

# AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE COOLIE TRADE

by

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For more than a century, the term "coolie" has been used loosely in the United States to designate Chinese laborers. It has been popularly employed to describe some kind of contract laborer, but in most cases it has the connotations of "servitude, slavery or peonage." Yet the actuality and history of the term "coolie" give no sanction for such usage. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "coolie," or "cooly," derives from "koli or kulo, an aboriginal race of western India; or perhaps from Tamil kuli," which means hire or one who is hired.<sup>1</sup> The term "coolie," or koo-li 苦力 is used in China to refer to unskilled labor. "Koo" means bitterness or suffering. "Li" means strength or power. If these definitions were universally applied then most of the European immigrants working in America should also be called "coolies". Such was not the case. Sinophobes twisted the meaning of the term "coolie" and claimed that the Chinese laborers in the United States were not voluntary and free immigrants and that they were bond coolies of the despotic Chinese merchants. But U. S. Congressional documents reveal that the Chinese in the United States were in fact all perfectly free immigrants, at the very worst coming on money borrowed at a high

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Cambridge University Press, 1910), 11th edition, VII, p. 77.

rate of interest.<sup>2</sup>

The story of Chinese emigration to the West Indies and South America was, however, entirely different. Those who went to the United States were voluntary and free immigrants, as Dr. Peter Parker, United States Commissioner to China, called them, but those who went to the other America ports were bond-contract coolies.<sup>3</sup> Hosea Ballou Morse, a British old-China hand, had written that since 1847 emigration to the West Indies and to Central and South America assumed entirely the form of "contract labor," while that to California and Australia was uniformly and actually "free emigration." He asserted that "The United States wants no coolies, and the Chinese emigration to California is... wholly confined to independent emigrants who pay their own passage money, and are in a condition to look to their own arrangement."<sup>4</sup>

There was then a crucial difference between Chinese laborers brought to the United States and Chinese coolies brought to Latin America under the pressure of brut force or other coercion. This difference derived from the original condition of the coolies and was made possible by two laws enacted by the United States government on February 22, 1847, and March 3, 1849. The law of 1847 provided that "a master of a vessel taking on board any greater number of passengers than in the foregoing proportions, with intent to transport

<sup>2</sup> See the messages on the "coolie trade" that Presidents Pierce, Buchanan, Lincoln, and Grant and Secretaries of State Marcy, Cass, Seward and Fish presented to the Congress, such as *U. S. Senate Documents 99*, 34th Cong., 1st and 2nd Sess. (1852), Serial 824; *House Executive Documents 105*, 34th Cong., 1st Sess. (1856), Serial 859, and *House Reports 443*, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860), Serial 1069.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Parker to Daniel Webster, March 27, 1852, *U. S. Senate Documents 99*, Serial 824, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (3 vols., London, 1918) II, p. 166.

the same from the United States to any foreign port or place, or from any foreign port or place to the United States, is guilty of a misdemeanor." The supplementary act of 1849 provided that "all vessels bound from any port in the United States, to any port or place in the Pacific ocean of its tributaries, or from any such port or place to any port in the United States, on the Atlantic or its tributaries, shall be subject to the provisions of all the laws now in force relating to the carriage of passengers in merchant vessels."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the laws regulating the carriage of passengers in merchant vessels applied to all American vessels engaged in Chinese emigration to California but not to the carriage of passengers in American vessels from one foreign port to another foreign port. American shippers took advantage of the loopholes in the laws and entered the profitable coolie traffic. But because of American involvement in the coolie trade, a traffic between China and Latin America but not between China and the United States, the myth of Chinese coolies was established and has persisted ever since. Such a misunderstanding has a mischievous effect on future American generations who could not know the true history of "Chinese coolies." Not surprisingly, this false American legend has been repeatedly seen in American television and movies.

The origins of the coolie trade are to be found in British colonial policy and in the emancipation of the African slave in the mid-nineteenth century. The British Parliament abolished slavery in 1833, and Spain and Portugal prohibited the slave trade respectively in 1820 and 1825. The Spanish Republics enforced anti-slave-trade legislation with new stringency in the 1840's. Suddenly British and Spanish planters, especially those in the West Indies, were in great need of labor. Thus

<sup>5</sup> T. H. Hyatt to William L. Marcy, May 1, 1855, *House Executive Documents* 105, Serial 859, p. 67.

they looked to the cheap and hardworking Chinese to replace Negro slaves for the purpose of planting and harvesting sugar cane, cotton, and other products of the region. At this juncture the degradation of extraterritoriality was imposed upon China in the Treaty of Nanking (1842) by Great Britain, by the United States in the Treaty of Wanghsia (1844), and other treaties by different European powers. Extraterritoriality guaranteed that "merchant vessels of the treaty powers, lying in the waters of the five treaty ports of China open to foreign commerce, were under the jurisdiction of the officers of their own governments without control on the part of China."<sup>6</sup> This extraterritorial privilege not only facilitated Europeans and Americans to kidnap Chinese laborers and protected the Chinese crimps who helped the coolie dealers steal peasant boys, but also made it difficult for the Chinese government to stop such practices.

The first recorded shipment of coolies to the American continent was from Amoy (one of the five treaty ports) in 1847. About 8,000 coolies were carried to Cuba in this year.<sup>7</sup> In 1849 two Peruvian capitalists, Domingo Elias and Juan Rodriquez, brought seventy-five Chinese coolies to work in Peru's guano pits.<sup>8</sup> In 1850, an American businessman, Henry Chauncey, recruited several thousand Chinese coolies to build a railroad from Panama to Colon.<sup>9</sup> The story of the possibilities in the coolie traffic soon spread throughout the New World.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States* (Washington, D. C., 1931), IV, p. 567.

<sup>7</sup> Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, II, p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Kao Teh-kun, *Pi-lu hua-chiao shih-hua* (The Story of Overseas Chinese in Peru) (Taipei, 1956), pp. 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Tom-yin, *The Chinese in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1957), pp. 10-12.

<sup>10</sup> Ch'ing Ju-chi, *Mei-kuo chin-hua shih* (A History of American Aggression against China) (2 vols., Peking, 1952 & 1956), I, p. 97.

Almost immediately, shippers of different nationalities participated in the traffic. From 1847 to 1859 the number of Chinese coolies transported by American shippers to Cuba alone averaged over six thousand a year.<sup>11</sup>

The coolie dealers erected barracoons of Chu-tzai-kwan (which literally means "pig-pens" in Chinese) and made arrangements with pirates, Chinese brokers and others to secure coolies by false promises, kidnapping, deception, and violence. A great number of poor Chinese peasants were induced to leave their homes under false promises of living in the barracoons, and then they were detained. They were unable to communicate with their friends or the governmental authorities. Some of the coolies were seized while asleep in their junks by night, or quietly taken out of their fields or gardens with hands and feet tied. They were then hurried off to the barracoons where they were imprisoned until the ship was ready to sail. In addition to false promises and forcible kidnapping, there were two other means of securing coolies. The first was that persons were taken in clan fights and sold by their captors to coolie brokers upon the interior waters. The second source was that individuals were tempted by vicious agents to gamble, and on losing, surrendered their persons in payment according to the peculiar Chinese customs in gambling.<sup>12</sup> A proclamation issued by Amoy's gentry illustrated the tricks of these crimps.<sup>13</sup>

Their tricks were innumerable, and they would dexterously conceal their real designs. They would pretend to hire their victims for employment by which they might realize a livelihood, and then drive them into the pits prepared; or they would cheat them with promises of advantage, and thus get them within their power; or perhaps would invite them to

<sup>11</sup> "Coolie Trade," *House Reports* 443, Serial 1069, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Harley F. MacNair, *The Chinese Abroad* (Shanghai, 1924), p. 211.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Parker to C.D. Mugford Esq. (translation by M. C. Morrison) January 14, 1856. *House Executive Documents* 105, Serial 859, p. 77.

travel and divert themselves, and so urge men to destruction .... The men being inveigled to barbarian houses and ships, are publicly sold. When once amongst them they cannot understand their gibberish, and they are kept in close confinement. They may implore Heaven, and their tears may wet the earth, but their complaints are uttered in vain....

The treatment of the Chinese coolies on board ship was even more inhuman. The transport ships were usually badly equipped and overcrowded. Food was poor and sanitary facilities lacking. Brutal treatment of the coolies was often reported. The American ship "Waverly," bound from Swatow to Callao, Peru, with 450 coolies on board, was a good example. On October 27, 1855, while preparations were being made to bury the body of Mr. F. O. Wellman, the captain of the ship, at Carito, Philippines, the coolies believed that they had arrived at their destination. They wished to go on shore and attempted to take possession of the boats in order to do so. The new captain, to prevent this, fired into them. The crew, fearing a revolt, armed themselves. The Chinese were, after a short struggle, driven below and the hatches closed up, and "on opening them some twelve or fourteen hours afterwards it was found that nearly three hundred of the unfortunate beings had perished by suffocation."<sup>14</sup> Many coolies could not endure the treatment they received. Some of them committed suicide while the militant ones instigated mutinies. Many of the coolies stabbed themselves with pieces of wood, or hung themselves to the masts of guano ships, "while three hundred, in 1856, drowned themselves in the ocean during a single day off the Guano Islands near the coast of Peru."<sup>15</sup> Mutinies frequently erupted when the coolies discovered they had been tricked into contract bondage.

<sup>14</sup> H. N. Palmer to William L. Marcy, November 9, 1855, *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> Russel H. Conwell, *Why and How: Why the Chinese Emigrate, and the Means They Adopt for the Purpose of Reaching America* (Boston, 1871), p. 87.

Angry and desperate coolies butchered crew and officers, and often set fires aboard their ships in mid-passage. One case of mutiny that attracted the attention of the United States government occurred aboard the American ship "Robert Bowne," sailing from Amoy in 1852. "Four hundred Chinese emigrants had been enticed aboard the vessel normally bound for San Francisco. When they discovered they had been deceived and were being carried into contract service in another country, they mutinied and killed the officers."<sup>16</sup> Afterwards they testified in court that they had been promised four dollars a month in the United States as hired laborers and not as contract laborers.<sup>17</sup>

The treatment of the coolies after reaching their destination was especially brutal. On arrival in Cuba and Peru, the survivors were usually transferred to the colonization companies as agreed under a contract made between parties seeking to exploit their skill and labor for a consideration not known to them and not intended to benefit them. Sometimes the coolies were sold at auction in the open market to the highest bidder, who held them virtually as slaves for as long as seven years. A coolie broker could usually buy a Chinese coolie from his captor for a price of eight Mexican silver dollars and sell him in the New World at the price of more than one hundred dollars. In many cases, the coolies were sent to labor, contrary to their agreements, in the sugar plantations of Cuba or in the foul guano pits of the Chincha Islands and Guano Islands near the coast of Peru. "Their miseries were not ended even by death; their charred bones were ground to powder to whiten the sugar of Havana" as Ch'en Lan-pin, first Chinese

<sup>16</sup> Parker to Webster, May 21, 1852, *House Executive Documents* 105, Serial 859, pp. 94-96.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1947), pp. 71-76.

envoy to U. S., described their fates.<sup>18</sup> They were forced to toil in gangs, each under the charge of an overseer armed with a cowhide lash. "In 1860 it was calculated that of the four thousand coolies who had been fraudulently consigned to the guano pits of Peru not one had survived."<sup>19</sup> One writer estimates that before 1865, out of the one hundred and fifty thousand coolies taken to the Spanish and South American colonies, less than five hundred returned to China alive.<sup>20</sup>

As early as 1852, the coolie trade was brought to the attention of the United States government when the United States initiated her first major criminal suit against China. As stated earlier, 410 Chinese coolies mutinied and killed all officers and most sailors of the American ship "Robert Bowne," about March 1852, ten miles to the south of Taiwan. Two of the American survivors of the "Robert Bowne" were later picked up at sea by Captain Wilson of the British "Nymph." Twenty-three of the mutinous coolies were captured by the American ship "Susquehanna" and the British sloop "Lili".<sup>21</sup> They were finally brought to Hong Kong. The United States Commissioner to China, Peter Parker, decided to hand the criminals over to the Ch'ing government. Imperial Commissioner Hsu Kwang-chin and governor of Kwangtung province Po Kuei promptly agreed to investigate.

After several months' thorough inquiry, Hsu and Po decided that the "Robert Bowne" case should be treated as the "buying pigs" crimes instead of piracy as Parker originally proposed. In their correspondence with Parker,

<sup>18</sup> W. A. P. Martin, *A Cycle of Cathay with Personal Reminiscences* (New York, 1900), p. 383.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, VII, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> Conwell, *Why and How*, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> Parker to Commodore Aulick, May 17, 1852, *House Executive Documents* 105, Serial 859, pp. 105-106.



Hsu and Po rejected Parker's accusation of coolie piracy by utilizing the testimony of the two surviving sailors. The testimony showed that about two hundred Chinese coolies had their pig tails cut off on the ground that they contained insects and vermin. Hsu and Po argued that<sup>22</sup>

We have never seen a Chinese, who, on account of vermin, cut off his tail, moreover, by the established laws of China, to cut off his tail is the same as to cut off the head, and thus it is manifest the said captain was tyrannical beyond doubt; and we now enclose the testimony of each of the criminals for your perusal.... We accordingly endeavor to consider that these seventeen men are without any one in the slightest degree to confront them, and without the slightest evidence against them; and seeing they have been cruelly treated, and, still more, have been examined under torture, and being innocent, is it reasonable to force them to acknowledge they are guilty?

Accordingly, these accused coolies were acquitted. Later on, Parker requested that the case should be resumed at the imperial court in Peking but his request was rejected by Governor Po. Parker then wrote to Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, suggesting the expediency of a direct communication from the President of the United States to the Emperor of China.<sup>23</sup> There is no document, so far as we know, revealing whether Webster followed or ignored Parker's suggestion. But the United States officials had for the first time officially confronted Canton provincial authorities on the coolie problem.

Later, Mr. Humphrey Marshall, United States Commissioner to China from 1852 to 1853, reported to Secretary of State, Edward Everett that before March 1853, more than four thousand Chinese coolies had been shipped to Peru by both American and Peruvian ships.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Parker to Chinese Commissioners, July 9, *ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Marshall to Everett, March 8, 1853, *Senate Documents* 99, Serial 824, pp. 176-177.

In a report to Secretary of State, William L. Marcy, dated May 1, 1855, T. H. Hyatt, United States consul at Amoy, wrote:<sup>25</sup>

American vessels are frequently taking Chinese coolies from this or the adjacent Chinese ports within the jurisdiction of this consulate, to Cuba and ports in the South American or other foreign states... These vessels are often overloaded, greatly to the detriment of the lives and health of the passengers, being little better in their operation, it is feared, than the African slave trade.

In January, 1856, Commissioner Peter Parker notified the Department of State, "the history of the traffic in Chinese coolies, as carried on in vessels of the United States...during the past few years, is replete with illegalities, immoralities, and revolting and inhuman atrocities."<sup>26</sup> Minister William B. Reed, American negotiator of the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858, was also concerned about American participation in the abuse. In a dispatch dated January 13, 1858, Reed said, "Our ships carry coolies without a chance of return, on a voyage of five months, in every variety of climate, and have no restriction imposed on them as to number or discipline. A large clipper ship called the "Norway," belonging to a firm in the city of New York, collected two thousand Chinese coolies on board from Macao and Swatow."<sup>27</sup> Minister John E. Ward was troubled when American ships began collecting coolies at a new barracoon center near Whampoa. In a letter to Secretary of State Lewis Cass dated January 24, 1860, Ward wrote, "I have considered the conduct of Captain Manton, of the American ship "Messenger," and that of the captains of the "Kitty

<sup>25</sup> Hyatt to Marcy, May 1, 1855, *House Executive Documents 105*, Serial 859, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Parker to State Department, January 14, 1856, *Senate Documents 99*, Serial 824, p. 182.

<sup>27</sup> Reed to Cass, January 13, 1858, *Diplomatic Dispatches, China*, U. S. National Archives Microfilms, M 92, Roll 17.

Simpson," "Governor Morton," and "Pioneer," as connected with the coolie traffic, and thus seriously affecting our relations with China..."<sup>28</sup>

As stated earlier, a Chinese coolie could be purchased for eight Mexican silver dollars and sold for more than one hundred dollars. Ordinarily, however, the business did not operate on the profits from such sales. Most of the American shippers involved in the trade signed contracts with the South American planters, colonization companies or governments. They made money by charging high passenger rates for the coolies destined for these planters or colonization companies. In a letter to Daniel Webster, Dr. Parker stated, "The present rate of passage money for a Chinese is fifty dollars... A steamer might receive \$75 or \$100 in view of the more expeditious and safer passage; and admitting her capable of conveying 350 Chinese, this rate would give \$26,000."<sup>29</sup> William H. Robertson, United States acting consul at Havana, reported to Secretary William Marcy that the ship "Hound" of Stonington, Connecticut, under Captain Amos Peck, arrived in Havana on July 22, 1855, from Macao with a cargo of 230 Chinese coolies.<sup>30</sup> Those 230 Chinese laborers were consigned to the Colonization Company of Pereda, Machado & Co. Another American ship called the "Sky Lark," under Captain Stephen B. Dow of New Hampshire, arrived in Havana on July 24, 1855 from Swatow. 532 Chinese coolies on the "Sky Lark" were consigned to the same Company, the Colonization Company of Pereda, Machado & Co.<sup>31</sup> The following summary of a coolie contract between the Peruvian

<sup>28</sup> Ward to Cass, January 24, 1860, *U. S. Congressional Records Executive Documents* 88, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860), Serial 1057, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Parker to Webster, May 21, 1852, *House Executive Documents* 105, Serial 859, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> William H. Robertson to Marcy, July 27, 1855, *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

government and Messrs. Olyphants & Co. of the United States tells how the coolie consignment was operated.<sup>32</sup>

Article 3: This contract is valid for five years only. Within five years period more than 23 coolies shipments should be completed between China and Peru.

Article 6: The Peruvian government cannot make any coolie carriage contract with any other shipping company while the Olyphants & Co. should try its best to select the best coolies.

Article 11: The Peruvian government should pay the said company 16 million Peruvian dollars for this service.

Article 15: The number of the coolies in each shipment should not be less than 500 heads.

Some American merchants took part in the traffic under the impression that the Chinese were leaving voluntarily. Several merchants of unquestioned honor and of high integrity engaged without hesitation and without a thought of wrong-doing in the shipment of Chinese coolies to Peru, Cuba, Brazil and the West Indies. After they learned the truth of the coolie trade these decent American merchants abandoned the traffic. In a report to Peter Parker, C. D. Mugford revealed that near the end of the year 1855 some 2,000 Chinese were sent to Rio de Janeiro under a contract made with the minister of the Brazilian government. Some of these Chinese were embarked on board the ship "Sarah," owned by Messrs. Sampson & Tappan. Messrs. Sampson & Tappan, in good faith for the fulfillment of this engagement with the minister of Brazil, had sent ship and money to have the contract completed. "But there [was] a clause in this contract which made the proviso, that should the government of China or the United States look upon the traffic as illegal, then the contract [was] null."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Chu Shih-chia, *Mei-kuo p'o-hai hua-kung shih-liao* (Historical Materials Concerning America's Persecution of Chinese Laborers) (Peking, 1958), pp. 67-68.

<sup>33</sup> C. D. Mugford to Parker, January 7, 1856, *House Executive Documents 105*, Serial 859, p. 75.

As the United States Congressional documents (1855-1856 and 1859-1860) reveal, American officials tried to help Chinese authorities stop the traffic, and to make the coolies' journey to the New World more secure and healthy.<sup>34</sup> Yet they failed because of technical problems stemming from the fact that many American vessels left Hong Kong or Macao rather than Chinese ports, and the fact that they were sometimes chartered by non-American firms. Remoteness from the home government and lack of decisive instructions were other problems. More importantly, American consuls used self-defeating means in enforcing the anticoolie policies, differing sharply as to how best to distinguish the voluntary emigrants from the bond coolies. The official inspection of the American ship "Wandering Jew", which took place at Shanghai and Amoy in early 1858, illustrated these problems. Albert L. Freeman, United States acting consul at Shanghai, tried to put a stop to the activities of "Wandering Jew" in receiving coolies. However, her Captain Carlton told Freeman that his vessel was only to give the coolies transportation to Amoy. Unfortunately, Elihu Doty, United States consul at Amoy, was so impressed by Captain Carlton's personality that he described Carlton as a "gentlemanly person of correct feelings and bearing," and was unwilling to stop the "Wandering Jew" from proceeding to Havana.<sup>35</sup> Another reason why American officials could not effectively stop this abuse was that evidence which differentiated a coolie from a voluntary emigrant sometimes was unreliable and incomplete. This problem was usually the result

<sup>34</sup> These documents include Franklin Pierce's message to the House Representatives on May 19, 1856; James Buchanan's messages to the House on May 26, 1860; a report of Committee on Commerce of the House on April 16, 1860; and Ulysses Grant's first message to the House on December 6, 1869.

<sup>35</sup> Eldon Griffin, *Clippers and Consuls* (Ann Arbor, 1938), pp. 196-197.

of the captains' tricks, as Minister John E. Ward testified.<sup>86</sup>

When a Chinaman has been kidnapped or stolen, he is taken to the first vessel and asked if he wished to emigrate. Should he answer in the negative, the captain, with great apparent honesty, declares he cannot receive him. His captors then leave the ship with him and he is held in the water, or tied up by the thumbs, or cold water is trickled down his back, or some other torture inflicted, until he consents to go. When he is taken to the next ship, and the same question repeated, "Are you willing to emigrate?" If his reluctance to become an exile is still unsubdued, he is again returned to his captors, and this process repeated until a consent is wrung from him, when he is received as one of the willing emigrants.

But in one case Chinese and American officials cooperated in effectively repressing the coolie abuse. Late in 1859 Governorgeneral Lau Ch'ung-kwang of Canton received reports that there was an American vessel named "the Messenger" at Whampoa with several kidnapped men on board. No sooner had Lau got the news than he requested an interview with American minister John E. Ward. They discussed the affair of "the Messenger" and the activities of other American ships, whose captains had been charged by the Chinese officials with attempting to carry off Chinese natives by violence. Governor-general Lau said that if the Chinese natives were willing to go abroad according to their own will, he had no desire to detain them. But Lau showed his determination to do all he could to put a stop to their being kidnapped or beguiled as they had been, and forcibly carried away to other countries. Minister Ward agreed and "reiterated his [policy] to allow no American ship to leave Whampoa, or any other port in China, carrying natives abroad against their will." Four days after the interview, all the coolies on

<sup>86</sup> Ward to Cass, February 24, 1860, *Executive Documents* 88, Serial 1057, p. 29.

board "the Messenger," were brought back to Canton from Macao. Dr. S. Wells Williams, the secretary and interpreter of the American legation, and Consul Oliver H. Perry joined with the Pwanyu district magistrate in examining the coolies.<sup>37</sup>

It is impossible to secure accurate figures on the number of Chinese coolies who were carried to Latin America by United States shippers. First, there was no official census in either China or the United States. Neither are there any reliable and complete records in Cuba, Peru or the West Indies. Second, the mortality rate during the voyage was so high that nobody could really calculate what percentage of the Chinese died on the trip to the New World. Third, some American vessels were chartered by non-American firms or even sailed under foreign flags in order to escape the visit and inspection of the United States officials. But there are some sporadic statistics in the United States congressional records, which show the extent to which American shippers were involved in this traffic. The statistics of the coolie trade for 1855 at Swatow, for instance, are as follows:<sup>38</sup>

<u>Ships</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>Coolies</u>
American ..... 5	6,592	3,050
British ..... 3	3,821	1,938
Chilean ..... 1	500	250
Peruvian ..... 3	1,860	1,150
12	12,773	6,388

The figures show that the American ships were the most active in this traffic. As a matter of fact, from 1847 to 1862 the traffic between Macao and Havana was monopolized by American coolie dealers. From 1847 to

<sup>37</sup> Lau to Ward, January 8, 1860; January 30, 1860; & February 5, 1860, *ibid.*, pp. 20-36.

<sup>38</sup> Parker to Marcy, February 12, 1856, *House Executive Documents* 105, Serial 859, p. 73.

1859 the total number of Chinese coolies carried to Cuba by American shippers can be found in the following table.<sup>39</sup>

Year	No. of Vessels	Tonnage	Shipped	Landed	Died
1847.....	2	879	612	571	41
1853.....	15	8,349	5,150	4,307	843
1854.....	4	2,375	1,750	1,711	39
1855.....	6	6,544	3,130	2,985	145
1856.....	15	10,567	6,152	4,968	1,184
1857.....	28	18,310	10,116	8,547	1,509
1858.....	33	32,800	16,413	13,385	3,029
1859.....	13	10,283	6,799	6,027	772
	116	90,107	50,122 [sic]	42,591 [sic]	7,562 [sic]

The above table, representing the total number shipped, does not include a cargo of 757 landed in Cuba later, so that the total should be increased to 50,879; and 220 more should be added to the mortality. During the period 1847 to 1859, therefore, the total number of deaths was 7,782. This is really a fearful record!

Conscientious American officials, such as Peter Parker and John E. Ward, naturally deplored such tragic human exploitation. Ward, in a dispatch to Secretary Cass, dated February 24, 1860, stated, "Mr. Consul Perry has used every exertion to prevent the disgrace from resting upon our flags, and deserves much credit for his untiring labors, but with no law to sustain him, he has been able to do but little."<sup>40</sup> In the same dispatch to Cass, Ward made a positive suggestion:<sup>41</sup>

I shall do all in my power to have the coolies returned for examination; failing in this, I shall propose to [our consuls] to fine every American engaged in violating the laws of the port

<sup>39</sup> Attorney General Jeremiah S. Black to Cass, March 11, 1859, *House Reports* 443, Serial 1069, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Ward to Cass, February 24, 1860, *Executive Documents* 88, Serial 1057, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



and then allowing the ships to have their clearances... I sincerely hope that, the attention of Congress being called to this subject, some law will be passed regulating this trade and putting it more under the control of the American minister or chief diplomatic agent in China.

Ward's appeal was by no means in vain. On February 19, 1862, two years after Ward wrote this report, the United States Congress passed the so-called Prohibition of Coolie Trade Act, directed against American shippers engaging in any form of coolie trade, even to the West Indies and South America. The first article of the law stipulates that no citizen of the United States shall prepare any ship for the purpose of procuring "coolies" from China to be transported to any foreign country. If any ship shall be employed for the "coolie trade," she shall be forfeited to the United States, and shall be liable to be seized, prosecuted and condemned in any of the circuit courts or district courts of the United States. Articles two and three state that every person who shall engage in the coolie trade shall be severely liable to be indicted therefore, and on conviction thereof shall be liable to a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars, and be imprisoned not exceeding one year. Article four says that a permit or certificate shall be prepared and signed by the consul of the United States, proving that the Chinese subjects on the ship were free and voluntary emigrants, before a ship may take her departure from the port.<sup>42</sup>

The Tsungli Yamen by this time was already functioning as a fledgling Chinese foreign ministry and began to be concerned with the coolie abuse. On December 1, 1866, it drew up a set of twenty-two rules for the management of Chinese emigration in any port

<sup>42</sup> "An Act to Prohibit the Coolie Trade by American Citizen in American Vessels," *U. S. Statutes at Large*, 37 Cong., 2nd Sess. (1862), Vol. XII, pp. 340-341.

of the Chinese Empire. Emperor T'ung-chih (1862-1874) approved these rules and immediately ordered authorities in each province to enforce them.<sup>43</sup> However, sporadic coolie trade continued on the China coast, and in Macao, it remained notorious and unobstructed. The abuse did not completely come to a halt until the late 1870s when, under international pressure, the Portuguese government finally outlawed the coolie trade in 1875 and simultaneously China secured from Peru and Spain guarantees that the worst feature of the coolie emigration should be effectively stopped by Peruvian and Spanish laws.<sup>44</sup>

The coolie trade is another chapter of human tragedy and is a classical example of human exploitation. Of course, those shippers and crimps involved were responsible for the abuse. But the Ch'ing government should be blamed for its failure to arrest the abuse quickly and effectively. Ch'ing political corruption, traditional prohibitory migration laws, military weakness, diplomatic complexity and other factors contributed to the continuation of the coolie traffic on the China coast for as long as thirty years. Yet the tale of this human bondage also created the legend that the coolies are Chinese and the Chinese are coolies. In the 1870s and 1880s, when the Americans on the West coast launched anti-Chinese campaigns they argued that the Chinese bond coolies impeded and distorted the liberty of Americans. Actually the Chinese laborers did not distort the liberty of Americans; the American Sinophobes distorted the truth of the coolie.

<sup>43</sup> For the 22 rules in entirety, see "Office File Copies of Chinese Despatches Received and Sent [by U. S. Legation], 1846-1874," *Tsungli Yamen Archives*, Academia Sinica, Taipei, pp. 311-312.

<sup>44</sup> The first Sino-Peruvian treaty and Sino-Spanish treaty were ratified respectively in 1875 and 1877. For more details see Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru* (Durham, North Carolina, 1951), pp. 200-201; Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, II, pp. 179-181.