

The White Woman's Burden Chinese Prostitution in San Francisco

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On a cold Thursday evening in November 1905, Mooie Qui, fled from the underground prostitution ring. She ran “into the street and showed [a] note to the first man she saw with a star on his breast.”¹ When the officer read the note, it directed him to take the note-giver to the mission house of Donaldina Cameron. From this refuge, located in San Francisco’s Chinatown, Cameron endeavored to rescue girls and women from the subjugation of the so-called “yellow slavery.” Mooie Qui’s story made it into the *San Francisco Chronicle* the following month as another example of Cameron’s work. While there were many charities and institutions who helped prostitutes escape the sex trade, the most notable organizations focused on aiding Asian women. The mission houses would remove girls from harsh conditions, force Christian conversions, and deport them or marry them off to Chinese men. Such infantilizing treatment dehumanized these women and reinforced negative white sentiments towards Asian females. The institutions that helped these women, under the guise of charity, facilitated Chinese discrimination to flourish in the city of San Francisco in the early twentieth century.

The discovery of gold in California in January of 1848 brought an influx of men from all over the world. At first, they only trickled in, but by 1849 they were coming in large numbers. Very few women came with them in part due to the dangerous journey to California, and because the men did not intend on staying very long. Some dangers of the journey included unsafe sailing vessels, a six to eight-month voyage by sea, the treacherous crossing at the Isthmus of Panama, hostile Native Americans,

1. “Note Leads Girl to Mission,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 9, 1905.

harsh climate, difficult terrain, and, of course, disease.² The cost of such an expedition was also a deterrent. Because of these factors, women became one of the most prized commodities in San Francisco; “When one appeared in public[,] men clustered around and stared.”³ Because so few women came to San Francisco, prostitutes were treated with the same veneration as any respectable woman.⁴ Prostitutes worked in various venues such as saloons serving food and drink, standing with customers and dealers, in parlor houses, and brothels.⁵ Women came from all over the world to take advantage of the booming prostitution industry. The most popular came from France, but many also came from Central and South America, and China in particular.⁶

Chinese prostitutes were not abundant at the start of the Gold Rush, but as Chinese men realized that they were staying longer than planned, demand grew. The women who came over contributed to their family’s incomes. Parents both received an initial payment for their daughters and then could go on with one less mouth to feed.⁷ Though these women were generally considered by many to be slaves who could not easily better their position and were bound to die young, they also became the target of police crack downs on prostitution.⁸ These women would be arrested and fined, deported, or put into the custody of a Mission home. However, these prostitutes were often morally excused for practicing this profession since they were considered “a slave with no control over her situation”⁹ and the

2. Jacqueline Baker Barnhart, *Working Women: Prostitution in San Francisco From the Gold Rush to 1900* (Santa Cruz: University of California Santa Cruz, 1977), 33-35.

3. Rand Richards, *Mud, Blood and Gold: San Francisco in 1849* (San Francisco: Heritage House Publishers, 2009), 85.

4. *Ibid.*, 91.

5. Joann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1990), 149-172.

6. Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 86.

7. Barnhart, *Working Women*, 126.

8. *Ibid.*, 8.

9. *Ibid.*, 124.

large community of men supported the profession.

San Francisco during the California Gold Rush was the breeding ground for a booming prostitution economy. The lack of normal social constraints during the Victorian era in California allowed for a freedom in society not seen in Europe or the eastern United States. The absence of wives in the territory also permitted for an increased social status and income for prostitutes. As the city's inhabitants began to realize that their residency was permanent, wives and families started to push prostitution to the fringes of society. The return of the strict moral codes of Victorian society also brought the need for regulated sex work. The group most targeted by these laws and reform efforts were Chinese prostitutes.

As was often the case during the Victorian era, the female sex workers were often viewed as immoral and the victims of circumstances. Jacqueline Barnhart refutes that idea in her 1977 dissertation, *Working Women: Prostitution in San Francisco From the Gold Rush to 1900*. She examines prostitution in this era through the lens of working women who chose the profession they were in. Pointing out that very few jobs were available to women at this time, Barnhart suggests the high profit margins of the occupation made sense for women as a way to supplement their earnings or to make it their sole source of income.¹⁰ However, Barnhart primarily looks at prostitutes who willingly entered this profession and thus her findings do not extend to Chinese prostitutes who were usually pressed into the sex trade. Her work focuses mostly on American and European women, along with some attention on Latin American women. Barnhart does briefly cover the experience of Chinese women through her discussion of Ah Toy. Toy is most famous Chinese prostitute turned madam of her own brothel who came out of the era.¹¹ Through Toy's story, Barnhart is able to show how Chinese prostitutes were the most likely to be targeted by police crackdowns on prostitution.

Benson Tong's 1994 book, *Unsubmissive Women* looks into Chinese women who were able to rise up from their circumstances and leave the profession behind. Tong does not portray them in the stereotypical manner that the portrait of them having no control of their lives, lacking the ability

10. Barnhart, *Working Women*, 8.

11. *Ibid.*, 124.

to decide, and having to live under a harsh master, dehumanized these women.¹²11 He points out that the women who did leave sex work behind usually did so through marriage, a fact that the census in the later part of the 19th century confirms. Tong also discusses how Chinese women received more unjustified attention than other ethnicities who worked in the industry of prostitution.¹³ Tong suggests that the strict moral code of Victorian society and the women's lack of familiarity with their surrounding enhanced racial segregation.

In 1980, Paul McHugh published *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform*, in which he explores the social reforms in the United Kingdom related to prostitution. He focuses on the way in which groups acted to repeal the Contagious Disease Act of 1864, and why they opposed it. The Contagious Disease Act stipulated that police could arrest prostitutes in ports and army towns and force them to submit to an STD inspection. If a prostitute was found to have an STD she would have to undergo treatment for it before being released. While looking mostly into the efforts of a middle-class activist, Josephine Butler, he points out that middle-class women organized to uphold working class women and human rights for prostitutes, even though they disapproved of the occupation of prostitution and never bothered to know or understand about these women.¹⁴ His discussion of these reforms and the thoughts of reform leaders shows how the ideology made its way over to the United States at around the same time. The views of prostitutes and prostitution in Victorian society were very universal, considering it “the great social evil.”

Mildred Martin's 1977 *Chinatown's Angry Angel* focuses on Donaldina Cameron, the renown social worker from the Presbyterian Mission House (now called the Cameron House). Cameron's mission was to rescue Chinese girls and women from prostitution and indentured servitude. Once she rescued these women, she would either help them gain employment or help them return to their homes. Cameron's belief in Chinese women being

12. Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-century San Francisco* (Norman and London: University of Oakland Press, 1994), xviii.

13. *Ibid.*, 124.

14. Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 20-21.

inherently poor and defenseless contributed to, rather than deterred from their dehumanization. Tong would likely consider Cameron's constant reference to these women as her "daughters" a patronizing epithet. However, Martin presents it as a term of endearment born from deep compassion. Cameron did not do her work as a social obligation or a means of establish meaning in her own life. Rather, she saw her efforts as an inherent part of her ethical, and what she called Christian, duty. As such, Cameron is quoted as thinking about the media and her cause, "Donaldina wondered what effect publicity about them would have on the work. She wanted the awful existence of Chinese slavery known."¹⁵ She had a deep faith and truly believed that "With God all things were possible."¹⁶ Martin's biography of Cameron gives a wonderful view of the workings of a Chinese prostitution rescue house and what happened to them afterward.

While these books touch upon the topic broadly, their overlap provides important information into how prostitutes were treated and viewed. The special attention given to Chinese prostitutes brings up an interesting topic as to why they were targeted more than other groups. Granted, the extra legislation against their race brought unusual attention; these women were ostracized not only from society as a whole, but within their own profession. While there were general laws in place against prostitution, specific laws that identified Chinese and Japanese prostitutes targeted them. Such laws included forbidding Asian women to be brought over to California for the purpose of prostitution. Since the laws specifically identified women of those races, it added a separation between Chinese and white prostitutes. Also, most of the Chinese prostitutes rarely ever left Chinatown, which isolated them from other prostitutes as well. The added emphasis on them is not because of their profession but because of their race; targeting them was just a gentler form of racism. In my research, I will address how Chinese prostitutes in San Francisco were targeted in the mid-nineteenth century, how this compared to the treatment of women of other ethnic backgrounds in prostitution, and how the treatment of these women reflected on society as a whole.

15. Mildred Crowl Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel: The Story of Donaldina Cameron* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books Publisher, 1977), 58.

16. *Ibid.*, 122.

Like many others in the mid nineteenth century, Chinese men left their homes for the gold in California. They did not plan to make California their home and therefore left their families behind, thinking they would return rich. The wives of these men maintained their family relationships by remaining behind and continuing the custom of serving her in-laws.¹⁷ Social upheavals in China during the 1800s included the declining Qing dynasty, the opium wars, population growth in southern China, the Taip'ing Rebellion, The Red Turban Revolts, and the Punti-Hakka feuds; all of which played a part in the increase of Chinese women entering prostitution unwillingly. Since women were not considered as valuable as boys and men they were vulnerable to being taken or given up by their families. As conditions worsened in China, it became more likely that families struggled to feed all members and survive. Women would agree to travel to California under the ruse that they would be entering indentured servitude for domestic work. Another ploy given to the girls and their families was that they would be sent to America in order to marry Chinese men. In many cases, giving up their daughters over to indentured servitude or marriage to a man in another country was emotionally difficult for families.¹⁸

Upon arrival, these girls were either sent to a predetermined brothel or man, while most were sold at auction in alleys.¹⁹ These girls, the majority of which were in their early teens, if not younger, would sign contracts before and after being sold and then have to give the money used to buy them to their captor.²⁰ In 1893, laws were passed that prevented Chinese and Japanese women from being brought into the state of California "for the purpose of selling her to any person whatsoever."²¹ But the Tongs, as well-known procurers of Chinese prostitutes, simply had the women claim to be wives, sisters, or daughters of men already in the state in order to get around this. Laws previously passed in 1870 and 1873 had already set up

17. Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, xvi.

18. *Ibid.*, 40.

19. Michael Rutter, *Upstairs Girls: Prostitution in the American West* (Helena: Faircountry Press, 2005), 46.

20. Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 47.

21. *The Statutes of California and Amendments to the Codes* (Sacramento: A.J. Johnston, Supt. State Printing, 1893), 217.

restrictions on this as well. The enforcement of these laws were easy to get around not only through deception but also by bribing officials.²² Although it was common for officials to be paid to look the other way, by all forms of prostitution, Chinese prostitution involved much more than just bribing the police; it meant bribing customs agents and, dock officials as well as law officials.²³ A lot of effort and money was spent for women who usually did not live past their 20s; especially at a time when Caucasians were very much against their Chinese male counterparts. These women were usually not the ones in fancy parlor houses entertaining high end clients; in fact, they were found in cribs in Chinatown working for quantity, not quality. Why would officials try to stop Asian males, look the other way when it comes to Asian females? The dehumanization of Chinese prostitutes by the media and society as a whole played a part in the issue of Chinese prostitution, as does the sexualization of these women.

Lucie Hirata states that one of the reasons why Chinese prostitution flourished in San Francisco was due to whites encouraging it to lessen the perceived threat to white women.²⁴ The increase in prostitutes coupled with Chinese traditions meant that the Chinese men were less likely to bring wives and families over and settle down. The wider society played on this and allowed the prostitutes in so they could encourage the men to not make California their permanent residence. By using race to their advantage, white society was willing to turn the other way with regards to their laws, if it meant encouraging the Chinese to return to their home country. However, as increasingly more white females came to California, created families, and brought Victorian society with them, they adopted Chinese prostitution as the “white woman’s burden.”²⁵ This meant that Victorian minded women in San Francisco began a crusade against prostitution that emphasized the saving of Chinese women.²⁶

22. Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 49.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Lucie Cheng Hirata, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century America” (Signs 5(1), University Chicago Press, 1979), 7.

25. *Ibid.*, 28.

26. *Ibid.*, 27.

With the increased population of white women in the area, so too came an influx in ideals and values of the Victorian family. Within the scope of this Victorian system of values, the fight against prostitution made perfect sense. However, the emphasis these “burdened” white women put upon the issue of Chinese prostitution, as opposed to Irish, French or otherwise, highlights how their effort was less so spurred from a moral higher calling and more so from a feeling of racial superiority. Mission houses set up to help these women and save them from the evil and violence of their profession would often force Christian conversions on them along with the restrictive ideals of Victorian society. The publicity of Donaldina Cameron’s efforts shows that it was more for the benefit of the white women than the benefit of the prostitutes. On several occasions the *San Francisco Chronicle* printed stories of how Cameron would help rescue these women; these articles would put an emphasis on Cameron and her methods and less on the females she was helping. Of course, the articles about these prostitutes emphasize that they are “rescuing... them from a horrible fate.”²⁷ One article in 1897 is dedicated to Miss Culbertson, the superintendent before Cameron, and her work at the mission house. In this article, they hardly mention the girls and women she had helped, and instead praise Culbertson’s dedication to her work despite the danger and detriment to her health.²⁸ By specifically praising Culbertson the media completely leaves out those whom she is helping and only mentions them in order to show what a great person she is. It shows that while praising her dedication to helping Chinese prostitutes, the main interest lies with the white women and how morally superior and virtuous they are. They use the mission house and the work being done there as the means to show the superiority of the white women. By barely acknowledging the Chinese women in the articles or only showing them in the light of poor defenseless creatures, they support the idea that the Chinese are second class citizens; if that at all. They are considered secondary characters in these stories that would not have existed without them. The continued emphasis on the whites involved in these events or the emphasis on the morally wrong proceedings allows

27. “Note Leads Girl to Mission,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 9, 1905.

28. “Miss Culbertson Goes East: She Will Take a Rest From Rescue Work,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 25, 1897.

for the public to continue to only see Chinese sex workers through one lens, as victims and the males as harsh perpetrators. This is so even though many Chinese women participated in forcing others into prostitution.²⁹

Once the women successfully entered the country they were put up for auction, "When the sale began, the girls were brought in one by one to the block. They were stripped, punched, and prodded and in some cases examined by Chinese physicians."³⁰ While some of these women went into higher-class brothels, the majority went into cheap cribs. The brothels catered to a higher clientele than the cribs, and the girls there wore silks and perfume. They might be bought as a man's mistress for a time and then returned when he didn't want her anymore. The women who ended up in cribs had a much harder time. They were cheaper and served a rougher crowd. They lived in dirty, dark conditions with only enough room to service her customers. Whether in a brothel or in a crib, both types of prostitutes signed a contract. These contracts would state that they had to serve for four years, but several clauses would allow the contractor to easily add years onto that. The illiteracy levels of these females most often meant that they marked these documents without knowing what it said.³¹ Any attempt to run away meant that they were "to be held a slave for life." Rutter makes the point that the Chinese emphasis on honor and devotion to their family meant that it was rare for these women to try and escape.³² This image of submissive girls who attempted to endure the harsh conditions of their lives most likely added to the image of sexual pleasure. Men, knowing that these females were often here illegally and bound by tradition to obey their masters, often found an added exotic appeal in this. This meant that the men coming for some cheap entertainment could find it easily and without much trouble with these girls. Even if they wanted to, these females could not go to the police if customers or masters mistreated them.

The grim conditions that prostitutes faced fueled society's view

29. "The Human Merchandise," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 28, 1874.

30. Herbert Ashbury, *The Barbary Coast*, quoted in Anne Segraves, *Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West* (Hayden: Wesanne Publications, 1994), 138.

31. Segraves, *Soiled Doves*, 138.

32. Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 46.

of these practices as immoral, which extended to all Chinese immigrants. Since women were forced into this service, society often excused them, allowing them to escape morally while painting them as physically weak. The men who forced the women were considered the vilest. While most white prostitutes were also condemned for their profession as well, they were not excused morally like the Chinese women were. They had usually chosen their fate, whether out of necessity or curiosity, they had to deal with those consequences. While the issues of white prostitution were being prosecuted through laws, they did not make the news as much as Chinese prostitutes. The difference between white and Chinese cases of prostitution in the news shows that people were more concerned with the Chinese. By printing articles about the injustice and the conditions that the women experienced allowed the newspapers to shape society's opinion against the Chinese men even more. The men who brought the victimized women over in these accounts "exercised complete control until they landed in San Francisco,"³³ which added more fuel to the feelings against Chinese men already in existence. By going against the Victorian ideals of how women were supposed to be treated, allowed both white men and women to get behind the sentiment of keeping the Chinese out of California. Of course, while the women who were forced into this profession were exempt morally, society still ostracized them.

These women were kept isolated from the society at large so when they were taken from the environments of the cribs they faced the daunting task of not only adjusting to foreign surroundings but also to a culture very different to their own. Leaving meant joining a mostly Christian dominant culture that dressed differently and spoke another language. Many of these women spoke only enough English in order to call out to customers on the streets. Most were illiterate and often didn't learn to speak, read, or write English until they came to a Mission home. Because of this, many did not venture into wider society.³⁴ This isolation coupled with the already weak image of them allowed for wider society to take advantage of them once rescued by Missionary workers.

33. "The Slave Traffic: How the Courts Assist the Dealers in Women," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 18, 1887.

34. Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 124.

Donaldina Cameron was one of the most famous Missionary workers to help these women and girls. She was born on July 26, 1869, in New Zealand. Her parents came from Scotland and had a total of seven children. Her father had a sheep ranch that he later moved to the San Joaquin Valley along with his family in 1871. After a few bad years of weather and the death of her mother, the family moved to San Jose and later to Oakland. In Oakland, she became friends with Evelyn Brown whose mother was the president of the Occidental Board of Foreign Missions. It was due to Mrs. Brown's influence that Cameron entered work at the Mission Home.³⁵ Cameron was fascinated by Mrs. Brown's stories of Miss Culbertson who ran the Presbyterian Mission House; Cameron, "Found it incredible that children and young girls could be so brutally treated. She turned the conversation repeatedly to the plight of the Chinese girls in San Francisco." Cameron's first job at the Mission House was teaching the girls to sew and later joining the rescue parties. When she discovered that not all the girls wanted to be in the Mission House, Cameron was shocked and could not understand why they would reject help. Miss Culbertson explained by saying, "These are children of darkness" and they were afraid of their masters or "others who asked [for] sanctuary changed their minds when they discovered the Home's requirements."³⁶ The requirements of the Home meant living in simple cotton clothing, eating simple meals, doing chores, and going to lessons. The Mission House, after rescuing the girls, would educate them in western ways; Cameron couldn't understand why they would not wish to learn. Despite resistance from those who did not accept her help, Cameron is credited with saving at least 3,000 girls from "yellow slavery"³⁷ since she began her work in the Mission House in the spring of 1895.

Donaldina Cameron constantly referred to the girls she rescued as her "daughters". This term, while she intended it to be an endearment, was actually very patronizing. By only calling them that, and using it for all of them, the term shows that these females were seen as nothing

35. Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 34-35.

36. *Ibid.*, 44.

37. *Ibid.*, 23.

more than children who needed the constant guidance of a mother and the only fitting mother for them was a white woman. In fact, many of Cameron's "daughters" referred to her as "Lo Mo" which translates to mother. Cameron's care of these girls, like any good Christian woman, included teaching them about Christianity. In a statement recorded by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Cameron states that the females were taught Christianity, "but were not coerced."³⁸ It is not easy to imagine that she or the news reporter chose this phrasing as a direct stab towards those trying to reclaim the girl. However, the fact that all those who enter the house were taught Presbyterian Christianity does, in fact, point out that they were coerced. It also shows that white women working to help these women felt it necessary to convert them. In order to show off the good work that the Mission house was doing, Cameron would bring some of her "daughters" along with her, "How illuminating for people who knew Chinese only as laundrymen and cooks- or highbinders- to see her daughters in pink shams, hear them recite scriptures, and 'sing like little birds.'"³⁹ Presenting the girls this way proved that wider society could convert the Chinese to their ways.

Their form of charity and doing good could not happen without trying to convert them to their "white ways" and the best way to do so was through religion. Cameron also married many of these women off to Chinese men. This is another way to help these "heathens" and convert them to ways of white society. Since the Chinese wouldn't do it themselves, women like Cameron took it upon themselves to accomplish this. However, many of the women they married off had been prostitutes. Since these women were excused morally due to Chinese prostitution being known as "yellow slavery," it was acceptable for them to marry Chinese men. Had a white man married a former prostitute, society would have shunned both the white man and the white prostitute. Since these men and women were Chinese, white society held them to a lesser set of moral standards and therefore it was okay for them to marry former prostitutes. The double standards also set up for divisions between the different races in prostitution. This is a blatant form of the racist sentiments towards the Chinese. The fact

38. "Chinese Object to Christian Guardian: They Seek to Prevent Miss Cameron from Obtaining the Custody of a Slave Girl," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 30, 1901.

39. Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 60.

that they were all right with the Chinese marrying the type of woman that would not have been acceptable for a white man shows how they viewed the Chinese as lesser. These marriages also show how the whites still felt that the only way to better the Chinese was to make their society more like the white society but still kept separate from them. This also meant that they were still encouraging the law that dictated that the only Chinese women in California must be wives of the men already there.

Even though the majority of the Chinese prostitutes chose or were chosen by death as a way to leave the profession, many were able to leave through other means. Marriage was one of the most popular forms of escape. While whites did not see it acceptable for other whites to marry former prostitutes, Chinese society saw it as acceptable for a second wife to be a former prostitute since "prostitutes were seen as daughters who obeyed the wishes of the family."⁴⁰ This acceptance also helped Cameron and those like her, who once rescued the females, tried to marry them off. This conflicting view of former prostitutes showed another way in which the Chinese did not conform to white society, adding more fuel to racism and the ideology that they were immoral. Not only were they forcing these women into prostitution, they were also willing to marry them; something white society thought they were above. Marriages also brought on the extra challenge of pimps, owners, and Tongs coming after their "property." Fiancés would often try to buy their future wives from their masters, but they did not always succeed. Involving the courts did not always work in their favor either. Judges might unknowingly send the women back to their masters.⁴¹

Another way in which they left the trade was by escaping to humanitarian institutions. Such institutions included the Magdalen Asylum and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. While the latter focused on getting them out of prostitution, they did not do much after taking them out of the environment. They focused on miners, which excluded the majority of prostitutes.⁴² The Magdalen Asylum not only taught the former

40. Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 164.

41. *Ibid.*, 174.

42. *Ibid.*, 176.

prostitutes about religion, but also domestic skills. The majority of women in this institution stayed for only a little while before being deported back to China.⁴³ The placement of this institution in a white neighborhood allowed for many to be ignorant of its existence.⁴⁴ The placement of this institution in a white neighborhood also allowed for them to display the ideals that they encouraged. Teaching these women only religion and domestic work is a direct example of Victorian society that emphasized the woman's virtuous role in the home. Since these women apparently were lacking in those departments, white women had to take it upon themselves to correct this deficiency. The idea that these women were uneducated in domestic skills shows that white culture did not accept any of the skills taught to girls in China as acceptable. By believing that they must educate these women in what they considered basic skills shows that they were only concerned with reinforcing Victorian ideals on Chinese women.

Such missionary homes in Chinatown were more accessible to prostitutes who wished to escape. The ones that held the market on helping prostitutes were of Methodist and Presbyterian denominations.⁴⁵ These mission homes were as much for those they helped as they were for those who ran them. This catered to the belief that by helping the Chinese they were securing their place in salvation.⁴⁶ Many of these houses encouraged Chinese women to convert to Christianity and return to China to spread the word of God. This agenda accomplished two things: first, that they expanded the influence of white society; second, that they returned to China. While working under the guise of humanitarian and Christian values, these organizations encouraged the women to return to China. Returning to China might include the risk of being forced back into prostitution, but white society did not see that possibility, or if they did they chose not to speak of it. By encouraging the women to return, they also encourage the men to return. Since the law prohibited interracial marriages, the only way for a Chinese man to marry was to have a bride sent over or marry a former

43. Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 177.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, 178.

46. *Ibid.*, 180.

prostitute. Sending the reformed prostitutes back to China meant fewer females available in California for the Chinese men to marry. It was a subtle way of coercing the men to return to their homes and find a wife, while at the same time, making immigration into California much more difficult than before.

While Chinese prostitution was brutal and unpleasant, leaving it behind also meant entering a much more racist environment. The separation they experienced not only from their homes, but from their culture, and others in their profession who isolated them in a way that other races did not experience. In an attempt to be humanitarian, many of the organizations that helped these women escape also encouraged the spread of racism. Instead of focusing on what these women believed was the help they needed, the organizations often forced religious education and Victorian social ideals upon them. Marrying them to other Chinese men or sending them back to China usually followed this. Organizations like these were rare for other races to go to when they wished to leave prostitution behind. Starting over for non-Chinese prostitutes was difficult to do since they were not morally excused. This emphasized the idea that the Chinese women were no more than children who did not know any better. The news-papers usually spent very little time discussing the females that were rescued and focused instead on praising the white women who helped them. They showed that the focus was still on the whites and that very little care was felt towards these foreign women.

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