

Panda-monium in America: The “Discovery” of the Giant Panda and the Chinese Immigrant

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In 1934, William Harkness set out to be the first person to ever get a live giant panda out of China. He along with his inexperienced, yet ambitious, younger partner Floyd Tangier Smith set out for Southwest China. Unfortunately, Mr. Harkness never made it out of Shanghai – he died there at the all-too-young age of thirty-four, of supposed cancer. Smith, lacking the funds for the venture without Mr. Harkness was stuck in Shanghai unable to continue. When word finally reached back to the young widow in America, Mrs. Ruth Harkness took twenty thousand dollars from her late husband’s estate and set out for Shanghai to claim her husband’s ashes with the intent to spread them in the Southwest China mountains.

The young New York fashion designer arrived in China to collect her husband’s ashes. When there, she met some of those who were to be part of her husband’s entourage into the remote mountain forests of Sichuan Province. After meeting with them, she decided not only to take his ashes there, but to also continue his trek to be the first ever to retrieve a live giant panda from China. Mr. Harkness’ former partner, Smith, had tried to cozy up to Mrs. Harkness when he got word of her financial capacity to carry out such a mission. Unlike her husband, Ruth Harkness was able to see through Smith’s ambitions, she had told a friend “he is anything but well...is totally impractical,” and, knowing her time and money was limited, “I cannot afford to take chances of any kind.”¹ She rounded up her own crew, which included one Quentin Young – a Chinese-American whose brother had earlier helped the Roosevelt brothers become the first Westerners to shoot a panda. Much chagrined, and refusing to be outdone by a woman, Smith departed simultaneously on his own ill-funded, ill-fated mission in attempt to thwart her goal.

After days of arduous traversing across water, woods, and montane terrain, Ruth Harkness finally found her quarry. No one in history had ever captured a giant panda and successfully departed China with it still alive. Nestled safely in the hollow stump of a tree, there Harkness plucked the baby panda whose mother was out foraging for food. Where men like Smith, and other hunters “came armed with guns, Harkness had come armed with baby bottles.”²

While in Shanghai waiting to board her ship back to America, Harkness was stopped by customs officials “who got wind of her intention” and were led to believe she might get twenty-five thousand dollars

¹ Henry Nicholls, *The Way of the Panda*, (New York: Pegasus Books, LLC, 2001), 60

² Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 62

for the panda back in the US.³ Had Harkness come this far only to be thwarted by whomever tipped off customs? With the aid of some “powerful friends” some “money changed hands” and Harkness was finally off to America with an export permit that read: “One dog, \$20.00.”⁴ On November 27th, 1936, Ruth Harkness landed in San Francisco with Su-Lin, the first giant panda to ever arrive on foreign shores alive. When the two debarked the ship, “the reporters swarmed” for pictures and interviews; when Su-Lin finally arrived at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago a short time later, fifty-three thousand visitors came on the first day to see her.⁵ An icon was born, brought out of the mystical depths of China to be a star in America.

The above story about Ruth Harkness and her feat will help demonstrate how Americans viewed China and the Chinese people from the early nineteenth century through the Chinese Exclusion Act and after the implementation of Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay area in the twentieth century. The giant panda existed only in China and was the sovereign asset of the Chinese people. However, with enough money, the right amount of leverage, and some white American chauvinism sprinkled in, anything in China was there for Americans to take. By her own account, Ruth Harkness was a good woman whose intention was never to deprive the Chinese of a national asset or take something which did not belong to her. However, therein could lie the vary problem. The idea was so banal, so ingrained in the American psyche that Mrs. Harkness only wondered if she *could* get a panda out alive – not whether she should.

The giant panda had gone from unknown species to world-renowned iconic mysticism in under seventy years. The mysticism behind the panda in the minds of Americans is not wholly different from the perceived mysticism behind the Chinese people. The giant panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) was an unknown species outside of China before 1869. The same could be said for the Chinese people to a large majority of Americans in the early nineteenth century. The giant panda was reputed to have ferocious tendencies and magical powers (when the Roosevelt brothers, Kermit and Theodore went to China to be the first to shoot a panda, they vowed to shoot simultaneously so they each were first to shoot “the beast”⁶), the same reputation was foisted upon the Chinese people by the late nineteenth century. Were the Chinese people ferocious as well, did they possess special powers, and could they be tamed? Like the giant panda, the Chinese were both known and unknown; both “species” left many questions unanswered in the collective minds of Americans. By the early twentieth century, the panda was seen as lovable, “chubby, clumsy,” and in need of help from Americans.⁷ Much the same can be said for how early twentieth century Americans viewed the Chinese people – through a patriarchal, chauvinistic lens. This created the need to only allow Chinese immigrants on to American soil after a period of imprisonment where they would be forced to prove their worthiness to be accepted into an Anglo-American hegemonic culture.

As stated above, the panda was not known outside of China prior to the middle of the nineteenth century. Americans, at first, found the panda to be exotic and mystical and held it in high esteem while maintaining a strange curiosity about the animal. Soon, they began to wonder if the panda may be ferocious, perhaps even dangerous. Among those wondering was a friend of Ruth Harkness who assumed the panda might be “awfully disagreeable” or an inquiring reporter who confessed to Ruth Harkness that he imagined the panda

³ Ibid., 63

⁴ Ibid., 64

⁵ Ibid., 64-65

⁶ Ramona and Desmond Morris, *The Giant Panda* (London: Kogan Page, Ltd, 1996), 39

⁷ Ibid., 9

to be “a half-grown tiger...growling and taking pieces out of people’s ankles” and the thousands of questions from reporters inquiring whether the panda was vicious or not. Rumors from inside China even suggested the panda possessed mythical powers.⁸ Tales permeated about the panda’s ability to make “a terrific leap of fifteen feet” straight at a man and that their diet “includes the iron cooking pots of isolated herb diggers.”⁹ The Roosevelt brothers, as we will see later, were finally able to subdue the elusive (and possibly dangerous) “beast” and ease the mind of Americans who were at a loss over “a creature that apparently defied all efforts to make sense of it.”¹⁰ After Su-Lin, the fear of pandas became assuaged and people felt like it was time to help save the species from itself and its clumsy ways by placing it in cages and closely observing its actions and motives.

There are two goals this paper seeks to achieve. The first is to elucidate the manner in which the panda became the cultural phenomenon it is today among Americans. In other words, why is there “panda-monium” in America? How do we come to understand how this creature achieved iconic status in the minds of Americans? One way to answer this question is to investigate America’s view of the Chinese people themselves over the same period since the panda’s “discovery”. This concept brings us to the second goal herewith: to use this information to demonstrate that similarities existed in America’s treatment of both the panda and the Chinese immigrant to the United States. First, I will argue that the panda achieved popularity in the West due to the mysteriousness of this newly discovered species in the mid-nineteenth century and, later, the American newspaper frenzies surrounding the first shooting by a white man, and then its capture (and subsequent taming) in the early early-middle twentieth century.

Other authors, such as British journalist Henry Nicholls in *The Way of the Panda the Curious History of China’s Political Animal*, argued that popularity of the panda didn’t take hold until as late as the 1960s, when Chi-Chi – the London Zoo panda – had her own television show and later went on to become the face of the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF). I will demonstrate, however, that dating the popularity to after mid-century is far too late when a flood of newspapers reported on the Roosevelt expedition and also “swarmed” Ruth Harkness and Su- Lin at the San Francisco seaport. The panda had achieved monumental stardom well before Chi-Chi went on television in London.

To assist with my argument, I will show how Americans saw both the panda and the Chinese people first with curious wonder. I will also demonstrate how Americans viewed the panda as a wild beast and the Chinese people as not much more. I will then illustrate how the same curiosity about the panda was present about the Chinese people, and how quickly it turned to trepidation which manifest in angst and a need for conquest. Curiosity and wonder about the Chinese people before the mid-nineteenth century soon morphed into fear and anger towards them by century’s end. When the twentieth century arrived, America’s view of the Chinese again morphed. Americans then began to see the Chinese through a Kipling-esque lens; convinced of their own superiority, by the early 1900s, Americans began to put Chinese immigrants in cages – much the way they treated the panda after arrival from its native China. While the panda was “chubby and clumsy” the Chinese were seen as backward and childlike. For evidence to back up this latter argument I will be using the diaries of Kermit and Theodore (Jr.) Roosevelt – replete with masculinity, chauvinism and pejorative similes between Chinese people and wild animals – along with the diary of Ruth Harkness to

⁸ Ruth Harkness, *The Lady and the Panda*, (New York, Carrick & Evans, 1938). 210, 230

⁹ *Ibid.*, 126-127

¹⁰ Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 25

further illustrate the patriarchal nature of their ventures. These diary accounts will also highlight the assumptions about their own superiority and their right to be in China as well as take what otherwise rightfully belonged to the Chinese. Other primary sources include American newspapers which trumpeted the successful shooting of "the beast" and the later capture of the panda.¹¹ Other newspapers will highlight twentieth century America's euphoria over the panda. An early nineteenth century advertisement will demonstrate the mysticism of the Chinese people in American's minds through the tale of a young Chinese girl on display (literally) for American gawkers, not unlike the panda in one of today's American zoos. Various primary and secondary sources will be employed to evidence the caging of Chinese immigrants in the early twentieth century along the same manner in which the panda was plucked from freedom in China to captivity in America.

Few historians have spent much time trying to figure out how the giant panda became the cultural icon it is today.¹² Certainly, the lion's share of historiography is more concerned with the environmental degradation of the panda's habitat, and some even discuss 'Panda Diplomacy' vis-à-vis geopolitical relations between China and the rest of the world. Nicholls has postulated that the panda gained its ultimate fame in the early 1960s when London's panda "Chi-Chi" debuted on *Zoo Time* – a London television show about the animals at the zoo. Nicholls adds that in addition to *Zoo Time*, in 1961, Chi-Chi became the recognized face of the World Wildlife Fund. Nicholls suggests the "panda made its greatest leap forward [in] the 1960s" and if it had to be "just one panda [that did it,] it would be Chi-Chi."¹³ However, to make this claim, Nicholls must ignore other facts he cites in his own book.

Prior to the date Nicholls offers as the pinnacle of panda fame, many events occurred in the United States which added recognition and distinction to the giant panda. Notwithstanding the media frenzy surrounding the Roosevelt brothers and Ruth Harkness, the panda had achieved a special place in the American psyche much before 1961. In April of 1937, when Su-Lin finally "went on show to the public" at the Brookfield Zoo near Chicago (despite, the reader should note, occurring in the midst of the Great Depression) "[m]ore than 53,000 visitors came on the first day and, within a week, the zoo had recouped its financial outlay in gate receipts."¹⁴ In 1938, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration commissioned painter Frank W. Long to paint a panda as part of the Federal Art Project to "inject a bit of color into the lives of Americans hit by the Great Depression."¹⁵ In 1941, Madame Chiang Kai-shek presented "a suitable and symbolic gift for the American people" of two baby pandas, in gratitude for financing the United China Relief fund."¹⁶ All of these examples are in addition to the myriad newspaper accounts surrounding the panda at the time of both the Roosevelt brothers shooting and Ruth Harkness capturing the panda. Much before 1961, the panda had achieved iconic status in the minds of Americans in general.

Many historians have tackled the subject of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. They have aptly delved into how the Chinese were perceived by American missionaries in China, how and why they first came to

¹¹ The New York Times, "Panda killed by Roosevelt is Sacred to Asian Natives," *The New York Times*. New York, New York, June, 2, 1929, Pg. 2

¹² Also see Morris, *The Giant Panda*, appendix, for an exhaustive list of reasons humans may be enamored with the panda

¹³ Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 259

¹⁴ Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 65

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 73

the United States, and what led up to the Exclusion Act. Iris Chang, in *The Chinese in America*, argues that the Chinese immigrant became “the indispensable enemy” – a people both needed yet deeply feared – and that it was the xenophobia of (mid-nineteenth century) Californians which led to the Exclusion Act.¹⁷ In *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*, Shehong Chen states that “as immigrants, Chinese Americans suffered from discrimination and exclusion in the United States, they were victims of white racism and the weakened Chinese nation.”¹⁸ Stuart Creighton Miller argues against the “California thesis” in *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, and suggests because the California “Sinophobic measures” were “repeatedly shot down by the Supreme Court” in Washington, D.C., anti-Chinese sentiment had to be a nation-wide phenomenon in order to produce the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.¹⁹ Miller’s argument for a nation-wide “Sinophobia” matches the American national “panda-monium” and its resultant need to conquer, tame, and ultimately cage the mystical and mythical panda. To my knowledge, within all the historiography, no one has used the American relationship with the panda to investigate the tumultuous relationship between the United States and the people of China.

The Panda is “Discovered,” the Chinese are “Discovered”

Europeans had traveled to China extensively since the opening of the Silk Road across the Middle East and from early times when trans-oceanic sailing techniques allowed for shipping lanes to Asia. Mostly these Europeans were going to China to profit off material goods such as spices, tea, and porcelain – but some of them went as missionaries or as naturalists to find new species of plants and animals previously unknown to the West. Christian missionaries were among those who went to China with an aim of converting a pagan people to a life of Christianity. The Jesuits were among the first missionaries to enter China with intent to convert and “civilize” the Chinese in the sixteenth century. Their romanticized and glorified accounts of China influenced other Christian sects to send their missionaries to China in the hopes of proselytizing to the masses of Chinese “pagans.”²⁰

Miller suggests that early American missionary reports about the Chinese and their culture had a major influence on the mythology that was built surrounding the Chinese people. Miller shares the story of Reverend Robert Morrison – a missionary who arrived in China in 1807 – and the periodical he wrote, the *Missionary Herald*, which “commanded the widest audience in America” and was cited as being “a leading authority on China” by the lay press.²¹ The *Missionary Herald* reported to Americans about the “breathless shock” with which one experienced Chinese culture.²² One missionary wrote that the Chinese are “children of darkness,” and condemned them as “lost souls” who could not “muster sufficient determination to save themselves.” Another proclaimed “we have been brought...into direct contact with heathenism...we are in Satan’s empire.”²³ Still another account brought horror and disbelief to American readers: “[H]eathen mothers without natural affection...killed between forty to seventy percent of all female infants born in China.” This illustrative report went on to explain that “before the carts go around in the mornings to pick

¹⁷ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America*, (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2003). viii

¹⁸ Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). 3

¹⁹ Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant, the American Image of the Chinese 1785-1882*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). 4

²⁰ Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013), 131

²¹ Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 57-58

²² *Ibid.*, 62

²³ *Ibid.*, 61-62

up the bodies of infants thrown in the streets...dogs and swine are let loose upon them. The bodies of those found are carried to a common pit.”²⁴ Another collective concern disseminated to Americans about the Chinese was the immense population. Not only were they “heathens,” – there were lots of them. Missionaries, according to Miller, stressed China’s “huge population” by constantly reminding their readers how many “heathen souls” existed in China. The missionaries “inadvertently campaigned” to make Americans aware that “the mind cannot grasp the real import of so vast a number” of people.²⁵ This latter idea would percolate in the minds of anxious Americans as their awe turned to angst later in the nineteenth century.

Iris Chang (unofficially) places the first Chinese woman in the United States in 1834.²⁶ Chang wrote that Afong Moy came to New York City as part of a cultural exhibit. She was on display in a museum as part of a “life-size diorama” wearing a silk gown and slippers, “as if she were a rare zoological specimen.”²⁷ A *New York Herald* advertisement from 1836 tells the public what they could expect from a visit to the diorama:

Various Chinese curiosities will be shown and explained to the company and every pains taken to gratify the curious, as to the manners and customs of these singular [sic] people. Afong Moy is a native of Canton city, about seventeen years of age, and engaging in her manner; addresses the visitors in English and Chinese, and occasionally Walks before the Company, so as to afford an opportunity of observing her astonishing LITTLE FEET (emphasis theirs), for which these Chinese ladies are so remarkable. The Exhibition will commence each evening at half past 8 o’clock. Admittance to the whole, 25 cents; Children under 10 years, half price.²⁸

Here was this Chinese woman, this “creature” from a world away, on display for Americans’ viewing pleasure, much like an animal at a zoo. Americans had been trading with the Chinese since about 1785, but the encounters were by merchant seamen and missionaries – hardly the average American – the Chinese were something most Americans had only heard about, but never (before Afong Moy) seen for themselves or experienced them in the real world.²⁹ Similar to the unknown status of the Chinese people – before 1869 – the panda was completely unknown to non-Chinese peoples.

In 1862, a French Catholic named Abbe Armand David went to China as a missionary priest and natural scientist. He may have been officially sent as a missionary but his heart was in science. He received a commission of exploration in behalf of the Museum of Natural History in Paris, which was dearer to his heart than converting “pagans.”³⁰ In fact, throughout his diary, there are few (if any) mentions of converting those pagans – yet four years of searching the remote villages and mountainsides for rare and exotic plant and animal samples is heavily chronicled. His status as Abbe seems to have been used more for free room

²⁴ Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 67

²⁵ Ibid., 75

²⁶ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 26

²⁷ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 26

²⁸ The New York Times, Advertisement. *New York Times*, New York, New York, July 9, 1836

²⁹ Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 7

³⁰ Armand David, *Being an Account of the French Naturalist’s Journeys and Observations in China in the Years 1866 to 1869*. Translated by Helen M. Fox (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949). vii

and board at places like the “fine Episcopal residence of Monseigneur Pinchon, vicar of northern Szechwan.”³¹

Lucky for natural science David was much more proficient at collecting and discovering new species than he was at converting the Chinese to Christianity. His discoveries were sorted, categorized, and sent back to Paris as samples for the museum and to aide natural scientists in properly classifying any newly found specimen by genus and species. Abbe David has one species of deer named for him – due to his painstaking work of discovery – the Pere David deer (*Elaphurus davidianus*) is his namesake. On May 26, 1869 his diary entry lists the contents of a box to be sent back to Paris. Among the samples to go back include: “(1) nine or ten species of mammals; (2) thirty species of birds; (3) twenty-seven bottles or vials filled with reptiles and fish (sixty species); (4) six hundred thirty-four species of insects; (5) one hundred ninety-four species of plants.”³² However, his most important “discovery” probably came on March 11, 1869.

On this date, Abbe David was invited to the home of the “principal landowner” of the valley in which he was collecting. While being served “tea and sweets” by the “pagan landowner” Abbe David spotted the “fine skin” of a white and black bear.³³ Over tea and sweets, Abbe David inquired of the man the origins of the skin. The landlord of the valley informed Abbe David that his hunters could go out and “certainly obtain the animal within a short time” for him as well.³⁴ It turns out the pagan landowner was right. Just twelve days later, the hunters returned to Abbe David with a young white [and black] bear they called “bei-shung”³⁵

which they took alive but unfortunately killed so it could be carried more easily. The young white bear, which they sell to me very dearly, is all white except for the legs, ears, and around the eyes, which are deep black.³⁶

Upon inspection of the bear specimen Abbe David noted the peculiarities. “This must be a new species of *Ursus*” he wrote on March 23rd. He noted the bear was “very remarkable” not only because of its color, but also for its paws, which are “hairy underneath” unlike other bear species. On April 1st he continued to note the specimen’s uniqueness, he wrote “the animal’s head is very big, and the snout round and short instead of being pointed as it is in the Pekin bear.”³⁷ Abbe David sent his sample bear back to Paris to the Natural History Museum along with his notes. He was hoping his “discovery” would be a welcome addition to the museum and for that they would extend his stay in China.

Once the Paris museum received Abbe David’s package, they set about trying to classify it. Abbe David’s note suggested to name the animal *Ursus melanoleucus* (black and white bear), but museum

³¹ Armand David, *Being an Account of the French Naturalist’s Journeys*, 251

³² *Ibid.*, 287

³³ *Ibid.*, 276

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 287

³⁵ “bei-shung” (白熊) early Chinese for panda, literally meaning “white bear”. Today the giant panda is called “da xiongmao” (大熊猫)

³⁶ Armand David, *Being an Account of the French Naturalist’s Journeys*, 283

³⁷ Armand David, *Being an Account of the French Naturalist’s Journeys*, 283 (See footnote 12, as this is among the list of reasons humans may be enamored with the panda)

naturalist Alphonse Milne-Edwards determined that it was more closely related to the lesser panda ("discovered" in 1825 by Frederic Cuvier, known as *Ailurus fulgens*, or "fire-colored cat") and raccoons than to bears.³⁸ Milne-Edwards determined it "must constitute a new genus" which he called *Ailuropus*. Eventually, taxonomists settled on *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* literally meaning "black-and-white panda-foot."³⁹ The questions about this animal's species as well as the mystique surrounding its uniqueness fed into the panda becoming the "most challenging animal trophy on earth."⁴⁰ The "tennis-like tussle" over the genus of the strange and exotic giant panda "only succeeded in adding to the interest... [h]ere was a creature that apparently defied all efforts to make sense of it."⁴¹ Like early taxonomists with the panda, Americans, it could be said, would have the same problem classifying the Chinese people as well.

Like Abbe David's western "discovery" of the panda, Americans discovered the Chinese immigrant (*en masse*) on the shores of the United States around the middle of the nineteenth century. Also like the panda, the new Chinese immigrants were both known, and unknown, recognizable yet strange, also mysterious and bizarre. The average Chinese man was only four feet-ten inches tall and one hundred-twenty pounds. Many Americans deemed them "too delicate for the job [of gold mining and railroad building]" but others argued that "the people who built the Great Wall could [do it]."⁴² The Chinese were noticeably different from their Anglo-American counterparts and their appearance in American cities begot an uneasiness among some Americans.

The arrival of Chinese immigrants to California in the middle of the nineteenth century "provoked editorial fears across the nation" and was cast in terms of unfavorable images. The "presence of Chinese on the West Coast reinforced many of the negative stereotypes" about them and "interacted with other anxieties" affecting nineteenth century American society.⁴³ In the 1870s when America slid into a nationwide depression, "the Chinese became the scapegoat" in regions where their numbers were the greatest. In 1870, "there were one Chinese and two whites" for every job in San Francisco. Further exacerbating things, "many California businesses hired Chinese" because, in hard economic times, they were willing to work longer hours for "half the pay."⁴⁴ When, it was discovered the Chinese laborers were sending money home to China it was believed this was "depleting America of currency" and fueled even more ire.⁴⁵ Fear of a new "species" of man, dissimilar from themselves, quickly grew to anger and resentment. White Americans could tolerate a different-looking human species on their shores and in their cities only so long as their cultural and economic hegemony would not be threatened.

In 1879, President Hayes vetoed a bill put forth by California Senator John F. Miller calling for Chinese Exclusion - Hayes feared reprisal by the Qing government in China against American economic interests there. Soon after, he was "burned in effigy all across the West" for his veto. Facing public ridicule and an upcoming election, President Arthur (later) kowtowed to "a conciliatory bill for a ten-year ban" on Chinese

³⁸ Morris, *The Giant Panda*, 11, 30

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 36

⁴¹ Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 25

⁴² Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 56

⁴³ Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 15

⁴⁴ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 116, 118

⁴⁵ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 119

immigration.⁴⁶ At the same time, white union pressure on capitalists hiring “cheap Chinese labor” limited the growth of the Chinese working class.⁴⁷ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 represented the “first departure from our official policy of open, laissez-faire immigration to be made on ethnocentric grounds” in American history.⁴⁸ The Chinese did not fit “the melting pot theory” which many Americans had conceived of for themselves. Before the Chinese had arrived *en masse*, “no immigrant group had differed sufficiently from the Anglo-American root stock.”⁴⁹ This all leads Historian Michael Hunt to remark that racial hierarchy and American ideology was “inspired by the struggle of white Americans to secure and maintain their supremacy under conditions” of economic hardship (perceived or otherwise).⁵⁰ Propagandists “were able to sway” those forming “ignorant or indifferent” opinions of the Chinese by creating the image of “an inherently inferior and intolerable foreign element”⁵¹

The intolerance toward the Chinese immigrant was epitomized in the United States presidential race of 1888 when both candidates took aim at the Chinese immigrant. Grover Cleveland said the Chinese were “dangerous to our peace and welfare.” Benjamin Harrison insisted the Chinese were an “alien race whose assimilation was neither possible nor desirable.”⁵² After the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (and ensuing corresponding legislation to be enumerated later) “large-scale Chinese immigration ceased entirely for eighty years.”⁵³ White Americans took their aim and successfully killed the “beast” that was the Chinese immigrant.

Just as the Chinese immigrant had to be subdued and conquered, so too did the panda. This animal, extremely rare and only existent in the remotest of Chinese highlands, had to be tracked down and summarily executed in the name of American progress and superiority. American museums and big game hunters alike felt an intrepid need to put the panda on display as yet another vanquished species – not unlike Afong Moy. White America’s destiny was manifest in its need to eradicate all foes and conquer newly discovered frontiers; white American hegemony could not be threatened – nor escaped.

For a long time, the panda “eluded all the foreigners who tried to shoot it.”⁵⁴ Unsuccessful safari after unsuccessful safari trekked into the remote montane habitats of southwestern China in search of a panda to shoot. American museums, covetous of the Paris specimen, wanted their own panda samples to put on display. Competition between natural history museums, “first fueled” by the late nineteenth century race for “the biggest and best dinosaur remains” found its way into the early twentieth century race for “the most exotic specimens” – a niche the panda would fill nicely.⁵⁵

In 1888, (then future president) Teddy Roosevelt established the Boone and Crocket Club which aimed to champion the virtues of the big-game hunters “who must be sound of body and firm of mind and must

⁴⁶ Ibid., 130, 132

⁴⁷ Chen, *Being Chinese, becoming Chinese American*, 12

⁴⁸ Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 3

⁴⁹ Ibid., 192

⁵⁰ Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). 18

⁵¹ Ibid., 70

⁵² Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 70

⁵³ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, xii

⁵⁴ Morris, *The Giant Panda*, 36

⁵⁵ Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 51

possess energy, resolution, and manliness.”⁵⁶ In 1895 his Boone and Crocket Club’s annual handbook *Hunting in Many Lands* – edited by Roosevelt himself – included a sketch of the giant panda among its big game trophies and listed China as one of the last great hunting lands. Roosevelt’s Boone and Crocket Club, as well as the bravado and swagger he brought to the presidency later, would serve as a measuring stick for his two sons some two decades after Theodore Senior was done in office.

In 1913, British botanist Ernest H. Wilson wrote about the panda

This animal is not common, and the savage nature of the country it frequents renders the possibility of capture remote. It is the sportsman’s prize above all others worth working for in western China. There is no record of a foreigner having killed a specimen and no foreigner has so far seen a living example.⁵⁷

Wilson was not only laying down the gauntlet for future safaris, he was lighting the torch which would ignite the tinder of White America’s need to conquer yet another adversary of Chinese descent.

In 1926, brothers Kermit and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., went to China to collect a panda specimen for the Chicago Field Museum. It was their opinion “there [were] those who say that Americans have lost the pioneer spirit.”⁵⁸ Like their father’s Boone and Crocket club ideals, the Roosevelt brothers thought it necessary to rekindle the spirit of American (white) westward expansion – its *Manifest Destiny*. One could even infer that they were seeking to further their father’s own tradition of carrying Manifest Destiny outside the shores of America’s contiguous soil when they proclaimed their inherent right to conquer Asian wildlife and said, “our Indian [is descended] from far-distant tribesmen of central Asia.”⁵⁹

According to the brothers, central Asia “had always been the Mecca of our desires” and “for all intents and purposes no collections of the wild life [from China] are in our museums” -(unless one was inclined to include Afong Moy, of course).⁶⁰ The goal of the brothers Roosevelt was to be the first non-Chinese to ever shoot and kill a panda. The Chicago Field museum was financing their extensive entourage to China with the explicit goal of returning with samples for display at the museum. The brothers believed in their mission. Big game hunters they were, but they also felt that “hunting in itself is a great sport, [but] without the scientific aspect as well it loses much of its charm.”⁶¹ But, was their version of “scientific” nothing more than the popular pseudo-science of the era – Social Darwinism? If not, it certainly dripped of American masculinity and machismo.

The Roosevelt brothers spent months traversing the tablelands of southwestern China and Tibet. They had bagged many large-game specimens for the Field Museum, but had not yet found their original quarry. Soon though, on April 13th, all their trekking, climbing, and slogging finally paid off.

⁵⁶ Nicholls, *Way of the Panda*, 47

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40

⁵⁸ Theodore Roosevelt and Kermit Roosevelt, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons). 10

⁵⁹ Roosevelt, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, 7

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2,5

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2

We came upon giant panda tracks in the snow...in the Hsifan Mountains...We had been following the trail for two-and-a-half hours when we came to a more open jungle. One of the Lolo hunters...had not gone forty yards before he turned back to eagerly motion to us to hurry. As I gained his side he pointed to a giant spruce thirty yards away. The bole was hollowed, and from it emerged head and forequarters of a *bei-shung*. He looked sleepily from side to side as he sauntered forth and walked slowly away into the bamboos...As soon as Ted came up we fired simultaneously at the outline of the disappearing panda. Both shots took effect. He was a splendid old male.

Even though Kermit Roosevelt later admitted the bear “had put up no resistance,” and “when hit he had remained silent and had not called out as does a bear,” the killing was considered a boon for science and conservation.⁶² Success of the expedition soon reached the scientific community as well as American newspapers. The Roosevelts had elicited excitement in the United States over the panda.

American newspapers heralded the Roosevelts’ feat by claiming they “had bagged...the cat-footed Himalayan bear, the first ever shot by white men” and “The Roosevelt’s brought down their quarry in... a mountainous, thickly forested region infested with bandits.”⁶³ Another article proclaimed the Roosevelt brothers were “[s]couring mountains, valleys, and snow-clad highlands in quest of the beast which lured them on their dangerous sporting mission.”⁶⁴ A third article tells how the “Roosevelts eventually were able to overcome the natives” then “the Roosevelts fired simultaneously” and the “big bear-like animal...came rolling down.”⁶⁵ Like the Roosevelt’s panda which had put up little resistance, the Chinese people in America had also put up little resistance to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Unlike more vociferous immigrant groups before them, the Chinese were not as organized and clamored less for protective rights. Also, unlike these other immigrant groups, the Chinese didn’t form many groups to lobby for political capital. Instead most Chinese retreated to the various “Chinatowns” or “Little Chinas” within major cities and lived among themselves in a near-hermit stasis for decades to come.

White American hegemony had been restored. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese laborers from entering the United States for ten years. In 1888, the Scott Act prevented laborers who were temporarily away in China from returning to America. In 1892, the Geary Act extended the exclusion for yet another ten years, and in 1904 the exclusion was extended indefinitely.⁶⁶ Formal legislation had successfully terminated the Yellow Peril. The Roosevelt brothers, exuding the manliness their father demanded, successfully brought down the *bei-shung* beast that had so successfully eluded white hunters for so long. No longer was white America bested by the Chinese immigrant nor the Chinese panda. Following a seeming victory over both the panda and the Chinese immigrant, both “species” would soon find themselves in cages on American soil.

Two Chinese “species” find themselves in cages on American Soil

⁶² Morris, *The Giant Panda*, 40-41

⁶³ New York Times, *Roosevelts Bag a Panda*, *The New York Times*, New York, New York, May 5, 1929. Pg. 9

⁶⁴ New York Times, *Roosevelts Bag Rare Asian Panda*, *The New York Times*, New York, New York. May 24, 1929. Pg. 9

⁶⁵ New York Times, *Kermit Roosevelt Back With A Panda*, *The New York Times*, New York, New York. June, 13, 1929. Pg. 60

⁶⁶ Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*, 11-12

As mentioned previously, white Americans employed a Kipling-esque lens of superiority and deep chauvinism in dealing with Chinese immigrants which fueled the former to see the latter as possessing less than human qualities – never mind equal standing as “Americans,” or potential Americans. Rudyard Kipling, who championed Britain’s “civilizing mission” in India and the “West’s duty to educate and govern the ‘Sloth and heathen Folly,’” is famous for his poem “*The White Man’s Burden*.”⁶⁷ The diary of Kermit and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. quote Kipling poems three times in the first twenty pages – including the opening vignette to the entire diary itself.⁶⁸

Quoting a particular poet multiple times does not a chauvinist make. However, when coupled with the myriad unconsciously racist comments splattered throughout the pages of their own diary, it is easy to form the opinion that the Roosevelts’ saw the Chinese as an inferior species to America’s white, hegemonic stock. Kermit wrote, “[w]e were in the country of pigtailed, and the men in charge of the ponies wore them. They were a cheerful lot, very Mongol in feature, and not at all cleanly.”⁶⁹ Later, he wrote about the natives and how they “varied greatly in color; some were as white as we and others very dark. We saw no Negroes, nor could we make out any trace of Negro blood.”⁷⁰ His brother, Theodore Jr., would add descriptions of some of the Chinese men. “He was a picturesque old Oriental. He looked like an elderly serious monkey,” another was “a jovial little fellow...he looked like a jolly goblin.”⁷¹ Kermit would follow this up by describing one of their hired workers as “a short man [who] walked doubled over, giving a gorilla-like appearance.”⁷² The Roosevelt brothers were not alone in their mindset about the Chinese people.

Ruth Harkness believed the Chinese were incapable of caring for the panda without American assistance. Harkness’ belief notwithstanding, this is a species that had survived in China for millennia and completely eluded Western “discovery” until as late as 1869. Yet, she still felt inclined to write:

Why shouldn’t I take Su-Lin to America where there were facilities to raise her to adulthood, and where science was equipped to make use of the knowledge to be gained from a live panda? China had no such facilities; there are no great zoos such as America [has].⁷³

Ruth Harkness – though she firmly believed she was on a mission to rescue a baby panda and bring it back safely to the security of the United States – was not without her own superiority complex toward the Chinese. Like the Roosevelts, she remarked how her Chinese guide, Quentin, “made me think of an American Indian.”⁷⁴ About the Chinese villagers, she encountered she likened them to children by suggesting they were “filled with curiosity [and] had to see me; examine my tiny mirror, comb and brush, my fountain pen, and other things the like of which they had never seen.”⁷⁵

⁶⁷ James Brophy, et al., *Perspectives from the Past*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 410

⁶⁸ Roosevelt, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, 1, 3, 20

⁶⁹ Roosevelt, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, 36

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 81

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 103, 115

⁷² *Ibid.*, 129

⁷³ Harkness, *The Lady and the Panda*, 232

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 210

⁷⁵ Harkness, *The Lady and the Panda*, 144

At about the same time as Ruth Harkness brought Su-Lin to America to be saved from a backward-appearing China, America's self-perceived cultural and racial superiority caused a similar treatment toward the Chinese (human) immigrant.

Conclusion

Curiosity about the Chinese gave way to fear and anger which manifest itself into violence against – and eventual expulsion of – the Chinese in America. As mentioned earlier, after curiosity and conjecture about the panda subsided, there was an ardent drive to track the “beast” down and kill one as a trophy-testament of American power and superiority. Nicholls states that between 1870 and 1900 there was a “lull in safaris in search of pandas” due to political upheaval in China, but this did not mean Americans weren't desirous of nabbing their prize.⁷⁶ After all, one should recall the Boone and Crocket Club which labeled the panda “an obvious target.”⁷⁷ The Roosevelt brothers were the first white men to shoot and kill a panda. In their cable back to the Chicago Field Museum they boasted they had “[j]ointly shot for you [a] splendid old male giant pandar [sic].”⁷⁸ Their exploits were published in book form the very next year in order to share the conquest of the great white hunter over the foreign species with all Americans.

According to Chang, “no country exudes a greater air of mystery to Westerners than China.”⁷⁹ For the Chinese immigrants to California, the “greatest threat” would not come from the “harshness of nature” but from the “cruelty of fellow humans” and the racism endemic to America.⁸⁰ As the Chinese population in America's West grew, so did “consternation among certain whites.”⁸¹ The media was awash with this consternation – voiced by editorials, textbooks, poetry, and even a Broadway play. An 1852 *San Francisco Daily Alta* editorial wrote that the Chinese were “morally a far worse class to have among us than the Negro,” it continued “they are not our people and never will be, not of that kin that Americans can ever associate or sympathize with.”⁸² In the mid-1850s the textbooks American schoolchildren were learning from (the same children who would come of age just before the Chinese Exclusion Act was created) described the Chinese as “the most dishonest, low, thieving set in the world.”⁸³ Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote about the Chinese:

The closer contemplation we condescend to bestow, the more disgustful is that booby nation. The Chinese Empire enjoys precisely a Mummy's reputation, that of having preserved to a hair for 3 or 4,000 years the ugliest features in the world. I have no gift to see a meaning in the venerable vegetation of this extraordinary people. They are tools for other nations to use. Even miserable Africa can say I have hewn

⁷⁶ Nicholls, *The Way of the Panda*, 38

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 48

⁷⁸ Nicholls, *The Way of the Panda*, 50

⁷⁹ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 1

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 52

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 93

the wood and drawn the water to promote the civilization of other lands. But China, reverend dullness! Hoary ideot [sic], all she can say at the convocation of nations must be – "I made the tea."⁸⁴

The poet Bret Harte's popular work *The Heathen Chinese*, written in 1870 "struck a chord deep within the American psyche." It later became a Broadway "wild success" when he teamed up with Mark Twain in releasing *Ah Sin*.⁸⁵ Both the Chinese immigrant and the panda were once revered then feared, but white America had to take them down; the Roosevelts had done their part to the panda, legislation from Washington had done it to the Chinese immigrant.

The panda was not yet a household name when William Harkness set off to become the first ever to bring a live giant panda from China. Many in the scientific community, and those lucky enough to have seen them on display in the various field museums were aware of them, but the panda was not commonplace in American culture of yet. In her diary, Ruth Harkness admits she misinterpreted her husband's desire to go "to the border of Tibet" in search of a giant panda as "you mean giant panther, don't you?" Like many Americans, she "had never heard of a [g]iant [p]anda."⁸⁶ Upon his untimely death in Shanghai, Ruth Harkness assumed her husband's journey and set out to be the first person to ever take a live panda specimen out of China. She was a demure, young dress designer from New York – not a seasoned safari professional like all those men who had failed at the same objective before her. She admitted she "wouldn't know a Tragopan pheasant from a tufted deer" but she was "certain that there would be no mistaking a [p]anda."⁸⁷

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century few Americans, save for merchants and missionaries, and those who had seen Afong Moy on display, were familiar with the Chinese. The Chinese were brought to America to work in gold mines and on the transcontinental railroad. However, once the boom years of the rail and the rush were done, hard economic times hit much of America. This made the Chinese into what Iris Chang called "the indispensable enemy" – truly a people both needed and deeply feared. The Chinese immigrants became the scapegoats for white Americans who were down on their luck. The Chinese, it was said, "filled prisons, alms houses, and hospitals" along with a myriad of other social problems.⁸⁸ Eventually, white American hegemony would feel an uncomfortable pressure which would result in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

From the onset of the twentieth century up until the 1940s, the American people maintained a patriarchal view of China and the Chinese people. Similar to Afong Moy before them, the Chinese immigrant was to be locked away in cages and only allowed out upon the behest of the hegemonic Anglo ruler. Arguments for the necessity of Angel Island may have been couched in language similar to Ellis Island, but those East coast immigrant counterparts more closely resembling America's white stock did not suffer the same fate and treatment. Like Ruth Harkness bringing Su-Lin back to the United States because

⁸⁴ William H. Gillman, *The Journal and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (Cambridge: New York, 1961). 224

⁸⁵ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 118

⁸⁶ Harkness, *The Lady and the Panda*, 15

⁸⁷ Harkness, *The Lady and the Panda*, 30

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 122

China lacked the ability to care for her, the American people saw the Chinese as incapable of assimilating on their own without

American interference and “care.”

The ebb and flow perspective of the panda can help answer how Americans viewed, and treated, the Chinese people over time. Through literature, tales, and side-shows Americans had their first wide-spread, contact with the Chinese people in the early nineteenth century. Soon after, the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants came around the middle of the nineteenth century followed closely by wondering about the potential danger of the Chinese – which led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. By the time this fear was assuaged, Americans had decided the Chinese immigrant (like the panda) needed to be conquered and caged on American shores to maintain the perceived *Manifest Destiny* Americans believed to be their innate right. Just as Americans went to view Afong Moy in a cage, today they go and view the panda the same way. They marvel at the panda’s “various Chinese curiosities” and gawk to “gratify the curious as to the manners and customs” of this animal.⁸⁹ As for Ruth Harkness, who was convinced that bringing Su-Lin to America where there were facilities to raise her to adulthood – Su-Lin died just two years later due to medical complications related to pneumonia.

Throughout the history of the United States, white Americans have, at times, felt their hegemony being challenged. Emancipation of blacks in the South was seen as a good thing by the North, until blacks began migrating northward and taking space and jobs formerly apportioned to only whites. As this paper highlights, the Chinese came to American shores and infringed upon white jobs and land as well. Later Mexican and other migrants became a problem when jobs became scarce during the Great Depression. The 1965 Civil Rights Act, fair housing, schooling, and various work-related laws all chafed against Anglo-American hegemony as well and all met with an ensuing push back. Today, Latino immigrants and Middle Eastern refugees are the latest to be a perceived threat to the white American hegemonic perception and the push back is being seen again, the same as it has been throughout the history of the United States. Maybe this time we can solve this complex issue without the need for another Exclusion Act.

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⁸⁹ See footnote 28

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