known as the *boo how doy* (hatchet sons) or highbinders. The origin of the word highbinder comes from the name of an Irish gang in New York in the early nineteenth century (Dillon 21), but later the word highbinder became associated with the *boo how doy*.

Until about 1880, there was no special name for Chinese criminals. The terms highbinder and hatchet men came late. While giving testimony during the 1870's in regard to evildoing in Chinatown, Special Officer Delos Woodruff answered a question from the bench by saying, "A lot of highbinders came to the place—" The judge interrupted him with a gesture of his hand. "What do you mean by 'highbinders?'" His honor queried. "Why," replied Woodruff, "a lot of Chinese hoodlums." The Judge persisted, "And that's the term you apply to Chinese hoodlums, is it?" "That's what I call them," responded Woodruff. (Dillon 21)

Highbinders were also referred to as hatchet men. In Richard H. Dillon's book *Hatchet Men*, a San Francisco police officer named Michael Smith testified at a joint

Congressional committee investigating Chinese immigration in 1876 that these persons were called hatchet men because, “A great many of them carry a hatchet with a handle cut off. It may be about six inches long, with a handle and a hole cut in it. They have the handle sawed off a little, leaving just enough to keep a good hold ...” (Dillon 108).

Similar to the rest of Chinese society near the beginning of the twentieth century, the highbinders or hatchet men were connoisseurs of Chinese theater. Much to the consternation of the San Francisco Police, the 1870s through the 1890s were the heyday of murder for these paid killers, and although the hatchet men’s battlefield was generally the alleyways of Chinatown, highbinders on occasion spilled blood in the houses of the Chinese theaters during performances.

Perhaps no more desperate breed of fighting men were developed in the Old West than the 20 percent or so of the tong membership who were “salaried soldiers” or *boo how doy*. These were the real highbinders—the professional hatchet men. Unlike the anarchical road agents, cattle thieves and brigands of the Hispano-American and Anglo-American frontier, the killers of this Sino-American frontier were fanatical and militarily disciplined ... Their battlegrounds were the alleys off Jackson and Sacramento streets, and their enemy the rival tongs. (Dillon 114)

Similar to other Chinese audience members, the hatchet man wore a long brimmed black hat and baggy clothes, and his long hair was tied back in a queue (Asbury 185). Underneath the seemingly innocuous garb, a highbinder concealed weapons. A steel bar or hatchet might be hiding in a sleeve. At his hip might be a pistol and under his clothes, the hatchet man might be wearing a bulletproof vest (Asbury 185). While these weapons seem cumbersome and inappropriate for an evening of theater, a *boo how doy* needed his arsenal handy if he wanted to escape an attack in the Chinese theater’s house with his life.

Unlike the rangers and haphazardly organized and violent hoodlums roaming the streets of San Francisco's Barbary Coast, Chinatown's highbinders were members of highly organized criminal syndicates known as tongs. The tongs were similar to fraternities or clans for young sojourning Cantonese men.

The rootless young men of Chinatown, some with criminal records and all without families, became great joiners. They tended to form not only clan and provincial groupings, but also tongs. These were fraternal and mutual-aid societies supposedly patterned after the secret patriotic societies of the old country. The word tong, from the Mandarin or Pekinese *t'ang*, signified nothing more mysterious or notorious than association, hall, lodge or chamber ... (Dillon 111-112)

Although tongs were "patterned after the secret patriotic societies of the old country," tongs were distinctly American. "... We are assured that the tong is a purely American invention, unknown to and dreaded in name and reputation by native Chinese" (Chu and Foster 31). The tongs came into being in Northern California. "The first tongs—the Hop Sings and the Suey Sings—were organized around 1860 by the Chinese in the gold-fields near Marysville, California, as mutual benefit associations" (Asbury 184). In his book *Hatchet Men*, Richard H. Dillon claimed a man named Low Yet founded the first tong named the Chee Kong tong: "He was therefore the founder of all tongs in America, and rightly or wrongly, on his shoulders must be placed much of the blame for the bloody tong wars of Chinatown" (Dillon, 118). Chinese immigrants leery of the business monopolies held by the six companies and other organizations of commerce initially created the tongs. Many tongs started out as legitimate organizations, but as the tongs' power grew in the 1870s and 1880s, tongs became associated with San Francisco's criminal elements.

A tong consisted of literary men, paying members and paid assassins. The literary men drafted the rules that the tong members adhered to, as well as making all decisions regarding the tong. The paying members were members who joined for protection against other tongs. Sometimes members would join multiple tongs, hoping to avoid conflict. The last members of the tong were the *boo how doy* or the hatchet men.

There were many tongs in San Francisco in the 1870s and 1880s:

They [tongs] first appeared in San Francisco during the late eighteenth-sixties, and within ten years at least twenty tongs were firmly entrenched in Chinatown, with large memberships and overflowing treasure-chests. Occasionally they engaged in legitimate business, but in particular they were the lords of the underworld—they operated gambling resorts, opium dens and houses of prostitution, and exercised practical control over the slave trade, for although the actual buying and selling of girls was done by individuals, the tongs usually collected a head-tax for every slave imported for immoral purposes. Sometimes even an honest Chinaman who brought his wife to this country was compelled to pay the tongs before she was permitted to remain. (Asbury 185)

The number of tongs existing in San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1870s and 1880s is unknown. "It is difficult to say how many tongs were active during the bloody 80s and 90s, what with mergers and splinterings, and the perennial problem of translating their names into English. Some say there were 19; others that there were as many as 30" (Dillon 139). However some of the names of these tongs are known. The tongs gave their organizations benevolent titles. Dillon gave several examples of English translations:

One of the most notorious was the Progressive Pure Hearted Brotherhood. Signs outside other tong headquarters proclaimed, in translation, their associations to be: the Society of Pure Upright Spirits, the Perfect Harmony of Heaven Society, the Society as Peaceful as the Placid Sea, the Peace and Benevolence Society, and the Society of Secured and Beautiful Light. (Dillon 120)

Despite their kind-sounding names, the tongs were violent criminal syndicates. With the emergence of the tongs came the bloody rivalries between these underworld Chinatown factions. “The seventies saw also the inauguration of the Tong Wars in America ... It was in 1875 that the first great fight between two powerful rival tongs took place in San Francisco” (Chu and Foster 30). The various tongs and their disputes were complex. “The complete history of these extraordinary associations probably never will be written” (Asbury 184). Newspaper reporters oversimplified the conflict, lumping the tongs into two camps: The See Yups, and the Sam Yups. The newspapers also incorrectly identified these two groups as tongs when they were actually two of the six companies. The Sam Yups’ members and the See Yups’ members did, however, represent the two major subcultures of sojourning Cantonese men:

Only two of them [Tongs] came to be known widely to the non-Chinese of the Pacific Coast: the See Yups and Sam Yups. But it was more of euphony than importance gradients. Out of their laziness or bewilderment, Chinatown reporters for the dailies tended to place all Chinese into one or the other of these camps. When the tong wars erupted, the press often identified the combatants as See Yups versus Sam Yups, instead of naming the actual fighting tongs involved in the mayhem. It was also a convenient way of breaking down the many factions of Chinatown into two. The See Yups and Sam Yups did represent the two major dialect groupings of the immigrants. The See Yups spoke the common tongue of Dupont Gai; the Sam Yups, a more courtly Cantonese. (Dillon 40)

On May 10, 1870, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that at midnight on Sunday May 9, an attempted murder occurred on the steps of the Chinese theater on Jackson Street (“Police Court Record: Interesting Cases”). The assailant’s name was reported as Ah Kee. The *San Francisco Chronicle* offered this description of the man, “...a rascally “pig-tail” ... who has been in nearly every row in Chinatown for the past few

years” (“Police Court Record: Interesting Cases”). The *San Francisco Chronicle*’s article claimed Ah Kee was hired by the See Yup Company to kill two “obnoxious” members of a rival organization (“Police Court Record: Interesting Cases”). It is doubtful that the See Yup Company was actually involved in the assassination attempt. What is more probable is that a tong of the See Yup Company’s subculture (Dupont Gia) was to blame, and the reporter lumped this tong into the oversimplified binomial See Yup/Sam Yup definition. The use of the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s adjective “obnoxious” to describe the victims of the attack was vague, but the victims’ description was further expounded upon by the May 9 *Alta California*’s version of the incident:

It appears that hostile feelings exist on the part of some of the Celestials belonging to the See Yup Company against those belonging to other companies, who have become so far Americanized as to have their queues cut off, and wear our dress. Several of the latter were in the theatre last evening, and, on going down the flight of stairs, were dealt severe blows on the head with a hatchet in the hands of a Chinaman named Ah Kee ...One of the victims had the side of his head cut open, in addition to receiving a fearful wound across the back. Another received two blows on the top of the head, inflicting frightful cuts. The injured men fell to the floor senseless, the blood streaming from them in torrents, and for a time they were hardly able to recognize any of their friends who were soon at hand. (“Americanized Chinamen Hatcheted”)

Special officer Duffield witnessed the assassination attempt on the steps leading up to the Chinese theater on Jackson Street, and he chased Ah Kee (“Murderous Assault”). The *Daily Evening Call* reported that Ah Kee threw his hatchet at the special officer in his attempt to escape (“Murderous Assault”), and the *Alta California* reported the hatchet hit special officer Duffield in the foot (“Americanized Chinamen Hatcheted”). At one point, special officer Duffield apprehended the assailant, but Ah Kee slipped out of his coat, and ran down Kearny Street (“Murderous Assault”). Eventually he was

captured: “He was stopped by a citizen in front of the “Bella Union” and taken to the station, and there locked up on a charge of attempted murder” (“Police Court Record: Interesting Cases”). Bizarrely, the incident began at one theater and ended at another. The outcome of Ah Kee’s trial is unknown, as well as what happened to the Americanized Chinese victims, although the *Daily Evening Call* stated, “Both of the wounded men will probably recover” (“Murderous Assault by a Chinaman”).

Not all Chinese theater victims were as fortunate to survive highbinder attacks, as were the two westernized Chinese men assaulted in the early hours of May 9, 1870. The various dailies occasionally wrote about highbinder murders in the Chinese theaters of San Francisco. On April 2, 1877, the *Alta California* reported:

A shooting affair occurred in the gallery of the Royal Chinese Theatre, Jackson street, yesterday afternoon, originating in an altercation between two Chinamen about the right to a seat. They began firing, and one was shot in the back. The other was arrested by Officer Jehu and Local Officer Langdon, on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon. How others escaped being hurt is a wonder, as it is said some twelve shots were fired, and the theatre was crowded, the number of Chinamen present being estimated at two thousand. (“Shooting in the Chinese Theatre”)

Chance meetings of rival warring tong members in the audience of the Chinese theater could lead to riot-provoking murder. Lue Ah Sing worked as a shoemaker on Jackson Street, and was attending a Chinese theater. (“Killed in a Theater”). A half-hour into the show, Wong Fung and a friend, both allegedly members of a rival tong sat down directly behind Lue Ah Sing and his cousin Ju Ah Jim (“Killed in a Theater”). The *San Francisco Chronicle*’s article stated that the men involved in the altercation were from rival tongs: the Min Yung Society and the Hip Wing Society. These two tongs had a

long-standing feud, and the Hip Wing Society had a price out on Lue Ah Sing's head ("Killed in a Theater").

Wong Fung and his friend came to the theater loaded to the teeth with weapons. "The murderers went armed with a hatchet, a knife and iron bar and a huge 38-caliber Colt's revolver" ("Killed in a Theater"). It was not long before the rivals commenced quarreling. In a flash a hatchet came down on the crown of Lue Ah Sing's skull, leaving a two-inch gash in his head ("Killed in a Theater"). Pandemonium ensued: "Then the battle must have become general, for knives, iron bars, and pistols were flashing in the air. Sing appeared to be the target for most of the shots, for of the five which are supposed to have been fired four were found in his body" ("Killed in a Theater").

The *San Francisco Chronicle* also reports that there were about sixty Europeans in the audience that night. When the assassination occurred, or as the author of the article facetiously called the murder a "by-play" in the Chinese theater, the Europeans in attendance became confused:

Some English tourists, who were seated on the stage when the fracas commenced, applauded loudly at the realistic manner in which the killing was done, but when they were informed that it was not a part of the play but a deadly battle which might involve half of the occupants of the theater, they got out as fast as ever they could. ("Killed in a Theater")

As the tourists from across the Atlantic fled the theater, Ju Ah Jim attempted to do the same:

Ju Ah Jim fought with desperation born of despair, and had partially made his way through the crowd when he got the cut on his wrist which nearly severed the hand from the arm. He fell to the floor, and the highbinders would have made short work of him had not the cry gone forth just at that instant that Sergeant Wittman and his posse were coming up the stairs. ("Killed in a Theater")

The article stated that one of the highbinders tried to hit Ju Ah Jim in the back of the head as the wounded man lay on the floor of the house, but that the hatchet missed his head, and struck him in the shoulder (“Killed in a Theater”). “The assassins then hurried across the theater and off through the stage door” (“Killed in a Theater”). While the assassins made a speedy escape through the back of the theater, it took the responding officers time to push through the crowd (“Killed in a Theater”). “When the officers did arrive upon the scene they found the body of Lue Ah Sing lying on the floor with blood oozing from almost a dozen wounds, any one of which would have been enough to kill him. Ju Ah Jim was also found moaning and insensible near the body of his cousin” (“Killed in a Theater”). Ju Ah Jim was taken to the station, and his wounds were treated before he assisted officers in trying to track down Wong Fung (“Killed in a Theater”). Several articles appear in the succeeding days in regard to the search for the murderer, but it is unknown if Lue Ah Sing’s killers were ever captured.

Highbinders killing highbinders in the audience of San Francisco’s Chinese theaters near the end of the nineteenth century continued for several decades. Another example can be found in the March 12, 1890, *Alta California* article titled, “Held For Murder:”

The preliminary examination of Mah Him, the Chinaman who is charged with murdering a countryman last July in the Jackson-street Chinese Theatre, was concluded yesterday. He was held for trial in the Superior Court by Police Judge Rix. The police were unable to find Him for many months, but about two weeks ago he was arrested in Fresno and returned to this city. (“Held for Murder”)

While highbinders usually attacked other hatchet men, occasionally their wrath was directed at other persons besides audience members in the Chinese theater. The late

nineteenth century in San Francisco's Chinatown saw several attempts by highbinders to murder doorkeepers and special officers. Generally, highbinders were reluctant to assault whites, for the hatchet men did not want to further aggravate anti-Chinese sentiment in San Francisco. However, sometimes highbinders did attack whites, as George Van Ness, the doorkeeper to a Chinese theater on Jackson Street discovered. On April 21, 1886, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported in an article titled, "A Murderous Highbinder A Daring Attempt on the Life of George Van Ness" that two highbinders, Ah Pong and Ah Sin, walked to the Chinese theater on Jackson Street where George Van Ness was working the front door ("A Murderous Highbinder"). The article stated that Ah Sin had an admission ticket, but that Ah Pong did not. The two highbinders tried to both gain admittance on the one ticket, but George Van Ness refused, and an argument ensued until finally Ah Sin entered by himself ("A Murderous Highbinder"). However, this was not the end of the altercation:

Sin proceeded among the dimly-lighted passageway slowly, and when he was about ten feet away from Van Ness he turned suddenly, and drawing a revolver, fired a shot at the ticket taker. The bullet whizzed past Van Ness' head, and, striking against a brick wall, glanced off and struck Ah Pong in the left foot. Van Ness then drew his revolver, and as Sin was about to shoot a second time, the ticket taker fired a shot and struck his murderous assailant on the right cheek. Sin threw away his revolver when he was wounded and another highbinder made his escape with it. ("A Murderous Highbinder")

The shootout attracted the attention of Officers Burr, Love and J.B. Martin, and they apprehended both Sin and Van Ness, and charged them both with attempted murder ("A Murderous Highbinder"). The bullet lodged in Ah Sin's cheek was reported as being too close to the jugular, and could not be removed ("A Murderous Highbinder"). Ah Sin's

fate is unknown as is the fate of George Van Ness; however, his occupation as a doorman for the Chinese theater proved a dangerous vocation, for the *San Francisco Chronicle* ended the article by stating, “The highbinders have made three attempts to shoot Van Ness during his term of employment at the theater” (“A Murderous Highbinder”).

Again in December of 1889, another attempted murder by highbinders on a doorkeeper transpired. This time though, the ticket taker was Chinese. His name was reported as Wing Tie, and the alleged reason he was targeted was because he had helped the police suppress a riot a few weeks earlier (“A Deadly Attack”). Apparently after leaving the theater, as Tie was crossing Dupont and Pacific, several highbinders started shooting at him (“A Deadly Attack”). Over a dozen shots were fired, but fortunately Wing Tie was not injured (“Pistols in Chinatown”). Officer Sam Alden heard the shots, and is reported as having arrested one of the highbinders (“A Deadly Attack”).

While highbinders at times caused riot provoking violence in the Chinese theaters, it is unclear how much of this tumult was the fault of hatchet men. Reporters for the local San Francisco daily newspapers tended to blame highbinders anytime a crime was committed in Chinatown. In regards to actual highbinder violence in the Chinese theater, sometimes the hatchet men acted alone, settling personal vendettas, but at other times the *boo how doy* were hired by the various Chinese theaters in San Francisco to disrupt a competing theater’s patronage.

Theater Rivalries

The major Chinese theater in San Francisco in the 1860s was the Royal Chinese Theater on Jackson Street. However, by the early 1870s, rival theaters were competing for Chinatown audiences.

In the spring of 1874, certain affiliates of the Sam Yup group in Chinatown at last challenged the dominance of the Royal Chinese Theatre by erecting a rival house, the Sing Ping Yeun, which was thrown open to the public on June 20, 1874. The owners of the new theatre, said to have cost \$50,000, were: Dr. Li-Po-Tai; Ah You, ex-Inspector of the Sam Yup Company; Ho Man, of the firm of Kum Wo; Ah Jarok, of the firm of Yee Tuck, and Ah Yung, agent for Dr. Li-Po-Tai. The elegant and superior members of this organization called themselves the Bo Fung Lin Company. (Foster 64)

Other Chinese theater rivalries had already occurred prior to 1874. The Chinese theater on Jackson Street had a rival theater as early as 1870. Members of the Sam Yup Company ran the Jackson Street theater while members of the See Yup Company ran a Chinese theater on Dupont Street. According to several newspaper articles, the See Yup theater on Dupont Street was losing business while the Sam Yup theater on Jackson Street was playing to full houses (“The Chinese Riot Yesterday”). The *Alta California* reported the reason for the Dupont Street theater’s lack of patronage as “not being able to offer superior attractions” to the Jackson Street theater (“The Chinese Riot Yesterday”). Another reason that the Jackson Street house was faring better than its competitor was that during the Chinese holiday season the Jackson Street theater “has been kept open for day and night” (“Chinatown”). Perhaps the authorities were lax on the Jackson Street theater while enforcing the entertainment curfew on the Dupont Street theater. In a facetious and extreme article by the *San Francisco Chronicle* subtitled “Chinese

Theatrical Rivals on the Rampage,” another cause was given: “One of the principal reasons was that ladies visited the former [the Jackson Street theater], and where they went male Mongolians, like their Caucasian brethren, were sure to go” (“Chinatown Excited”). The Dupont Street theater tried several legitimate means to entice back their audiences: “They put out “show-bills” to announce the character of the performance within, redoubled the noise on their gongs, burned hundred of packages of Foo Chow fire-crackers, and made other horrible noises to attract attention, but all these failed to “draw,” ...” (“Chinatown”).

Angered by the success of their rival, and desperate by the lack of income, the Dupont Street theater conspired to disrupt the Jackson Street theater’s business. The *Alta California* claimed the Dupont Street theater hired a gang of “highbinders” to do their bidding (“The Chinese Riot Yesterday”). The *San Francisco Chronicle* claimed the Dupont Street theater hired several hundred railroad laborers who were presently out of work (“Chinatown Excited”) while the *Daily Morning Call* did not make a distinction about the hired men except to say that they were members of the See Yup company. The *San Francisco Chronicle* gave an account of the purpose of hiring these men:

They were instructed to stroll down Jackson street toward the Hung Chien Guen [Jackson Street] Theater, congregate around the doors and do all in their power to raise hell generally. They went down, and pitched in with a will and it must be confessed they succeeded admirably. They blockaded up the entrance and as soon as some of their opponents appeared there was a regular fight, in which half a dozen or so of the Hung Chien Guen [Sam Yup] Company got rather roughly handled and disappeared. (“Chinatown Excited”)

A Chinese woman also tried to enter the Jackson Street theater: “One of the See Yups seized her by the *chignon* and robbed her of several articles of head-dress, and also took a

pair of earrings from her ears. Then several others knocked her down and commenced to kick her ..." ("Chinatown"). At this point, special officer Duffield arrived at the Jackson Street theater: "This ruffianly conduct was noticed by officer Duffield, who came to the rescue and was about to arrest the assailants when in turn they charged upon him, throwing dirt, rocks, and all kinds of missiles at him" ("The Chinese Riot Yesterday"). Special officer Duffield momentarily retreated, but he returned shortly thereafter with the aid of Captain Douglass and his "locust" brigade ("Chinatown").

The Police arrived at the scene of action under the command of Captain Douglass. They were at once scattered through the crowd of Chinamen and did all in their power to make them disperse, but to no purpose. The Johns stood firm and treated some of the policemen in a most disrespectful manner. Several of them had dead rats in their possession or immediate vicinity, and one of them hit officer Duffield a tremendous crack over the head with one of these novel missiles, utterly destroying his new hat. There was no getting them to move on, so Captain Douglass blew his whistle and forming his men in line they all charged with drawn batons. ("Chinatown Excited")

According to the *Daily Morning Call*, it took several charges by the police, but by the late afternoon, Captain Douglass and his men had succeeded in clearing the street ("Chinatown").

The Royal Chinese Theater had its fair share of theater rivalry. During the 1870s multiple new Chinese theaters opened. In 1877 the New Royal Theater opened on Washington Street. "And now theatre rivalry was really furious. The old component across the street waxed livelier than ever under the stimulus of a third claimant to dramatic honors and audience" (Foster 77). One particular rivalry between the Royal Chinese Theater and one of its competitors occurred in June of 1877. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that:

The Royal Chinese Theater has had a troupe of performers for some time, under a contract which expired yesterday. The opposition theater put in a bid for their services and secured them. The Royal Chinese proprietors, however, determined to have one more performance, and locked the performers up in a room and fed them on bread and water, but the opposition managers succeeded, by dint of threats to criminal prosecution and writs of habeas corpus, in effecting their release. There was accordingly high jubilee in the opposition theater last evening, and the Royal Chinese Theater was compelled to call into requisition the services of some amateurs. (“Chinese Theater Rivalry”)

This version of the story is the historical narrative of this event most presumed, but the *Alta California* gave a different report of the incident:

The statement published a few days since that nine of the actors engaged at the Royal Chinese Theatre on Jackson street had been detained against their will and liberated by the police, seems to be incorrect. A number of the actors are under contract with the proprietors of the theatre to play for another year. From information they had obtained, they feared that some of them would leave their employ in the interest of a rival theatre. To protect themselves, the Royal Chinese Theatre invoked the aid of the law by calling on the Chief of Police and Captain Douglas, who found the men at liberty. The next day injunctions were served on the actors not to leave. The following day some officers came to the theatre, and went to the rooms occupied by the actors. All who desired to leave were requested to rise. Nine got to their feet and left without any hindrance, and went to play at a rival theatre, notwithstanding injunctions had been served on them. (“Rival Chinese Theatres”)

Whether or not the actors were still under contract, and whether or not they had been imprisoned in the Jackson Street theater, is unclear. However, Chinese theater rivals in San Francisco during this time period were employing more and more brazen tactics against one other. In October of 1878, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that thirty-three Chinese men were arrested for obstructing sidewalks:

These fellows were in the employ of the Royal Chinese Theater, and last evening they took up their positions in the doorway of the new Chinese Theater opposite, which opened a night or two since to the lovers of the Celestial drama and refused to allow any one entrance. A posse of

policemen charged them with clubs, and they would scatter and return again to their positions. During the melee bricks and cobbles were freely used by the Mongols, and an incipient riot was only averted by the arrest of the thirty-three prime movers in this Mongolian project. (“Almost a Celestial Riot”)

A few days later the rivalry continued:

The Chinese theatrical struggle was resumed about six o'clock yesterday evening, at the Sam Yup Theatre, on Jackson street, opposite the Royal Chinese (See Yup) Theatre. The Sam Yup, or new theatre, has a special attraction in a star of the first magnitude, and the theatre had been crowded to its utmost capacity since his engagement. Business jealousy is said to be the cause of the disturbances which have made his engagement rather more tumultuous than the bills called for; some Chinese claiming that the new “star” is a fraud; but there is another story going that the cause of the trouble is dissatisfaction felt at the partiality alleged to be shown to the new theatre, in being allowed to run until 2 A.M. while the two other Chinese playhouses are obliged to close at 1 o'clock. However that is, there has been a disturbance nightly at the new theatre. Last night the disorderly persons began throwing cigar stumps and other missiles on the stage. The only officer present was John Avan, and a part of the crowd wanted to fight him. He put one of them, named Ah Fong, out; but the latter climbed the stairs again, breaking windows as he went. Avan then arrested him, and took him down stairs, but encountered a crowd at the door some of whom took his club away. He then drew his pistol, when the crowd fell back, and he took his prisoner in and charged him with battery. Captain Short, of the Central Station, soon appeared on the scene with a squad of police, and cleared the street, which had become black with Chinese, who poured out of Dupont street to see or encourage the row. A large number of whites were in the crowd, and helped obstruct the street. (“The Actors Have Come My Lord”)

Rival Chinese theaters employed various stratagems to thwart their competitors' businesses. Besides trying to break up a performance or block an entrance, Chinese theater managers used litigation against rivals. In March of 1880, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the Chinese theater on Jackson Street tried this tactic, but to no avail:

Their characteristic methods having failed in their purpose, an attempt was made yesterday afternoon by the Jackson street company to get out an injunction preventing the performance on the ground of its unlawful and noisy nature. Owing to the lateness of the hour it was impossible to obtain the necessary restraining order, and other means were decided upon to prevent the performance. (“Chinese Cussedness”)

The Washington Street theater had been filling its house for several nights due to the arrival of a celebrated actor (“Chinese Cussedness”). As a result the Jackson Street theater’s benches were bare. After the usual schemes to disrupt the Washington Street theater failed, the Jackson Street theater tried its hand at chemical warfare: “For an hour things ran on uninterruptedly, when the audience was startled by the crash of breaking glass and the descent upon the stage from the skylight above of a can of burning phosphorus. At the same time in five other parts of the building a fire simultaneously broke out” (“Chinese Cussedness”). The result caused a panic as the audience members all ran for the door at the same time, which alerted the police (“Chinese Cussedness”).

Officer Brown, Avan, Kehn, and [sic] reached the spot and by their efforts succeeded in getting the theater cleared without mishap to the excited Celestials. The officers then gave their attention to extinguishing the flames, and plenty of water being handy, it was accomplished with celerity and before much damage resulted. The loss entailed was about \$800. (“Chinese Cussedness”)

While warring tongs employed their salaried soldiers (highbinders) to murder their rivals in San Francisco’s Chinatown in the 1870s and 1880s, and while many of these battles occurred in the Chinese theater, rival Chinese theaters were not necessarily a part of the tong wars. The various Chinese theaters were owned by differing sub-cultural groups of Cantonese sojourners, such as the Sam Yup Company or the See Yup Company, but these affiliations with their dialectical groupings did not mean that these

theaters were tong related. Unfortunately the tong wars were raging in San Francisco during this time period, and sometimes tong warfare occurred in the Chinese theater, so it was easy for the newspaper dailies to lump theater riots in with the tong wars. The issues and conflicts of the Chinese theater rivalries were more complex than merely a result of warring tongs.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As part of the strange American culture, the Chinese were, from a European perspective, part of what made American culture 'American' (Lei, *Production and Consumption* 298).

A Brief Examination of Chinese Theater Riots in the 1890s to the 1906 Earthquake and Beyond

San Francisco's Chinatown in the 1890s was replete with Chinese theater riots. Police raids, stampedes, highbinder murders and theater rivalries abounded during the last decade of the nineteenth century in the Dupont circle. Although bigotry toward the Chinese in San Francisco continued into the 1890s, white hostilities toward the Chinese shifted from immigration to sterilizing Chinatown. "Intense dislike of the Chinese in San Francisco continued into the 1890s and the twentieth century, but by the 1890s, the Cantonese sojourners were more or less accepted as a part of the city" (Foster 99-100). As well as quarantining Chinatown at various times during the 1890s, the economic depression of the 1890s also adversely affected Chinatown's commerce, and subsequently various Chinese theaters closed due to the lack of patronage.

The 1890s also represented the peak of San Francisco's tong wars. One reason for the heightened amount of bloodshed occurring in Chinatown was the rise of one of San Francisco's most infamous tong leaders, Fong Ching, also known as Little Pete. Little Pete was the leader of a Sam Yup tong. "Understanding of the picture is somewhat complicated by the fact that the See Yup Association included at least twelve member tongs; while the Sam Yups, on the other hand, were headed by one of the most notorious tongmen of all time, Fong Ching, or "Little Pete," as he was called. ..." (Foster 112).

For a time, it was said that Little Pete worked in legitimate business, but shortly thereafter he began running opium dens, gambling houses, the slave-girl trade, houses of prostitution and various other businesses of ill repute. Little Pete was also an enthusiast of the Chinese theater. Through his successful illegal entrepreneurial dealings, Little Pete was able to buy a Chinese theater on Jackson Street, and he became a major figure in the Chinese theater rivalries of the 1890s. He used his influence and his highbinders to bankrupt his competitors. Little Pete was also alleged to have been a playwright, and it is believed that his plays were performed at his theater. Little Pete was eventually murdered at a barbershop near his home in 1897 by rival highbinders. Although the most infamous tong leader's reign had ended, the tong wars still raged.

Gold Mountain Theater Riots happened sometimes in the early part of the twentieth century. "By late 1903, the situation was more grave than at any time since Little Pete's murder. A hatchet man stepped on the stage of the Washington Street Chinese theater, and in full view of a packed house shot down a well-named (Gong) cymbalist. The audience panicked and stampeded" (Dillon 256). Less than three years after this incident, the Chinatown of the nineteenth century had been completely destroyed by the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and the ensuing conflagration. The massive destruction of Chinatown loosened the murderous grip of the tongs on Chinatown's population; however, tong violence still occasionally occurred in post-earthquake Chinatown.

Difficulties Assimilating

During the 1870s and 1880s, San Francisco was one of the most corrupt cities in the United States (Asbury 49). Gambling, prostitution, vices, and murder, as well as understaffed police and corrupt city officials, made San Francisco a haven for criminals. Chinatown was no exception. The sojourning men from Guangzhou, who arrived at the Gold Mountain, found a land practically void of ethics. The early years of San Francisco's history were replete with male treasure hunters from all walks of life behaving atrociously.

The reason there were so many riots at the Chinese theaters was because San Francisco was a riotous town. From the beginning of San Francisco's history, rioting was commonplace. Criminals, sailors and rangers all rioted in the streets. The hoodlums also rioted several times in an attempt to destroy Chinatown. Ironically, a member of the vigilante group (Dennis Kearny) who fought back the hoodlums' attempt at Chinatown's pogrom would later become an anti-Chinese labor agitator who also caused several anti-Chinese riots throughout the city.

The Chinese themselves rioted in the streets of San Francisco throughout this period. Labor disputes over territorial rights to laundries, cigar making and shoe manufacturing turned Chinese workers against one another. San Francisco was a violent town during this time period, and the Chinese adapted to their surroundings.

Chinese theater is a traditional theater, but when it traveled to California with the sojourning Chinese, certain theatrical conventions of the Chinese theater were forced to assimilate to American conventions. San Francisco Chinese theater audiences rioted in

the 1870s and 1880s as a result of sanctions put into place by city officials against the conventions of the Chinese theater. City ordinances designed to silence the music that accompanied the Chinese plays, such as banning the banging of the gong within the city limits, or creating entertainment curfews, created havoc in Chinese theaters, but these ordinances were also put into action to punish the Chinese for maintaining their native traditions in the United States. Chinese theater audiences rioted against these forced changes. When the Chinese theaters did not comply with these biased ordinances, the police were allowed to use brutal force to break up performances. Police brutality against Chinese audience members was praised and sensationalized in facetious articles written by reporters from the daily newspapers. When the Chinese audience members revolted against these harsh social injustices, their violent actions were portrayed in the local media as heathenish, uncivilized or tong-related.

The newspapermen who wrote articles about San Francisco's Chinese theater riots were just as important characters in the social history of these extra-theatrical events as were the rioters and the police. Although these reporters are nameless, they provided the only contemporary descriptions of San Francisco's Chinese theater riots. These newspapermen remained anonymous because bylines for reporters were rarely used until the latter half of the 1890s. While these are the only accounts that exist of the riotous houses in San Francisco's Chinese theaters, the reporters' versions of these stories were probably not completely accurate. The sensationalizing of these extra-theatrical events was committed not only to sell newspapers, but more importantly to push an anti-Chinese political agenda, and to justify xenophobia by portraying the riotous Chinese audience

members as exotic and savage heathens. Therefore it is important to be dubious of these accounts outside of the dates, times and locations of these theater riots.

While Chinese audience members were battling to keep their theatrical traditions alive in San Francisco, they were also rioting for another reason. For the first thirty years of their existence, San Francisco's Chinese population had been growing, but the Chinese had also been experiencing waves of anti-Chinese sentiment from the city's white population. The 1870s and 1880s represented the high point of Chinese xenophobia in San Francisco. The 1870s saw the rise of Dennis Kearny and his "The Chinese must go!" political rallies that garnered hatred toward Chinese labor in California. During this time period, Chinese immigration became a national issue, and in 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, banning the immigration of Chinese laborers into the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act would not be rescinded until 1943.

While the Chinese Exclusion Act effectively halted the immigration of the Chinese into the United States, it had the opposite effect on San Francisco. During this time period, San Francisco's Chinese population grew. As various Chinese populations in California and other states congregated in San Francisco, the city's Chinese theaters flourished. Within the Chinese theater, the audience members, seated next to so many fellow countrymen, could for a brief time forget about the cruelties heaped upon them. Chinese audiences could relax and enjoy their traditional theater, and they could bask in the illusion of their native land. When violent police raids shattered the illusion of their homeland, Chinese theater audiences, angered by the invasion and feeling strength in

numbers, retaliated against these injustices by destroying the house and attacking the police.

It was also easier for Chinese audiences to vent their frustration in a Chinese theater as opposed to anywhere else in San Francisco. The Chinese theater was the safest place for riotous violence by the Chinese in San Francisco. The damage done to the Chinese theater as a result of a riot was practically ignored by white society because these riots did not affect them. Only the Chinese proprietors of the theaters would incur the cost of damages as a result of a Chinese theater riot.

Rioting in the Chinese theater to keep Chinese theatrical conventions intact, as well as rioting in the Chinese theater against social injustices, was an attempt to keep alive the traditions of a diasporic theater in a foreign land. Every part of the Chinese theater in San Francisco in the late nineteenth century was imported from China: the actors, costumes, plays, stages, musicians, and musical instruments. Every component of the Chinese theater was Chinese except for the location. Although Chinese theater was steeped in tradition, the new topography geographically forced Chinese theater to break with its historical traditions. Despite efforts to maintain cultural homogeneity, the Chinese population was adapting to life in San Francisco. Although the Cantonese sojourner had no intention of settling in the United States, he was not leaving. Whether the whites and the Chinese liked it or not, Chinese theater in San Francisco in the 1870s and 1880s was amalgamating into a branch of American theater.

This research is valuable because it draws attention to the history of Chinese theater in America. Instead of focusing on the stage, the play, or the actors, this

investigation highlights the perils Chinese audiences encountered in the United States' first Chinese theaters. Hopefully, further understanding of riotous Chinese theater audiences in this work has allowed for a better understanding of not just the patrons of the Chinese theater in America but also of the Chinese theater as a whole. The social history of the Gold Mountain Theater Riots should aid future researchers interested in Chinese theater, theater riots, Chinese-American history, diasporic theater and the history of San Francisco by providing an in depth examination of these phenomena.

Many questions arising from this thesis go unanswered. Because there are no known existing primary accounts of the Gold Mountain Theater Riots given by Chinese audience members, it is impossible to completely comprehend these audiences' exact thoughts and perspectives in regard to these theater riots. The only known contemporary glimpses of these extra-theatrical events exist as various biased newspaper articles. Although these reports reveal startling and profound accounts from these tumultuous affairs, it is important to understand that many aspects of these theater riots are inaccurate. In these instances the research will only reveal so much, and it is thereafter the researcher's job to carefully theorize the rest of the history with the hope that someday evidence will be discovered that will confirm or disprove the researcher's speculation.

While this research is incomplete, the research process yielded many intriguing facets surrounding the Chinese theater that deserve further examination. Due to time constraints and the liminality of these facets in relation to the Gold Mountain Theater Riots, many intriguing details were not investigated, such as Chinese actors illegally

entering the United States while trying to simultaneously evade capture and perform on Chinese stages, white youths imitating the customs of highbinders, various undercover attempts by the police to penetrate Chinese theater's audiences, and many other tales of these two cultures colliding at the Chinese theater. Although these small parts of the history of Chinese theater are not examined in this formal inquiry, they certainly deserve further scrutiny.

Lastly, it is important to comment on certain social aspects of present-day Chinatown in comparison to the era in which these extra-theatrical events occurred. Although the immense popularity of the Chinese theater in San Francisco among Chinese Americans began to wane during the twentieth century, the seeds of Chinese culture that nineteenth-century Chinese theater helped germinate have flourished. Nineteenth-century Chinese Americans were relegated to menial and labor-intensive vocations. Despite massive waves of anti-Chinese bigotry and legislation that has occurred throughout San Francisco's history, the Chinese population of San Francisco has not only survived the various persecutions inflicted upon them, it has in many aspects overcome these difficulties. Through perseverance and tenacity, San Francisco's Chinese citizens have climbed San Francisco's social ladder.

San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, which once set into motion a series of discriminatory city ordinances directed against the Chinese, presently has two Chinese American members serving as board members. David Chui is the President of the Board of Supervisors and he is the Supervisor for district 3, which encompasses Chinatown. Carmen Chu is also a Chinese American serving on San Francisco's Board of

Supervisors, representing district 4. Chinese Americans also now serve on San Francisco's police force, and from 1996 through 2002, Fred H. Lau became the first Asian American Chief of Police in San Francisco. From 2004 through 2009, Heather Fong also served as San Francisco's Chief of Police, and presently Edwin Mah Lee is serving San Francisco as its first Chinese American Mayor. Although assimilation into American society has been an arduous journey for Chinese Americans, they have in many instances managed to overcome the societal disadvantages heaped upon them by their white neighbors, and achieved assimilation into American society while simultaneously maintaining important characteristics of their native culture.

The Gold Mountain Theater Riots were a fascinating yet harrowing aspect of not just Chinese theater in San Francisco, but also of the history of theater in America. Hopefully this thesis garners interest in researching Chinese theater and its audiences in America as well as spurring further research into the various and sometimes overlooked ethnic theaters and their audiences that have contributed to the rich history of American theater.

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