

Excerpts of “The American Coolie-Trade,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1860, sec. 4.

By a curious coincidence, which we trust may not be altogether unprofitable to the cause of humanity, the Legislatures of England and America have been almost simultaneously called upon to consider the abuses of the Coolie-trade in the East. The report of Mr. Eliot, of Massachusetts, upon this traffic, has just been laid before the House of Representatives, and though the press before the people of the US. In this report it was proved with terrible distinctness that in the absence of any regulations weighted with the national authority to restrain them from violating the instincts of humanity, American merchants and ship-masters have been gradually drawn into the most atrocious practices in connection with the Coolie-trade on the coasts of the Chinese Empire. The traditional horrors of the African middle-passage have been reenacted, are indeed continually reenacting, under the American flag in the Chinese ports and on the Indian seas. Men are kidnapped by the agents of American mercantile houses, huddled into the unventilated holds of American clipper-ships, restrained of their liberty by force of arms, transported thousands of miles to foreign lands, there disposed of under instruments which they cannot comprehend to masters whose language they do not speak, and condemned to labors which in nice cases out of ten can have no end but death, and to a life from which death is a welcome and desirable release... with Mr. Eliot’s report lying before Congress, we can have no excuse for delay in our action upon this matter. It is a question of national honor, as well as of common humanity.

Nor is this all. We are even now preparing to receive with unwonted pomp the first embassy which any great Power of Eastern Asia has even sent to a Christian State since the ten mighty empire of Siam dispatched its envoys to the Court of Louis XIV. The Japanese Ministers are to be welcomed as the forerunners of a wonderful expansion in the intercourse of maritime Asian with the US, and we are already confidently counting upon our growing influence with the Chinese and Japanese nations, to give us certain immense future advantages over our European rivals in the opulent commerce of the Orient. It should be clear to the meanest capacity, that if we suffer our flag to become identified in the Eastern seas with the excesses and outrages now perpetrated almost exclusively under its starry folds, we shall seriously compromise our position in that quarter of the world. All considerations of Christianity and civilization apart, it may perhaps be doubted whether the profits which half-a-dozen reckless ship owners may make for themselves by selling the bodies and souls of a few thousand Mongols, yearly, to the sugar-planters of Cuba and the guano-workers of Peru, can compensate us for this national risk.

The Coolie-trade, upon which we now desire to see the energetic action of Congress concentrated, needs, perhaps, a clearer definition than it has yet received, to the popular apprehension. It has no sort of connection either with the voluntary Chinese emigration which has filled the ranches and canons of California with the patient disciples of CONFUCIUS, or with the Hindoo Coolie-trade which has produced such marvelous results of prosperity in the English colonies... The Chinese emigrants to California and Australia, like the Irish and German emigrants to America, pay their own passage money, command their own labor, and are the architects of their own good or ill fortune...

The Chinese Coolie-trade, on the other hand, is prosecuted by entirely irresponsible persons, with no control from any Government, Asiatic or European, and is a creation of

European shipping-agents, acting in combination with Chinese contractors, no more decent or scrupulous than the emigrant-runners of New York. The Imperial Chinese Government in 1855 issued proclamations forbidding the trade to be carried on, under the severest penalties. But thanks to domestic rebellion and foreign intervention, the Chinese Government has been reduced to a state of practical paralysis, and its fulminations have been found powerless against the cruel greed of the Coolie dealers. In the same year, 1855, the British Government was appealed to on the subject, and Parliament passed an act confiscating all British vessels found engaged in this traffic within the British jurisdiction in the China seas. The only effects of this act have been to drive the traffic from the open ports of China into the smuggling port of Swatow, about two hundred miles above Hong Kong, and to transfer the burden of the business from British to American vessels. Our only present rivals of importance in the nefarious traffic are the Peruvians, Chileans and North Germans. Peru, in 1856, followed the example of China and England and made the trade illegal. But so long as the American flag covers this cruel and cowardly commerce, it must continue to be carried on with all its actual incidents of shame and sin. Immediate and vigorous action on the part of Congress must result in its almost instantaneous suppression; and that action should clothe our civil agents in China with authority to put the enormity down with the power of our naval forces in those seas. Circumstances having finally shifted the responsibility of this great wrong mainly upon our shoulders, it rests with ourselves to vindicate our national reputation, by acting at once in the premises as becomes our Christianity and our civilization.