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“Smelting-Pot of Races”:

Yellow Peril in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Wrecker*

Masao MORISHIGE

1. Introduction

“I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I build them very inexpensively”, said the U. S. President Donald Trump, who has been regarding immigrants as enemies with many insulting words.¹ His plan to build “a great wall” between the United States and Mexico was so sensational that he became the centre of public attention with the power of social media. In spite of his discriminatory election promises, he actually became the President. On the contrary, if it had not been for his drastic remarks, he would have failed in the election. Here is a demagogue’s strategy in the immigrant society under economic slowdown. In order to figure out the mechanism of such a shocking phenomenon, we can refer to a nineteenth-century novel titled *The Wrecker* (1892), written by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) and his step-son Lloyd Osbourne (1868-1947) because the text deals with immigration issues.

Unfortunately, *The Wrecker* has been underestimated in Stevenson’s criticism. Firstly, the work looks too autobiographic to be a literary masterpiece.² Certainly, Loudon Dodd, the main protagonist of the story, is similar to Stevenson to some degree in his character and the places he visits. Secondly, his co-writer Lloyd Osbourne’s reputation hinders the work from being evaluated in a right way, as Gordon Hirsch mentions that “although Stevenson was widely liked and admired, Osbourne was and remains decidedly less so” (162). Indeed, Osbourne was well-known for enjoying “his social status, membership in elite clubs, and driving fast motorcars” by virtue of his step-father’s name (Hirsch 163). Thirdly, Roderick

Watson traces its underestimation back to “lengthy picaresque progress” (115). The collaboration work seems much longer than any other Stevenson’s oeuvres, so some of the readers may feel it boring. Lastly, its form of a mystery genre has prevented many researchers from finding a critical value out of the work.

However, *The Wrecker* is worth reading from the academic point of view. In the Epilogue of the novel, Stevenson declares that “[t]he tone of the age, its movement, the mingling of the races and the classes in the dollar hunt, the fiery and not quite romantic struggle for existence with its changing trades and scenery . . .” (*Wrecker* 405). Whether Stevenson’s remark is trustworthy or not, we can definitely see the Zeitgeist of his age in the novel—American commercialism and immigration matters. While some recent critics such as Roslyn Jolly and Philip Steer have already focused on the Pacific Ocean in the novel because the Pacific Ocean and Pacific islands played a pivotal role in colonial and world trades,³ this paper gives much greater importance to another space, San Francisco in California, which most clearly represents “the mingling of the races and the classes in the dollar hunt”.

Stevenson describes various racial groups dwelling in the city. Loudon makes a habit of lingering on multinational wharves, where he observes “greasy Mexican hands pinned to the [gambling] table with a knife for cheating”, and hears “cold-minded Polacks debate upon the readiest method of burning San Francisco to the ground” (115). A small eating-shop named *Little Italy*, with a portrait of Giuseppe Garibaldi, is Loudon’s favorite places in slums to visit. The novel also refers to German immigrants establishing secret societies and Irish labourers enraged with manufactures. In this way, Loudon couches the city with his impressive phrase “the hugest smelting-pot of races and the precious metals” (117), which naturally reminds modern readers of a well-known metaphor of “melting pot” to symbolise racial and cultural heterogeneity of the United States.

Although Stevenson’s early use of the metaphor itself is notable, it is more remarkable that the text exposes the instability of the melting pot society to the readers just as it was. Indeed, Chinese immigrants were so influential in San Francisco among many immigrant groups that Chinese exclusion movements occurred several times there, but we need to consider who regarded them as the enemies and why they were so influential as to be excluded out of the society. In the present day, when the world is overwhelmed by immigration matters such as The Tramp phenomenon and Brexit, the *Wrecker* has become significant enough

to be reevaluated. Thus, this paper aims to interpret Stevenson's collaboration work in the context of Chinese exclusion movements in the late nineteenth century America and clarify that the mystery unveiled by Loudon figuratively implies the Chinese question.

2. America in "The Gilded Age": Muskegon

Muskegon, a city in Michigan State, represents a capitalistic and commercialistic value in the late nineteenth century America. Loudon, the narrator of the story, spends his college days in Muskegon Commercial Academy. He studies foreign languages such as German and French, book-keeping, and many useful matters in the morning; in most of the day, he practices economic theory by gambling with other pupils in the mock stock and commodity market as an educational curriculum. Business organs in the reading-room encourage the pupils to converse with their schoolmates about Wall Street, and "College Paper (like poker chips)" enables them to experience actual economic activities (17). While the capitalistic curriculum effectively contributes to fostering pupils' value, Loudon seems to distance himself from it: "I [Loudon] could turn my mind to landscape-painting and Balzac's novels, which were then my two preoccupations" (20). Indeed, the academy looks to him like an "absurd place of education" mainly because he has been packed off to it by his father soon after graduating from the high school (20). Loudon concedes, nevertheless, that the academy is "something exceptionally nineteenth century and civilised" of which the people in Muskegon are proud (16).

The slight description of Muskegon Commercial Academy gives a glimpse of the association between the development of information network systems and the economic growth of America. "Electric wires" on the building—they connect the academy with "the various world centres"—plays a vital role in promoting commercial enterprise in the mimic stock exchange (17). With telegraphs, Loudon's schoolmates can make contact with their family members outside the college and obtain newest information on stock rate more quickly than other rivals. Such a speedy information game stimulates competitive spirits. Ian Tyrrell underscores further economic significance of communication revolution: "[i]n the world of the gold standard, exchange rate stability depended on knowledge of the available gold ready for shipping to provide hard currency backing for trade movements. Cable facilitated

this process” (25).³ The modern information technology is essential to both domestic economy and international trades. Cable network links were established between the east and the west of the country (i.e. San Francisco and New York) by 1861, overcoming the distance in terms of communication. In *The Wrecker*, telegraph wires are depicted not only in the academy but also in the city of Muskegon and San Francisco. Besides, telephones are another modern device which indicates American technological advancement. Hundred-fold wires of telephones are “matting heaven” in Loudon’s hometown (85). According to David Trotter, telephones were invented in 1876, becoming “an instrument of business for some” or domestic indulgence for middle-class others by 1900 (3). Telephones were one of the modern inventions which brought about huge fortune by getting a patent. Telegraphs and telephones accelerate businesses on a global scale and incite people’s speculative spirits.

In addition to modern information network systems, we should confirm another historical background to comprehend why American pupils in the academy absorb themselves in speculation—“the Gilded Age”, Mark Twain (1835-1910) and Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900) coined. In “Author’s Preface to London Edition” in *The Gilded Age* (1873), Twain states people’s speculative spirit to be one of the major characteristics of “the Gilded Age” (*Letters* 643-44). After the Civil War, the prices of western lands climbed rapidly because of American expansion toward western frontiers and the construction of railways. Jay Gould (1836-1892), an American railway speculator, epitomises the Zeitgeist. He succeeded in the railway business in 1870s and 1880s in contrast to Loudon, who fails in the business: “I turned my attention timidly to railroads . . . I had no sooner made this venture, than some fools in New York began to bull the market; Pan-Handles rose like a balloon . . . I suppose I had come (a frail cockleshell) athwart the hawse of Jay Gould” (20-21).

Such a speculative fever in the society changes even an art into the target for speculation. Disgusted at the commercial education in his school, Loudon determines to go to Paris to study arts. He is, however, forced by his father to promise that he should curve a statue for the State capitol of Muskegon:

“Well, here it is,” said he [Loudon’s father]. “I took up the statuary contract on our new capitol; I took it up at first as a deal; and then it occurred to me it would be better to keep it in the family. It meets your idea; there’s considerable money in

the thing; and it's patriotic. So if you say the word, you shall go to Paris, and come back in three years to decorate the capitol of your native State. It's a big chance for you, Loudon (26)

Loudon's fleeing from the United States to Paris can never be read as fleeing from American commercialism; instead, it discloses art for money's sake. Hence, the plot alludes to a negative aspect of the age, which was caused by unstoppable speculative fever.

3. "Smelting-Pot of Races": San Francisco

As for "the Gilded Age", Twain explains that "all-pervading speculativeness . . . allows neither to stand still, but drives both [the individual and the nation] for ever on, toward some point or other which is a-head, not behind nor at one side" (*Letters* 643). Whether people's enterprises are "good" or "bad", they are unstoppable (643). The speculative fever is also found in California as well as Muskegon. Jim Pinkerton, Loudon's friend, embodies this spirit because he handles as many businesses as Loudon can "never fathom the full extent of" them in the state (93). In particular, Jim turns his expectation toward his brandy whose name is "*Thirteen Star Golden State Brandy*", obviously symbolising American bright future with fortune in California. Jim's optimistic hope for speculation is evident in his conversation with Loudon. When Loudon declares that he is going to improve his design of a statue with a word "better", Jim gets excited suddenly: "'Ah, that's the word!' cried Pinkerton. 'There's the word I love!' and he scribbled in his pad. 'What in creation ails you?' I [Loudon] inquired. 'It's the most commonplace expression in the English language.' 'Better and Better!' chuckled Pinkerton'" (45). The scene makes us realise that Jim is not satisfied with the "good" situation. His desire for being "better" than "good" represents wanton commercialism in the age.

However, San Francisco, where Loudon and Jim are involved in a mystery of shipwreck auction, shows some geographical characteristics different from Muskegon. Since the city is located on the West Coast of the United States and faces the Pacific Ocean, it is recognised as the farthest land of Western civilisation. Loudon emphasises the sharp contrast between San Francisco and the Pacific Ocean by comparing both the regions to an ancient

Roman soldier and the Picts:

I [Loudon] stood there in the extreme shore of the West and of to-day. Seventeen hundred years ago, and seven thousand miles to the east, a legionary stood, perhaps, upon the wall of Antonius, and looked northward towards the mountains of the Picts. For all the interval of time and space, I, when I looked from the cliff-house on the broad Pacific, was that man's heir and analogue: each of us standing on the verge of the Roman Empire (or, as we now call it, Western civilisation), each of us gazing onward into zones unromanised. (118)

The Roman legionary's gaze on the Picts reveals power relationship between the two, which exposes Loudon's "Orientalism" that he regards the non-Western place as backward.⁴ In other words, the Pacific Ocean seems to Loudon to set in a different temporality to the West. Actually, he is excited to narrate San Francisco as "the port of entry to another world and an earlier epoch in man's history" (*Wrecker* 117). His view on the uneven geographical development is clearly based on Social Darwinism in Stevenson's age.⁵ Thus, San Francisco, bordering on the Pacific Ocean, geographically demarcates the West from the East.

More crucial characteristic is that the city has thrived on trade owing to its suitable location for shipping. In the novel, Loudon observes "so many tall ships" from non-Western countries such as China, Sydney, and the Indies (117). Many critics tend to focus on the Pacific islands as nodes of trading network⁶; Lawrence Phillips dares to point out the "teeming hybridity" of San Francisco (112-13).⁷ Various commodities and races from the East gather in the city across the Ocean. Western people can experience different levels of eccentricities on a daily basis. Stevenson's description of the city resonates with Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone", the space in which the East and the West encounter (6).⁸ Considering San Francisco to be a "contact zone" makes complex the binary opposition between the East and the West. Although the city geographically belongs to an occidental territory, she lets Eastern immigrants reside within herself. In Stevenson's travel memoir, "San Francisco" (1883), the writer delightfully expresses his striking impression on Chinese quarter: "There on a half-holiday, three doors from home, he [a boy] may visit an actual foreign land, foreign people, language, things and customs" (*Amateur* 147). As the number of Chinese immigrants

in the city had increased since the mid-nineteenth century, a Chinatown was formed almost spontaneously. Westerners in San Francisco could enjoy themselves to take a travel in “an actual foreign land” without going beyond the border of their country. Furthermore, Stevenson’s reference to the “barber of the Arabian Nights” and “Aladdin playing on the streets” betrays his desire for the Orient. Stevenson declares that the Oriental part of the city is “the most romantic” of “all romantic places” (147). The city on the verge of the Occident includes Oriental Otherness inside her territory.

With regard to the eccentricity of the Chinese quarter, it is worth noting that creating eccentric atmosphere to Westerners supported Chinese immigrants to some extent. Ronald Takaki analyses that “[b]ehind the glitter of Chinatown’s exotic image was the tourist economy” (247). By reproducing their own culture in a diaspora space, immigrants could transform their quarter into a sort of tourist spot. Tourists are, for instance, encouraged to positively consume ethnic foods or exotic commodities. The capitalisation of cultural differences is considered to be an effective strategy for Chinese immigrants to financially survive in the United States. Along with a financial way, trying to keep themselves an Other for Westerners enables Chinese immigrants to merge into American society because Westerner citizens can recognise their exoticism as familiar in their daily life. In fact, Loudon becomes a Western tourist fascinated with the quasi-Oriental place: “Chinatown by a thousand eccentricities drew and held me; I could never have enough of its ambiguous, inter-racial atmosphere, as of a vitalised museum” (116). While wondering at “outlandish necromantic-looking vegetables” set in American shop-windows, Loudon never rejects them but rather accepts them as part of attractions in San Francisco (116).

Chinatown’s eccentricity in San Francisco, however, reveals that Chinese immigrants are not so much assimilated into Anglo-Saxon culture as maintain and even persist in their own culture. It is, here, necessary to confirm what melting pot idea was in the country. According to the *OED*, the expression of melting pot, meaning “[a] place where different peoples, styles, theories, etc., are mixed together”, was used for the first time in 1782. It was, nevertheless, not until *The Melting Pot* (1908), a drama written by Israel Zangwill, had been staged on Broadway in New York in 1909, that the metaphor permeated the concept into the whole American society and began to be used commonly for the United States. Zangwill created an idealistic vision of the nation as “a crucible that blended all nationalities and races

into a new American people”, which, in short, is assimilation to Anglo-Saxon culture (Herbert J. Gans 33).⁹ Considering the assimilating vision of the idea, Stevenson’s travel memoir informs his contemporary American readers of a startling fact:

The town [San Francisco] is essentially not Anglo-Saxon; still more essentially not American. The Yankee and the English men find themselves alike in a strange country. . . . Here, on the contrary, are airs of Marseilles and of Pekin. The shops along the streets are like the consulates of different nations. . . . For ever man, for every race and nation, that city is a foreign city; humming with a foreign tongues and customs; yet each and all have made themselves at home. (*Amateur* 146)

The Scottish writer saw many immigrants from different countries reproduce their own culture in the city, which he regards as “not American”. This, in other words, signifies that Anglo-Saxon towns are exactly American. Neither could all immigrant groups be Americanised nor melting pot vision be always realised. Therefore, Stevenson’s “smelting-pot of races” never mentions that the immigrants actually “melt” into one. Instead, it denotes their coexistence in a city while sometimes conflicting with other immigrant groups.¹⁰

In order to clarify Stevenson’s “smelting-pot of races”, it is, here, quite necessary to confirm what melting pot idea was in the country. According to *OED*, the expression of melting pot, meaning “[a] place where different peoples, styles, theories, etc., are mixed together”, was used for the first time in 1782. It was, nevertheless, not until *The Melting Pot* (1908), a drama written by Israel Zangwill, had been staged on Broadway in New York in 1909, that the metaphor permeated the concept into the whole American society and began to be used commonly for the United States. Zangwill created an idealistic vision of the nation as “a crucible that blended all nationalities and races into a new American people”, which, in short, is assimilation to Anglo-Saxon culture (Gans 33).

Burgeoning number of immigrant groups raised a serious question—who are Americans? Yoshiyuki Kido analyses that the abolition of slavery and the sudden increase of immigration in number were the two main reasons why the conceptual limit of “American citizens” became ambiguous after the American Civil War (11-12). The diversification of races and ethnicities in the country made the limit so fluid that the concept had to be

redefined. American governors were demanded to decide which minority groups they should permit citizenship. Not giving a racial or ethnic group citizenship cruelly meant their exclusion from the country.

Read from the perspective of national inclusion/exclusion, *The Wrecker* discloses white American protagonists' exclusive national image. Jim, who studies arts in Paris and then devotes himself to some business ventures in California, asks Loudon for solidarity, declaring that they should fulfill the "American Type" (42). In order to become the "American Type", people are, Jim believes, expected to "be pure-minded, to be patriotic, to get culture and money with both hands" (41). Taking into account that Jim has been born in Great Britain, he is clearly a typical character of an "old immigrant", from northwestern Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, so his idea of the "American Type" mirrors his desire for national assimilation to Anglo-Saxon culture. In contrast, "new immigrants" with Asian or southeastern nationalities, were not assimilated for the most part while pledging their loyalty to their mother country. Even if the latter is patriotic, their patriotism cannot be American, much less their culture.

In addition, Jim's rhetoric resonates with the national belief in "manifest destiny" in the mid-nineteenth century and the imperialistic ideology at the turn of the twentieth century. Jim cogently argues that becoming the "American Type" under bond is "the hope of the world" and, if American people fail to do it, there will be nothing left like "old feudal monarchies" (42). Here, remembering that Jim likes the word "better and better" helps readers to understand his progressivism and expansionism. As Phillips states, the acquisition of new territories such as the western frontiers, the Hawaii and Puerto Rico, was "as much economic as political, securing important points along key trading routes" (105). Unlike "old feudal monarchies", the United States, Jim expects, continues to progress economically by expanding their territories under Anglo-Saxon solidarity. Jim seems to justify expansionism as "the hope of the world".

This Anglo-Saxon expansionism is also true of Loudon. It is evidently uncovered by "[T]he Genius of Muskegon", a patriotic sculpture that Loudon carved out in Paris. The sculpture's seat is "a medley of sculptured fragments, Greek, Roman, and Gothic" to remind American people of the older worlds from which they trace their generation—authorisation of American history with help of Western civilisation (45). Moreover, the sculpture's gender

politics is made obvious in the point that it is a Native American mother young and almost naked. When “the Genius of Muskegon is placed in Loudon’s hometown, she will become an object gazed and desired by Anglo-Saxon male citizens; consequently, a hierarchy between White Americans and Native Americans is ideologically constructed. Indeed, the statue is to be set in the State capitol, where there are a large number of male politicians. By putting a baby with wings upon her knees, Loudon also tries to indicate American bright future. Hence, Loudon and Jim can be considered to be unconsciously tainted with Anglo-Saxonism.

4. Chinese Exclusion: Race, Class, and Whiteness

The Wrecker reflects social unrest and racial conflicts in contemporary San Francisco. Rather than depicting them in detail, Stevenson conveys frustration, violence, and discrimination occurring frequently in “smelting-pot of races”, to the readers in his age by referring to historical figures and places:

[Loudon heard] hot-headed working men and women bawl and swear in the tribute at the Sand Lot, and Kearney himself open his subscription for a gallows, name the manufacturers who were to grace it with their dangling bodies, and read aloud to the delighted multitude a telegraph of adhesion from a member of the State legislature: all which preparations of proletarian war were (in a moment) breathed upon abolished by the mere name and fame of Mr. Coleman. That lion of the Vigilantes had but to rouse himself and shake his ears, and the whole brawling mob was silenced. (116)

“Mr. Coleman”—William Tell Coleman (1824-1893)—was one of the influential figures in the state during the time, playing a pivotal part in maintaining the social order. He is well-known for Committees of Vigilance to suppress riots in violent ways. More remarkable here is, however, the name of “Kearney”—Denis Kearney (1847-1907), who was a drastic nativist and the leader of Workingmen’s Party of California. In July, 1877, Kearney collected White workers in a vacant area generally called “the Sand Lot”, next to San Francisco City

Hall, where he denounced manufactures and politicians in the state. He gained support from many unemployed and unskilled workers by attributing White workers' unemployment in the city to Chinese labourers and agitating the crowd with demagogic slogan "Chinese Must Go!". Certainly, Chinese labourers could be employed with lower wages than White; yet, as a matter of fact, his criticism on Chinese immigrants is just a method to unite White labourers together and attack capitalists and political elites, which shows a class conflict. His racist working campaigns, nevertheless, had great effects on the enactment of the Anti-Chinese Legislation in 1879 and the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.¹¹ These Anti-Chinese movements are understood as a sort of "Yellow Peril" in the United States.

The yellow peril in nineteenth-century California cannot only be reducible to an individual economic problem White workers suffered from, but instead, it is deeply involved in their collective identity in American society. In "Across the Plain", Stevenson betrays the reversal of the relationship between a persecutor and a victim, mimicking Kearney's way of speaking: "A while ago it was the Irish, now it is the Chinese that must go" (*Amateur* 117). Considering their historical background, while Irish-Americans are White, they tended to be relegated to the verge of the nation on account of their cultural and religious differences. They are also one of the major immigrant groups in the United States. Although they had experienced being oppressed and discriminated in the WASP society, they dramatically changed into a persecutor, who tried to expel the new immigrant group, in the late nineteenth century.

In order to comprehend their structure of feelings, we should focus on the ambiguous and fluid concept of "White". Basically, having white skin colour does not always guarantee being White. Ruth Frankenberg defines whiteness as nature and conditions, which make people "Whites", distinguishing it from being Caucasian. Additionally, she analyses the concept from three perspectives: "First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg 1). Irish immigrants, who were forced to leave their mother country due to some economic crises such as Potato Famine in 1840s, are typical "Poor White", so they do not belong to structural advantage and standpoint.¹² As they lose some of these conditions, they will deviate from the centre of White society. In short,

losing their job makes White workers' identity unstable. It is not coincident that Kearney himself was a poor Irish-immigrant. He created an enemy to protect their position. Stevenson quips on the "cheerful" Irishman (117), because he had an insight into the mechanism of the yellow peril, caused by Irish immigrants and poor White workers: "at that very hour the Sand-lot of San Francisco was crowded with the unemployed, and the echo from the other side of Market Street was repeating the rant of demagogues" (115). White workers, that is Irish immigrants, can be considered to be afraid of losing their whiteness and their enemy's acquisition of whiteness.

White workers' nativism is distinctly expressed in the latter half of the novel. A few years after Loudon visited San Francisco for the first time, he returns to the city to meet Jim again. Loudon enters a mean building whose front puts up a company name "The Franklin H. Dodge Steam Printing Company". It is notable that the words "White Labour Only" have been added so as to "suggest recent conversion" on the front (261). In the time when Loudon heard Kearney make a demagogic speech in the Sand Lot, he had not yet seen the words, so it corroborates that the racial antagonism between Whites and Yellows came to the surface as a ban on employing Chinese labourers due to Kearney's discriminatory efforts. Whether people could be employed or not depended on their "race" rather than their capability—the "race", here, was merely based on the colour of their skin.

In addition to Kearney's agitating activity, the novel illustrates the contemporary political reality. In the day when an election is just around the corner, Loudon chances to see a blind man, well dressed, enter a cheap saloon and sit on the counter:

I [Loudon] turned to my next neighbour with a question. He [a blind man] told me the blind man was a distinguished party boss, called by some the King of San Francisco, but perhaps better known by his picturesque Chinese nickname of the Blind White Devil. "The Lambs must be wanted pretty bad, I guess," my information added. I have here a sketch of the Blind White Devil leaning on the counter . . . (*Wrecker* 123)

Although the novel never clarifies who the blind man is, his nickname enables us to identify him as an actual historical politician—Christopher Augustine Buckley (1845-1922), an

Irish Democratic Party politician in San Francisco. As William A. Bullough points out, Stevenson's depiction of Buckley's nickname "the Blind White Devil" is erroneous because his Chinese nickname "Maang Pâak Kwái", to be precise, means "blind pale spirit" (Bullough 2). Nevertheless, it helps us to realise that the Chinese immigrants in the city were afraid of him and the Democrats, cooperative with Working Men's Party of California.¹³

The scene, where Loudon comes across "the Blind White Devil" in the saloon, tells us a structure of the Chinese exclusion in Stevenson's way. Tom, the coloured owner in the cheap saloon and the powerful leader of a brigade of "lambs", presents a contrast to "the Blind White Devil". Observing the contrast, Loudon actually feels the pair "ill-assorted" and guesses that the blind politician came to ask the "lambs" for support (122).¹⁴ It is true that many African-Americans in San Francisco remained adherents of the Republican Party; however, some of them agreed to exclude the Chinese immigrants and support the Democratic Party. Stevenson's description of the "ill-assorted" pair symbolises the complicity between the former victims of discrimination, that is to say, the Irish immigrants and the African-Americans. The novel underscores that both the two minority groups try to exclude from the city the new immigrant group gradually gaining power.

5. Carthew's Secret Past: The Gentleman Becoming A Labourer

In the latter part of the story, Loudon meets at last Norris Carthew, who is a rival in the auction for the wrecked ship *Flying Scud*. Norris, an Englishman from a noble family, tells Loudon his secret past, which discloses why he desperately tried to make a successful bid for the ship. Clearly, the novel's Chinese box structure literally has something to do with a Chinese exclusion matter. In spite of his noble birth, Norris comes to know the value of manual labour. Norris used to be, what is called, a profligate son in English upper-class family. Since Norris devoted his younger days to gambling, his father forced him to leave England for Australia, where he spends with "the companion of perhaps the lowest class on earth, the Larrikins of Sydney" (322). Norris enjoys his vagabond life without care while making friends with anybody in the land; yet, he becomes so impoverished that he determines to join a railway construction. The toil under heavy rain wears him out to be sure, but he never complained of the physical labour. On the contrary, Norris delighted himself in

the unusual experience: “he enjoyed a peace of mind and health and body hitherto unknown. Plenty of open air, plenty of physical exertion, a continual instance of toil, here was what had been hitherto lacking in that misdirected life, and the true cure of vital skepticism” (326). He is also proud of “plebian tasks” when the leader of the project admires him as a good example (326).

While Norris finds out labour’s worth, he observes a cruel racism in labours. After his railway navy life, he partakes in shipping in the *Currency Lass* for trade. When, unfortunately, the ship is wrecked amid the Pacific Ocean, the *Currency Lass* runs across another ship from England, named the *Flying Scud*. Before the homicide occurs among the crews of both ships, they eat together, which reveals a clear hierarchy on the ship. Although almost all the crews including Norris enjoy themselves at the table, only a Chinese named Ah Wing is engaged in his task with harsh command from Jacob Trent, the White captain of the *Flying Scud*: “Presently he [Trent] addressed the Chinaman. ‘Clear out!’ said he, and watched him till he had disappeared in the stair” (371). Indeed, Ah Wing is a cook on the ship; it is, nevertheless, evident that the Chinese is treated as racial Other by other White crews.

The racial Other image of the Chinese cook is reinforced in the scene, where Norris and other survivors attempt to hide the homicide evidence. Notwithstanding that Ah Wing is still alive, they mercilessly kill him: “The Chinaman was their [Carthew and the other crews] last task; he seemed to be light-headed, talked aloud in his unknown language as they brought him up, and it was only with the splash of his sinking body that the gibberish ceased” (377-78). At his last moment, the Chinese cook desperately asks for help in his own language, which sounds like “gibberish” to other crews. Norris, feeling guilty for his murder, can never forget “the face of the babbling Chinaman as they cast him over” (380).

It should be emphasised that the very man who triggered the homicidal accident is an Irish sailor called Mac. Owing to his emotional tendency, Mac had already had a possibility of making trouble in the *Currency Lass* before realising it in the another ship: “‘I told ye [captain Wicks] I was a violent man,’ said Mac, with a movement of deprecation very surprising in one of his character” (359). The crews’ fear proves right in the *Flying Scud*: “The Irishman’s hand rose suddenly from below the table, an open clasp-knife balanced on the palm . . . The missile struck him [captain Trent] in the jugular; he fell forward, and his blood flowed among the dishes on the cloth (373-74)”. As a result, the innocent Chinese

labourer is thrown away into the sea.

Regarding the ship as a metaphor for a nation, we can easily notice that the plot indicates the Chinese question in the nineteenth-century United States. Norris and other White crews can survive on the ship by excluding a Chinese, who has fulfilled his duty, out of the ship. It represents the shocking reality that Chinese immigrants—they have contributed to the nation through physical labours such as railway constructions—was about to be excluded as an Other out of the nation while White Americans maintained their power. It supports this interpretation that Irish Mac causes the tragedy. It is ironic that Norris, who has lost gentleman identity and had experienced a physical labour, killed the Chinese labourer to survive.

6. “Kites of Oriental Fashion”

From the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century, the U. S. economy developed significantly thanks to the expansion of national markets, technological innovation, and active pursuit of capital. Meanwhile, the labour shortage in constructing infrastructure affected by abolition of slavery, Gold Rush, and long economic slowdown allowed the unprecedentedly large number of Asian immigrants to enter the nation. In consequence, the nation faced a serious problem—who are Americans?—especially in San Francisco, in which the number of non-Western immigrants was greater than that in other regions. Although “Naturalization Act of 1790” stated the condition of American citizens to be “being a free white person”, the definition of a “white” was so ambiguous that poor Irish immigrants attacked the Chinese immigrants to prove their whiteness and protect their social position.

These historical backgrounds behind *The Wrecker* enable us to notice a thought-provoking symbol in a slight description of Chinatown scenery. As we have already confirmed, Loudon is unconsciously tainted with Anglo-Saxon centred value because he has been trained to become an investor in Muskegon Commercial Academy, whose “Electric wires” —they connect the academy with “the various world centres”—play a vital role in promoting commercial enterprise in the mimic stock exchange (17) It is natural that such a man should be startled at the sight of “kites of Oriental fashion hanging fouled in Western telegraph-wires”, when he walks around the outlandish town (117). Clearly, the scenery of

the kites hanging fouled in wires symbolises the contemporary situation where the intruders from a pre-modern society threaten a seemingly dignified civilisation and cause a social trouble, just as the Oriental toys disturb Western telegraph-wires, which allow for information exchange and maintain Western economy. Moreover, considering the wires as a symbol of capitalistic world, we can easily find it to indicate the complicity between capitalists and Chinese labourers.

In addition to these interpretations in different levels—civilisations and classes, reading the text from the perspective of a nation clarifies what it tried to say to the contemporary readers in Western countries. As Lisa Lowe points out, Chinese immigrants played significant roles in supplementing, replacing and obscuring “the labour previously performed by slaves” in the United States, where there was serious labour shortage as a result of the abolition of slavery (27). Chinese immigrants were such a major labour force for infrastructure constructions that there is no doubt that they contributed to American progress. Therefore, they should be inseparable with the national history just like “kites” and “wires” but, ironically, Chinese immigrants were “separated” from the nation due to a series of Chinese exclusion movements in the late nineteenth century. *The Wrecker* depicts that a white gentleman, Norris, who has experienced almost the same job as the immigrants did, excludes a Chinese out of a ship. It is, however, very important that Stevenson makes Loudon a parallel figure to Norris:

above all, the sense of our immitigable isolation from the world and from the current epoch;—keeping another time, some eras old; the new day heralded by no daily paper, only by the rising sun. . . . Such were the conditions of my [Loudon] new experience in life, of which (if I had been able) I would have had all my confrères and contemporaries to partake: forgetting, for that while, the orthodoxies of the moment, and devoted to a single and material purpose under the eye of heaven. (221)

As with Norris’s case, Loudon comes to know the value of physical labour outside while losing his gentleman identity with pleasure. After sailing in the Pacific Ocean, Loudon begins to seek for Norris to discover his secret. By Loudon’s detecting Norris’ disgraceful past,

therefore, Stevenson presents to his readers the cruel fact that the Chinese immigrants were being violently separated from the nation in spite of their contribution to its development.

Just as Kearney became the leader of WPC by appealing to anxiety of poor Whites in the nineteenth century while attributing their unemployment to Chinese labourers, Trump, who has been insisting that many social problems are caused by immigrants to the nation since the election campaign, became the president of the United States by gaining many supports from poor Whites in the twenty-first century. Quite a few Trump's supporters seem to be so paranoid as to believe whatever he says. Here is a national ambivalence toward immigrants. On the one side, the nation has been developed by them and, on the other, it has been discriminating them. History repeated, is repeating, and will repeat itself. Although this paper does not insist that Stevenson foretold such a present situation, it is noteworthy that he had described the vulnerability and the risks of the melting pot society before the idea became familiar throughout the country.

Notes

1. As for Donald Trump's remark, see an article on BBC. com. Web. 6 February 2017.
2. For the bad reputation of the novel, Gordon Hirsch and Roderick Watson analyse in their essay, referring to several factors. See Hirsch 162-63 and Watson 114-15.
3. Tyrrell's word "cable" may be confusing because this essay is discussing the topic of "wire". Basically, cables consist of complex sets of wires, but the boundary between them is very ambiguous. In fact, Tyrrell is referring to "The Atlantic Telegraph" in this context (25). Alan Trachtenberg, who writes about "the Gilded Age", also uses "wire cables" in his book (41). In short, the two words are often interchangeable.
4. The term and the concept "Orientalism" are coined by Edward W. Said, who points out that Western people have constructed "the Orient" with their knowledge and discourse on the East. See his masterpiece *Orientalism* (1978).
5. Stevenson was enthusiastic on reading both Charles Darwin's and Herbert Spenser's works.
6. With regard to nodes of trading network, see Philip Steer (351) and Roslyn Jolly (129-30).
7. Although Phillips uses the word "teeming hybridity" in his work, he does not consider whether different cultures are really and literally mixed.
8. Mary Louise Pratt defines the term "contact zone" as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with

each other and established ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality, and intractable conflict” (6).

9. As Gans analyses, “melting pot” idea was some Americans’ optimistic view on their nation (36). Naturally, not every immigrants assimilate to Anglo-Saxon culture.
10. Such a society, in other words, can be called as “Salada Bowl”, where different nationalities and ethnicities live together without cultural assimilation. That is a cultural pluralism.
11. The Anti-Chinese Legislation in 1879 prohibited corporations in California from employing Chinese labourers. Chinese Exclusion Act was a U.S. federal law which was signed by Chester A. Arthur, the U. S. President in 1882. As a result, the immigration of Chinese labourers was prohibited. The law was abolished in 1943.
12. For how the Irish immigrants in the U. S. became white in the mid-nineteenth century, David Roediger explains in his work. See *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991).
13. Some of the Democrats joined WPC because they sympathised Kearney’s racial policy. However, as WPC lost their supporters in 1880s, the former Democrats returned to their original party.
14. According to Bullough, blind Buckley employed his bodyguard before the day of election. The “lambs” can be considered an amateur bodyguard group, but there is no evidence that bodyguard groups in nineteenth century San Francisco were African-Americans. See Bullough 2.

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