The United States as a Site for Baohuanghui Activism

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The United States was the unofficial “offshore” headquarters of the Baohuanghui by the time President and founder Kang Youwei arrived for the first time in February 1905 and was more central to the organization than the official headquarters in Hong Kong and Macao. The organization had more chapters in United States mainland than in any other country or region, at least 62 and as many as 79 or more\(^1\), ranging from small mining towns like Marysville, Montana to New York City.

Along with Canada, the U.S. was the only Baohuanghui host country with a network of approximately 20 Baohuanghui military schools and nine women’s auxiliaries, supplemented by at least six elementary-level schools which incorporated not only Chinese language, ethics and history studies but innovations such as graduated learning and physical education.\(^2\) The Baohuanghui also supported the education of students abroad, and most came to the U.S. for their studies\(^3\) Apart from newspapers in San Francisco,\(^4\) New York City and Los Angeles, the

\(^1\)The higher number is based on Liang Qichao’s 1903 figures from his journal, Xin Dalu, plus chapters known to have been founded later, and the lower figure includes only currently identified chapters as of August 17, 2012. For example, Liang wrote there were 26 chapters in the Northwest, but only eleven have been verified. The above figures do not include Hawaii, which had 8 chapters in 1903 according to Liang. See Mapping the Baohuanghui at https://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AS7Ajg4xYgVqZGY1c3h3azVfMTBIymNqaz3d3aA6pi=1 for the current tabulation of chapters, schools, newspapers and other businesses run in each city throughout the world. Even before Liang’s trip to the U.S., Kang Youwei claimed that there were already 100 chapters in “all of America” (quanmei), probably referring to U.S. and Canada. Letter from Kang Youwei to Ye En, Xu Weijing and others, 26 February 1903, #563, in Fang Zhiqin and Cai Huiyao, eds., Kang Liang yu Baohuanghui—Tan Liang zai Meiguo suocang ziliao huibian [Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and the Baohuanghui: a compilation of materials collected by Tom Leung in the U.S.A.], (Hong Kong: Xianggang Yinhe Chubanshe, 2008), p. 49.


\(^4\)San Francisco hosted a continuous series of Baohuanghui-funded newspapers from 1899 to 1969, except for the year after the 1906 earthquake: Datong Ribao [China Free Press] [1900-1901]; Wenxing Bao [1899,
Baohuanghui operated two other businesses in the U.S., the King Joy Lo restaurant in Chicago, whose profits helped fund students abroad, and the Huayi Bank in New York, which became an important financial conduit for North American Baohuanghui activities.

In 1905 and 1907, Kang Youwei chaired two international Association congresses in New York, each producing an elaborate charter for the central organization and its chapters, with the 1907 congress announcing the organizational name change from Baohuanghui (Protect the Emperor Society) to Diguo Xianzhenghui (Imperial Constitutional Association), in response to Qing constitutional preparation initiatives.

American exclusion policy was an issue of great interest to Kang, prompting him to push his followers to undertake direct action against it, as exemplified by the Baohuanghui’s role in the 1905 Anti-American boycott. The boycott is widely recognized as the first instance of Chinese mass protest and aroused Chinese nationalism among a broad public.5

This paper is a preliminary study of why the United States became the effective center of Baohuanghui activism. Opposition to the Chinese Exclusion policy, in particular, provided the organization with a long-term issue of great importance to Chinese in the U.S. and a nationalistic focus for its larger, transnational mission of promoting political participation and constitutional reform. Gao Weinong in his book about the Baohuanghui in the United States makes a strong argument for U.S. centrality, which I attempt to expand and deepen.6 I close with a brief exploration of the wealth of resources newly available for researchers of the Baohuanghui in the United States.

Kang’s personal focus on the United States; the relative sympathy to the reform cause of Qing officials stationed there; the size, diversity, and financial resources of the Chinese population in the U.S.; the geographical and transportation advantages of the U.S.; the politicization of Chinese in the U.S. as a result of Exclusion policies; and the reformers’ attraction to American ideals were among the reasons that the Baohuanghui center of gravity turned to the U.S.

Asia would seem the natural region for the Baohuanghui headquarters, with Vice President Liang Qichao settled in Yokohama, Japan since September 1898, and British Hong Kong and Portuguese Macao in close but politically safe proximity to China. And, indeed, Hong Kong was the financial headquarters of the Baohuanghui, with a large portion of members’ dues sent back to support it (and Kang’s activities). At various times, the official headquarters was in Macao, Yokohama, and Hong Kong, but ultimate responsibility lay with Kang, who kept on the move and lacked full trust in his subordinates. The first headquarters was probably shared a daily by 1901,-moved to Los Angeles 1906 and became Xianzheng Bao; Guohun Bao [The New Era] [1907-1910]; Shijie Ribao [Chinese World] [1908, lasted until 1969]; Jingang Ribao [dates not known].

between Yokohama, where Liang and the famous newspaper, Qingyibao, were located, and Macao, with its pioneer Baohuanghui newspaper, Zhixinbao. But Macao became too dangerous after the failed 1900 Baohuanghui Qin Wang uprising in China, and Zhixinbao was closed under Qing government pressure in early 1901. Hong Kong took over as financial and business headquarters, but never had the political power of Macao. After the Huayi Bank was set up in New York, it began to share fiscal responsibility with Hong Kong for dispersing funds to various Baohuanghui projects.\(^7\)

Before Kang was able to visit the U.S. in 1905, Canada, especially British Columbia, was a prime organizational hub. Letters from Kang or Liang to be transmitted to others often went through Canadian Baohuanghui leaders like Li Fuji, Dong Qiantai or Ye En, copied by hand, duplicated by some form of mimeography and stamped with a seal that said “The Society to Protect the Great Qing Emperor” [Bao Daqing Huangdi Hui].\(^8\) As we have learned from Zhongping Chen’s research, at Kang’s instigation and during his absence from Canada in spring 1899, these Canadian business leaders began organizing the multinational conglomerate that ultimately became the Commercial Corporation. When the conglomerate formally came into being a few years later, Kang called upon these same leaders to help draft the founding papers and to head the corporation in Hong Kong.\(^9\) From Canada, these leaders also transmitted such official documents as the draft charter for the Commercial Corporation to other chapters.\(^10\)

After Kang entered the U.S., the center of gravity of the organization shifted south. San Francisco had already become the U.S. (and North American) headquarters of the organization, and it had a role collecting contributions for Baohuanghui projects from chapters on the American continent as well as occasionally transmitting group letters from leaders such as Liang Qichao. But, although Liang and other Baohuanghui leaders spent considerable time in San Francisco, Kang never went there. Instead, he selected New York City for the two international congresses he chaired in 1905 and 1907. Kang personally spent more time in New York than in other American cities, most likely because his daughter Tongbi was studying in the city or in nearby Hartford. Before the two New York plenary meetings, the few international meetings to be convened (mostly to do with the Commercial Corporation) were in Hong Kong or Macao.

Him Mark Lai in his foreword to Gao’s book explains that the increasing discrimination felt by Chinese in the U.S. intensified their alienation in their host country and solidified their identity as Chinese. “Thus, many supported moves for changes in China that would enable her to become a wealthy and strong nation respected by the international community, and, in turn,


\(^8\) See, for example, the seal on the letter from Kang to Li Fuji dated October 20, 1902 [#548], Tom Leung collection in UCLA’s Digital Collections at the link, [http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz00253b8g](http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz00253b8g)


\(^10\) Letter from 24 people in Vancouver and Victoria, December 1902-January 1903 [#554], Tom Leung collection in UCLA’s Digital Collections at the link, [http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz00253s98](http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz00253s98)
believed that this would be reflected in improvements in their status abroad." The Baohuanghui’s moderate political goals and its organized activities to carry out these goals were attractive to the Chinese in the U.S., especially when those activities were attuned to community needs, be it education, the chance to buy shares in a “patriotic” Commercial Corporation business, or donate to the anti-American boycott. It is notable that the revolutionaries took little interest in the Exclusion policy, whereas the reformers made it the centerpiece of a long, transnational campaign, which was directed as much to ameliorating the treatment of Chinese in the U.S. as to using the issue to mobilize Chinese nationalism and stress the need for reform.

As Robert Worden notes, “the largest concentrations of Chinese population [in North America] were strangely enough in the United States which had stiff exclusion laws to bar entry to all but the ‘exempt’ (i.e., non-immigrant) classes of Chinese, and which denied citizenship to those who did manage to come there legally.” This large Chinese population of approximately 100,000 and the comparative ease of travel within the U.S. were attractive to the Baohuanghui organizers, who also saw the Chinese in America as a potentially lucrative source of funds for Baohuanghui projects and businesses. America’s geographical location between Canada and Mexico made travel among the countries relatively easy, except for Exclusion restrictions, as Kang found on his return to the U.S. from Mexico in 1906. Unlike Sun, who had little success in leaving behind a lasting organization until much later, Baohuanghui organizers began in 1899 to work through mainstream Chinese community leaders to establish chapters, newspapers, women’s associations and schools. The strength of the American network of the Association was apparent in the spread of its chapters to all parts of the U.S. (including the Midwest and South).

Probably more than any other factor, Kang’s personal and political interests determined the place of the United States in the Baohuanghui worldwide organization. Although in many ways the organization was highly decentralized, with chapters and local leaders taking on activities without any guidance from Kang or his main disciples, it was Kang who made most of the decisions on where to allocate organizational resources.

Early in his exile, Kang saw the United States as one of a few countries (along with Japan and England) that might be willing and able to take military measures to restore the Emperor to his throne. He intended to visit the U.S. in 1899, almost immediately after his arrival in Victoria, British Columbia on April 7, hoping to travel through the U.S. before sailing to England. But, Kang’s first and subsequent attempts over the next five years to visit the U.S. were stymied by the complex requirements of the U.S. Chinese exclusion policy, as well as by the diplomatic pressure of the Qing government, which may only have reinforced his desire to visit the U.S. Kang’s inability to enter the U.S. did not stop him from sending his favorite daughter, Kang

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13 The railroad network in 1900 was more extensive than it is today. [http://www.american-rails.com/railroad-history.html](http://www.american-rails.com/railroad-history.html)
14 Worden, “Chinese Reformer in Exile,” chapters two and three.
Tongbi, to study in the U.S. from 1903 to 1909, first in Hartford, Connecticut, where she attended high school, and then in New York City, where she was the first Asian student at Barnard College. Hartford was presumably chosen as her first destination so that Tongbi could be under the care of another important reformer and friend of Kang’s, Yung Wing, who had been the first Chinese to graduate from an American college (Yale 1854) and was well-integrated in American society.

While Kang Tongbi reputedly once received an assassination threat from the Chinese government, her father was wanted for treachery by the Qing and under penalty of death by slicing should he return to China. Kang was a veteran of several close assassination attempts and even in Canada often had a police escort. But by 1905, the Qing was introducing policies that in many ways emulated Kang’s Hundred Days reforms, and the Chinese minister in the U.S., Liang Cheng, had been a student in Yung Wing’s Chinese Educational Mission and like many Qing officials was quietly sympathetic to the reformers.

However, from Canada, Kang wrote his former student Tom Leung, who had moved to Los Angeles in 1899 and founded a Baohuanghui chapter, noting that “in the U.S. there is the opposition party [fanduidang]. We can take President McKinley as an example [assassinated at a public meeting in 1901]. Many of our comrades are worried.” It is obvious that Kang felt he had less to fear from the Qing than from Chinese revolutionaries, who were gaining fervent adherents in the U.S., Sun Yat-sen’s latest American tour just ending when Kang wrote this letter: “I heard that in San Francisco there are catapults or slingshots [dangong] bronze armor [tongjia], as well as other protective wear made of hair [fajiaban] and paper [zhijia]. Please purchase them on my behalf. Be sure to try them out with a gun before you buy. Keep them at your place and keep this a secret. Wait until I notify you that I’ve arrived in America, and then mail them to me.” Lightweight paper and hair armor was used in ancient China, so Kang must be suggesting Tom visit San Francisco’s well-supplied Chinatown to buy these. Perhaps because he feared revolutionaries, Kang never went to San Francisco, which was one of Sun’s strongholds. In fact, if claims made long after the fact can be believed, in 1905 Sun had indeed asked Triad [Zhigongtang] leader Huang Sande to have Kang assassinated, but Huang refused to do so, according to his account.

As early as 1898, Kang’s admiration of the United States was clear, as stated in his Seventh Memorial to the Emperor: “Of all the countries on earth, none is as prosperous and contented as the United States of America,” although he did not see its republican system as suitable for China. The rapid growth of the U.S. and its national strength could not fail to impress Kang. During Kang’s two-month rest in Los Angeles before resuming his travels in the

16 Letter from Kang Youwei to Tan Zhangxiao, 6 December 1904, #131, in Fang, Kang Liang yu Baohuanghui, p.54.
U.S., he wrote the important “Essay on National Salvation through Material Upbuilding,” which put mastery of science and technology before the study of politics, law, and “empty theories.” From Los Angeles he wrote an old friend in Western Europe describing these ideas: “I entered America via Canada after touring eleven countries in Europe. The more I observed, the more I found China is deficient. That which is most wanted is none other than technological knowledge [wuzhi zhi xue—translated by Kung-chuan Hsiao as “material upbuilding”]. Other countries become strong only because they have automobiles, streetcars, technology, warships, guns and cannons, not because of freedom, constitutions, and other empty words. . . . Hard-working for 40 years, the United States has become the richest country in the world. This proves that technological knowledge is the most important. A country’s survival depends on it.”

As Hsiao points out, Kang had ulterior motives in championing technology over politics at this time and hoped his essay would divert “attention to what he believed to be a more constructive and less hazardous approach to the problem of China’s modernization,” namely reform over revolution. This was a time when the distinction between these two paths had sharpened, and, with the founding of the Revolutionary Alliance that summer, the Baohuanghui’s predominance in overseas Chinese communities was receiving its first serious organizational challenge. However, throughout his American journeys, caught in the contradictions of his own polemics, Kang continued to promote constitutionalism and political reform in China with both Chinese and American audiences.

Kang endorsed one form of American government for immediate adoption in China—“self-government”—by which he referred to local governments elected by their constituents and in charge of their own affairs. In a 1908 essay, “On Self-Government,” Kang wrote, “As I traveled through more than fifty cities and towns in the United States . . . I observed that these cities and towns are all based on self-government. These local governments are administered by the state government. The county magistrate is elected by the citizens. It is easy to rule under self-government.” Kang’s letter from Los Angeles in 1905 completed the thought: “China should have an assembly [yiyuan] at the village, county, prefecture and provincial levels and carry out local self-government, so that each Chinese citizen can exert himself and a foundation will be built in management and finance.”

Before departing for the U.S., Kang asked Tom Leung to escort him on visits to “factories, government agencies, and schools.” This intense traveling pattern, in aid of discovering “the foundations of Western strength,” in Worden’s words, included establishing relationships with such remarkable Americans as President Theodore Roosevelt (whom he met

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19 Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World*, chapter 11.
21 Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World*, p. 516.
twice and sent seven long letters); the “Father of the Trusts” Charles Flint (who may have persuaded Kang to pursue investments in Mexico and became Kang Tongbi’s guardian when she was at Barnard); and Homer Lea, a military schemer and author, whom Kang appointed “General” of the Baohuanghui Western Military Academy to train Chinese cadets in North America for what Lea hoped would be an eventual stealth return to China to overthrow the Empress Dowager and restore the Emperor.

On his nearly year-long trip in the United States in 1905, Kang was invariably treated as a dignitary, not only meeting mayors and governors as a matter of course, but receiving breathless coverage in the American press. For example, when he was in New York, the Los Angeles Herald published a full-page, illustrated article in its Sunday Magazine headlined “Man of the Week: Prince Kang Yu Wei,” which further exaggerated Kang’s power by calling him “this leader of half a million Chinamen,” and described his tour as “a triumphal progress, for the arousing of the national spirit in China . . . In every large city branches of the Chinese Empire Reform Association, of which he is the founder and the head, have hailed him as the leader of the hope of Cathay.” Even in cities where Kang never set foot and where the Baohuanghui was not present to our knowledge, local newspapers such as the Albuquerque Evening Citizen also published articles about Kang and his organization. The Citizen’s July 12 article, “Fortune for His Head Without the Body,” is datelined New York, and shows Kang’s success in publicizing the Baohuanghui as an organization of progressive Chinese, quoting him through his interpreter saying, “We look on America as our best friend—except for the exclusion act. We want our sons to be educated here. Our daughters, too, my daughter is now a student at Barnard. We would learn military tactics from your soldiers.”

It was the enthusiastic response he received in Chinese communities, both large and small, that most animated Kang. Liang Qichao, Xu Qin, Liang Qitian, Kang Tongbi, Ye En, as well as local Chinese, had already developed a network of Baohuanghui chapters in the U.S., so Kang’s was not an organizational tour but a propagandistic one, devoted to exhorting Chinese in America to dedicate themselves to the reform cause, and, he hoped, to buy shares in the Commercial Corporation. In a sense, his 1905 American tour was a kind of victory lap in which Kang by his very presence embodied the highest personification of reform for the organization’s members, who in the U.S. certainly numbered in the tens of thousands. Apart from the pomp of marching Western Military Academy cadets who greeted Kang upon his arrival in many cities, or the impressive Association meeting halls where he delivered some of his speeches, Kang’s reception in the U.S. benefited from an already strong organizational identity and social network that tied together the chapters and reinforced shared ideals by making them tangible.

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29 “Fortune for His Head without the Body,” Albuquerque Evening Citizen, 12 July 1905, p. 2.
30 Ma, Revolutionaries, Monarchists, and Chinatowns, p. 51, estimates that in summer 1900 about 1/8 of the Chinese in the mainland U.S. were Baohuanghui members.
By this time, there existed a Baohuanghui flag, membership badges, posters with photographs of each chapter’s leading members, and morale-lifting circular letters sent by chapters on the occasion of the Emperor’s birthday or the lunar New Year. Kang had a role in creating these organizational tools, some of which were given prominence in the 1905 and 1907 organizational charters he wrote and presented at the New York plenary meetings. For example, in the 1905 charter, Kang mandates a standard system of communication among chapters and with the headquarters, including the exchange of group photos and correspondence. The purpose, he explains, is to build connections among people in different cities and introduce “their city’s agriculture, industries, commerce, culture and political situation, so that the knowledge of all members will be increased.”

Members were to be identified by individual huipiao, or membership contribution certificates, and huipai, or generic badges that could be worn. Samples of the certificates and badges as well as circular letters and photo posters for local chapters and Ladies Empire Reform Association chapters still exist. For example, in 1902, the Philadelphia chapter wrote their “Righteous Brothers”:

> We should communicate with each other and take advantage of [what we learn] about governmental systems. . . . When I see Independence Hall, I'm moved and want to move it to our imperial capital. When I hear the Liberty Bell, I'm touched and want to ring the bell to wake our spirits. The sound of cannons shakes my soul, and the sound of the bell shakes my spirit. For a long while, I've worried day and night and didn't know what to do. Now that I've heard the news of the righteous association, my soul and spirit have begun to rest.

The Baohuanghui flag evokes the American flag with its three stars and two stripes (and occasional red, white and blue colors, although more often red and white) and can be seen on the parapet of Victoria’s first Baohuanghui building, letterhead of the Chinese Empire Reform Association “for the use of the President of the Headquarters only,” and on Baohuanghui badges, crossed with the Qing dragon flag above a portrait of the Guangxu Emperor. Liang Qichao and Kang Tongbi both arrived in the U.S. in 1903 and spoke to their Chinese audiences.

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34 British Columbia Archives, photo B-06854.
36 Gao Weinong, *Ershi Shijichu Kang Youwei yu Baohuanghui zai Meiguo Huaqiao Shehui zhong de Huodong*, p. 90 describes this badge and speculates that it might be the “huipai” that all members were to have as proof of membership; p. 95 says that these were issued by the “general headquarters” for 1 yuan, no matter where the member was located.
about the flag’s symbolism, which was duly reported in the American press: the three stars stood for education [sometimes translated as self-edification], unity and equality, and the stripes for independence [duli] and “gathering in groups” [hequ n] or association.  

These outward symbols of a nationalistic, if not national, Chinese group identity apart from the Qing must have created some consternation on the part of Qing officials in the U.S. But, perhaps because Qing vehemence toward the exiled reformers had softened after the Empress Dowager began to initiate the New Policies in 1901, a program clearly modeled on the 1898 reforms, Chinese diplomats and Manchu nobles visiting in the U.S. after 1902 either disregarded the activities of the Baohuanghui or, in a few cases, had direct contacts with the organization.

Two examples will suffice. In 1904, when young Prince Pulun visited the U.S. to represent the Qing court at the St. Louis World’s Fair, he showed himself to be reform-minded in contacts with the American press, vowing, for example, to recommend universal education for men and women, according to the New York Times. Even more surprising, the Times also reported that a Baohuanghui delegation met the Prince at his hotel in New York City, and the San Francisco Chronicle wrote that he “inspected the Chinese company, which is being drilled in infantryman tactics,” a sure reference to the Baohuanghui’s Western Military Academy cadets. A year later during the 1905 boycott when the Baohuanghui was reaching out to sympathetic Qing officials, Kang recommended that Prince Pulun be one of those targeted for support of the boycott.

There is certainly no evidence that such leaders as Kang or Liang met with the top Qing envoys in the U.S., but we do know that Kang became acquainted with the Qing commissioner who had represented Guangdong and Guangxi provinces at the 1904 World’s Fair. Commissioner Wong Yap (also known as Wong Tui That) was staying at the home of his relative Tom Leung during the time Kang was in Los Angeles. Wong saw Kang on several occasions, most notably when Wong spoke at the welcome banquet for Kang, and according to the Los Angeles Examiner, “voiced in sturdy terms the devotion of the Chinese people to the Emperor and to His Excellency Kang Yu Wei, whom he hoped soon to see again in power with the Emperor restored to his prerogatives.” The newspaper noted the surprising contradiction of an “agent of the Empress” greeting “Prime Minister” Kang “on whose head the Dowager has set a great sum.”

It was opposition to the Chinese Exclusion policy that brought Qing officials in the U.S. into common cause with Kang and his reform organization. The Qing government was certainly

40 “Prince is Astonished at American Sights,” San Francisco Chronicle, 19 April 1904, p. 16.
aware that the Baohuanghui had the most active transnational role in mobilizing the 1905 boycott, and Kang and Liang Qichao, among others, frequently addressed the Exclusion policy in their meetings with American officials, speeches to such sympathetic audiences as the American Baptist Missionary Union, and interviews with the press. Kang and others were shaken to read a public notice posted in American Chinatowns from Chinese Minister Liang Cheng after negotiations broke down in Washington over the renewal of the Gresham-Yang immigration treaty: “As your Minister, I can no longer bear to see our people unjustly suffering [the] inequities and indignities visited continually upon them, as people who cry but cry in vain.” Shortly thereafter, Kang sent a telegram to Liang Qichao and others in Asia, reading in part:

The U.S. has extended the Exclusion Treaty but Minister Liang [Cheng] refused to sign it. Now the U.S. government has sent an envoy to Beijing to ask the foreign ministry to sign the agreement. . . . But, the foreign ministry is cowardly, and, if frightened by the American envoy, will sign it. This is a matter of life or death. I hope you can organize a rally and urge everyone to send telegrams to our government and to provincial governors, appealing for help. At the same time, we should use newspapers to arouse popular sentiment. We may succeed in remedying this situation. . . . The Chinese in America will continue to give financial support.

During the boycott, the U.S. government pressured the Qing government not only to sign the Exclusion treaty but to end the boycott movement. Kang wrote an article in The World’s Work magazine on “The Hostility of China,” asserting that “the government of China is not to blame for the existing boycott of American goods in China, and is not even connected with it. I believe I may be recognized as a Chinese who certainly could not be accused of representing pro-government or official views when I say this. The boycott is a popular movement.” Qing officials, including Prince Qing who headed China’s foreign ministry, of course agreed. The Prince in a letter to U.S. Minister in China W.W. Rockhill, July 1, 1905, wrote:

Your Excellency says this agitation is based on absolutely groundless reports of extraordinarily harsh terms now being enforced on Chinese in the United States, and you request that steps be taken immediately to arrest this movement.

My board finds upon investigation that this movement has not been inaugurated without some reason, for the restrictions against Chinese entering America are too strong and American exclusion laws are extremely inconvenient to the Chinese.

Ultimately the 1905 boycott with its nationalistic critique of the Qing failure to counteract the Chinese Exclusion policy would dampen Chinese citizens’ confidence in their

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government. But, the truce between the Qing officials in the U.S. and the reformers allowed the Baohuanghui to expand freely. It is notable that even the controversial Western Military Academy with its several thousand Chinese cadets being trained all over the U.S. by retired American military men and much-publicized rumors that the Academy was in fact an Imperial Reform Army preparing to return to China to restore the Emperor to his throne apparently didn’t disturb Chinese Minister Liang Cheng as much as it did the federal and various state governments that were investigating the Academy on a number of serious charges. When Liang Cheng was asked about reports that a Chinese army was forming in the U.S. to overthrow the current Chinese government, he said, “The idea that an army for a hostile movement against China could be recruited in a friendly nation like the United States is absurd.”

Minister Liang Cheng was something of a hero to overseas Chinese for speaking forcefully in his discussions with the U.S. government on renewal of the Gresham-Yang treaty. In fact, the U.S. finally ceased trying to negotiate with Liang and sent William Rockhill, the new American Minister to China, to negotiate directly with the Chinese Foreign Ministry. It was fear that the Foreign Ministry would back down that precipitated Kang to send his telegram calling for rallies and pressure on Qing officials to Baohuanghui leaders in Asia. Hong Kong members responded with this suggestion: “Minister Liang worked hard for our fellow countrymen. He did not fail in achieving his mission. His loyalty to the public and love for his country excels that of all other diplomatic envoys we have seen. All Chinese in the U.S. should write him a thank you letter and ask him to further fight against the treaty within the foreign ministry.”

The Chinese population in the U.S. was falling as a result of the Exclusion policies. Chinese in America felt endangered, and in 1905 Kang Youwei warned, “Chinese people's lives are impoverished. If the laborers are completely cut off from working in the United States, then the situation inside China will certainly turn into great disorder.” The reformers’ success in organizing chapters in the United States was due in part to their ability to give an eloquent voice to the plight of Chinese immigrants and to making their struggles part of a nationalistic narrative for China. The Hong Kong letter above was published in a printed Baohuanghui circular sent from the chapter in Rangoon, Burma to other chapters, and also included letters from Kang and chapters in Yokohama and Shanghai, as well as this extraordinary song, which is excerpted below:

Vast is the Pacific Ocean  
Prosperous is America  
Turn the ship sideways  
Waves running high  
Look back at the motherland  
It's now far, far away.

48 “Ju Jinyue chuandan—lü Mei Huaren lai gao (Leaflet opposing the Exclusion Treaty—manuscript from Chinese living in America),” printed document, June 1905, in Kang Liang yu Baohuanghui, 381-2 (#577)
49 “Ju Jinyue chuandan,” 381.
Being barred from entering [the US]
We are very grieved.

See Europeans disembark,
Husband's hand on the shoulder of his wife.
See Japanese disembark
Beaming with pride.
Alas, innocent are we Chinese,
Not allowed to return to the boat,
Imprisoned, but why?
Tears shed into the Pacific Ocean.

See Koreans and Siamese whose countries
used to be China's vassal states.
See Indians whose country is ruled by the British.
See Jews who do not even have a country.
They all pass easily and quickly
Carrying their baggage, they walk with ease.
Oh, our large country, as vast as 10,000 miles,
unable to measure up to them, why?
We stare at the tall buildings in San Francisco, in despair.

Even one as honorable as a royal prince was hit by a flying stone;
And a minister can be demanded to show his passport.
See the embassy guard trampled to death,
How much more do we workers and merchants [suffer]?
Alas, we have no country and can only blame our empress dowager for her lack of virtue.

We vow to resist the great oppression.
We vow to work together and cooperate with one another.
We vow to wipe out our shame and disgrace.
We would risk our lives to fight against Exclusion and to accomplish our goal.
My fellow 100,000 compatriots, do you hear me?50

These potent images of American discrimination against Chinese and the final, rousing
call to unified action capture why the boycott “expanded into a formative movement of
nationalist mobilization” in the words of immigration historian Adam McKeown.51 In his
inimitable style, Liang Qichao, writing to Baohuanghui followers in June 1905, described the
startling effect of “boycott nationalism”:

50 “Ju Jinyue chuandan,”382-3.
51 Adam McKeown, Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders, New York:
In the last month, everyone in Shanghai has been thinking about and talking about the Exclusion Treaty. From millionaires to poor workers, millions of people are of one mind, and we must not stop until we win back our rights. Oh! We [disciples of Kang Youwei] have been working on these matters for many years, but have never seen more success than this time. . . .

Consequently, all the foreigners in Shanghai have become worried, saying that China, the sleeping lion, has awakened. Since the treaty ports were established, there has never been any activity like this. It shows that we Chinese are not easily bullied.  

Liang himself had helped educate the Chinese people about the history and graphic details of the Exclusion policy after his seven-month journey to the United States in 1903. *Huagong jinyue ji* (Notes on the exclusion of Chinese laborers) was published in Liang’s newspaper, *Xinmin Congbao*, in 1904 and widely read. It included a previously published blueprint for an anti-American boycott by a Honolulu Baohuanghui editor who suggested this strategy as the best way to protest Exclusion. Liang’s “Notes” were read aloud at boycott meetings and distributed as a pamphlet throughout China in 1905.  

In 1904, Liang had been sent on a secret trip to Shanghai by Kang to launch a newspaper, *The Eastern Times* [*Shibao*], which was run by two of Kang’s followers, Di Chuqing and Luo Xiaogao, who like Liang had been exiled in Japan. It was Shibao staff (probably Di and Luo) who met with directors of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce after receiving Kang’s telegram. Shortly afterwards, on May 10, the Shanghai Chamber announced a nationwide boycott against American goods. *Shibao* later was widely described as the boycott’s “mouthpiece,” with daily editorials, articles and announcements of rallies to keep its readers informed of boycott news flowing in from around the world.  

The threat of a boycott (scheduled to begin in July) was enough to bring the Exclusion policy to the urgent attention of President Theodore Roosevelt. Such groups as the American Asiatic Association, whose prestigious members were American businessmen with interests in China and a desire to see a more lenient Exclusion policy, had already met with the President. As a result, Roosevelt had begun to order his immigration officials to treat Chinese immigrants with greater discretion and fairness.  

Roosevelt and others in the U.S. government, including the Chinese inspector in San Francisco who kept a close eye on internal politics in the Chinese community, saw the Chinese Empire Reform Association and Kang as key to influencing the actions of boycott leaders in China. It was thought Baohuanghui leaders might have the influence to call off the boycott if Kang Youwei could be convinced that the U.S. was in fact making significant changes to ameliorate the situation. Thus, in June 1905, Roosevelt met twice with Kang and promised him “to see that less harshness was displayed in the treatment of  

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52 “Liang Qichao zhi gebuliewei tongzhi yixiong shu (Liang Qichao to all comrades and righteous brothers in all cities),” printed letter, 7 June 1905, #578, in Fang and Cai, *Kang Liang yu Baohuanghui*, p. 115.
54 Larson, “Articulating China’s First Mass Movement,” pp.9-10, 16.
incoming Chinese.” Following Kang’s second meeting with the President, Roosevelt issued a “sweeping order” instructing American consular officials in China to issue certificates to Chinese of the “exempt classes” (such as students and merchants), which would be considered valid unless proven fraudulent by local immigration officials rather than treating all Chinese visitors as suspect. Although this executive order has been called “a turning point in exclusion administration” by McKeown, Kang continued to criticize Exclusion, and the boycott went ahead as scheduled on July 20.

After leaving Washington, Kang told the Hartford Courant, “We look on America as the greatest country in the world, and, but for the exclusion act, our best friends. Is it any wonder that we will use all the means in our power to gain admittance? The boycott on American goods will last while the exclusion act is in force.” Soon after Kang arrived in Mexico, the next stop in his North American tour, he wrote President Roosevelt a 26-page letter that began by thanking the President for his “signal act of clemency” but decrying the fact that “since remedial legislation has not been enacted by the Congress, the uneasiness and dread of our people continue to grow.” The letter was entirely devoted to describing why “the whole Chinese population whether of high or low degree, whether educated or ignorant, is disaffected towards Americans,” a disaffection “now manifested in the boycott,” even detailing the horrors of the Rock Springs massacre and other anti-Chinese violence. He also projects far into the future: “When the sentiment of nationality shall have attained full development, a united Chinese nation will seek to assert its rights and avenge its wrongs. Its anger will be vented in ways that I dread to think of, but which I foresee [sic] and deplore in advance.”

In his letter, Kang frequently brought up the lack of equity in the treatment of Chinese under Exclusion laws in “enlightened” America. “The future historian will marvel why enlightened Americans, who permit the free dumping of the riff-raff and the off-scouring of Europe, who welcome the assisted emigration of European paupers and criminals—should single out the Chinese for exclusion. . . . Americans who visit China, or reside therein, are not required to register. Our people treat them as guests and citizens of the most favored nation. Chinese residents of America, even after registration, have often been cast in prison. Courtesy and kindness should be reciprocal . . . As an enlightened nation Americans lay great stress on the rights of people to life, liberty and property. Is it then just, according to American law and equity, that these Chinese who have been proved innocent of the crime of illegal residence in American territory should be deprived of the right to bring suit for damages against Chinese inspectors for false arrest and imprisonment?”

59 “Kang Yu Wei Here for a Week,” Hartford Courant, 17 July 1905, p. 11.
When talking to the American press, Kang remarked upon Exclusion’s stark violation of American values to make his case. He told the *St. Louis Republic* in May 1905: “America stands for fair play, and the Chinese, as almost all people of the world, have looked to the Stars and Stripes as the emblem of honesty and democracy. Chinese do not regard it as fair play to be excluded from a country which discriminates between social and commercial equality.” Kang suggests that precisely because the U.S. represents “freedom and democracy,” Chinese feel the “direct insult” of exclusion even more strongly.\(^\text{63}\)

Of course, it was not lost on Kang or his compatriots that American-style democracy and the power of public opinion had led to the Exclusion acts, influenced in particular by the views of American workers in the Western states. Kang noted in his 1906 letter that Congress was then in session and “fearing lest the Congress may not have presented to it all the facts bearing on the question at issue,” he would present “the Chinese side of the question.”\(^\text{64}\) He acknowledged that although President Roosevelt “even promised to do [his] utmost to bring about a change in the interest of justice and fair dealing,” the President did not have the power to overrule Exclusion unilaterally, and, “since the labor unions are making such a determined opposition, it is inconceivable that the Congress could be prevailed upon to adopt the far-sighted policy of an open door for Chinese immigration.” Yet, Kang closes his letter with a nod to the possibility that the American democratic process might yet work in favor of greater equity for Chinese immigrants by way of the Presidential bully pulpit: “I humbly hope that my suggestions will be honored by your careful consideration; and, if they be found compatible with the highest interests of the American public, that you will recommend their adoption—thus giving another illustration of your far-sighted and enlightened statesmanship.”\(^\text{65}\) Kang’s letter was quoted in the House of Representatives during its 1906 hearings on exclusion.\(^\text{66}\)

Two other letters written by Kang to President Roosevelt illustrate his continuing attempts to pull the United States into direct defense of the reform movement. After meeting with Roosevelt in June 1905, Kang sent him a memorandum in September detailing “reasons why the Dowager Empress of China should be requested to abdicate” and argued:

The President of the United States no doubt deserved universal praise for his great philanthropic work in bringing about peace between Russia and Japan [in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War], but there is a work of far greater importance which must not remain neglected. It is the restoration of the Emperor. The President should leave no stone unturned and should make every possible effort to carry out such important work, which cannot but meet with success, and for which the teeming population of that ancient Empire will feel ever grateful.\(^\text{67}\)

\(^{63}\) “Strong Feelings Against Exclusion,” *St. Louis Republic*, 20 May 1905, p. 2.

\(^{64}\) Worden, “Chinese Reformer in Exile,” p. 295.


Kang even suggested a channel the President could use to persuade the Empress Dowager to retire—the wife of the American Ambassador Edwin Conger, who was well-received in the court. Needless to say, the United States government took no action to restore the Emperor.

When the Empress Dowager and Emperor died within one day of each other in November 1908, Kang once again called on the United States to intervene in Chinese politics. As soon as Kang heard from his informants in Beijing that the Emperor’s life was threatened, Kang was convinced that Yuan Shikai, whom he considered the foremost traitor to the 1898 reforms, was responsible. On November 15, Kang sent the first of a series of telegrams and later a long letter to President Roosevelt urging him to take action to save the Emperor’s life, and when his death was confirmed, to stop Yuan from taking power. The U.S. State Department thought Kang’s worries credible at first and had Minister Rockhill follow up, but among those whom Rockhill consulted was Yuan himself who said that Kang “was nothing but [a] verbose non entity.”68 According to Worden, “once again, K’ang sought to keep the United States government informed as to his version of the events in China, and once again, the United States government chose to ignore the matter for the sake of diplomatic surety.”69

For all his disappointments with the lackluster response of the U.S. government to his proposals for helping China and the Chinese in America, Kang came to see the United States as a suitable model of national strength that he hoped China could someday emulate. Worden writes: “For K’ang there seemed to be a necessary and essential relationship among power, peace, and prosperity. He had seen these factors manifested in the United States during his intermittent stays there between 1905 and 1907, and thus arrived at his conclusions. His conclusions were then applied to the Chinese situation for which he had long recommended a phased development of parliamentary government. His concern for these ideals further speak for his desire to see China merge into the modern world.”70

There is no evidence Kang returned to the United States after 1907, although when he left that year he took with him a new wife (the third of six), 17-year old American-born Lily Haw (He Zhanli), who had been deeply moved by Kang when he spoke in Fresno in 1905 and at her initiative had corresponded with him over the next two years.71 In 1909, Kang returned to Asia for good, perhaps hoping to be near China should the chance come to participate in the burgeoning constitutional movement underway. At the same time, the Baohuanghui (now Xianzhenghui) was losing its focus, challenged both by severe setbacks in its businesses, which were collapsing under a world financial crisis compounded by internal mismanagement and corruption, and by the growing coherence of the revolutionary message and organization.

The center of reform action turned from the New World to China itself, where Liang Qichao and his Xianzhenghui-funded Political Information Society sought to establish the foundation for a full-fledged political party. Both organizations were at the forefront of a

71 Maybelle M. Selland, From China to Fresno: A Love Story (Fresno: Heritage Fresno Press, 2007), pp. 42-47.
national petition movement that urged the Qing to delay no longer in convening a parliament to
debate and promulgate a constitution, with Kang’s petition signed by merchants from “200
different cities, representing several hundred thousand people.”72 Prince Pulun, whom we recall
met with Baohuanghui members on his 1904 trip to the U.S., was appointed to head the proto-
national assembly that convened in 1910, and when the legislators voted by acclamation to
support the parliamentary petitions, he was exultant: “The entire assemblage was swept by a
storm of joy . . . Princes, nobles, scholars and ordinary subjects all gathered together in one room
and, giving expression to the same emotion, afforded a spectacle unseen in China for thousands
of years.”73 But, in 1911, the wave of constitutionalism and yearning for political participation
outgrew the ability of the Qing government to meet reformers’ expectations, and revolution
became inevitable.

Long after the 1911 Republican revolution, the United States harbored remnants of the
Baohuanghui, which continued to wield political influence. Most notably, in 1954, San Francisco
leader Dai Ming Lee joined with the former Republic of China acting president Li Zongren,
exiled in the U.S., in a Third Force seeking support for a democratic Chinese government as an
alternative to that of the Communists on the mainland and the Nationalists on Taiwan.74 Two
major newspapers in the United States were the last organizational vestiges of the Baohuanghui:
the Chinese World [Shijie Ribao], which closed in San Francisco in 1969 after more than 60
years of operation, and the New China Press [Xin Zhongguo Ribao], established in Honolulu in
1899 and shuttered in 1978.75 In Honolulu, the Mun Lun School, opened by the Xianzhenghui in
1911, remains a thriving Chinese language school to this day.

New Sources for Research on the Baohuanghui in the United States

The recent availability of digitized, searchable American historical newspapers online,
most of which are accessible by anyone and some only through libraries with subscriptions, is
the most important new tool for the Baohuanghui researcher. Productive search terms are
“Chinese reformer” or “Chinese Empire Reform Association,” rather than Chinese names, which
are spelled unpredictably. A surprising amount of attention was paid to the Association by local
newspapers, leading the researcher to unexpected tips to guide research about local chapters. For
example, only one year after the Association was founded, in June 1900, the Colorado Springs
Gazette [America’s Historical Newspapers database] reported that “Local Chinese will Seek to
Aid Emperor.”76 A prominent Colorado Springs Chinese and three Chinese in Colorado City
had been contacted by the San Francisco chapter “to secure sympathy and assistance from . . .
fellow countrymen to the movement to restore the young emperor of the celestial kingdom.” The

a spokesman for ‘the progressives’,” according to Fincher.
74 Him Mark Lai, Chinese American Transnational Politics (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2010), pp. 32-33.
76 “Local Chinese will Seek to Aid Emperor,” Colorado Springs Gazette, 20 June 1900, p. 5.
four “will manage the Colorado campaign for the Reform association.” Previously, only the Denver Baohuanghui chapter had been documented.

The most accessible national database is Chronicling America (http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/) through the Library of Congress, which includes important papers like the San Francisco Call, Los Angeles Herald, and New York Tribune. For state-focused research, a valuable website has been developed by the University of Pennsylvania (http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/guides/hist/onlinenewspapers.html) that aggregates by state all historical newspapers available at no cost online. Many states have their own newspaper archives, among the most useful for the Baohuanghui researcher being California (allowing one to “clip” an article, which is pasted in a single column), Oregon, and Washington. Because governmental digitization generally begins with the oldest issues, in many cases newspapers such as the Colorado Springs Gazette are not yet available for the turn of the century on the state site, but only on the subscriber-only private site. Proquest Historical Newspapers (http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.html) is the subscriber database with the most prominent newspapers (although some like the New York Times are available on their own site), including the San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Hartford Courant, and Boston Globe. Searching across these databases can be time-consuming, since to my knowledge there is no meta-database.

Chinese materials about Kang and the Baohuanghui in North America are also now becoming available online, an important advance for researchers. Notable is the collection of several hundred letters in the Tom Leung collection at UCLA (http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002311s5), which are all digitized, allowing the collection to be studied in a manuscript viewer, downloaded, and searched by ID number using the table of contents of Kang Liang yu Baohuanghui—Tan Liang zai Meiguo suocang ziliao huibian (Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and the Baohuanghui: a compilation of materials collected by Tom Leung in the U.S.A.) as a finding guide. At some point in the future there will be direct link from the table of contents to the digital collection.

The University of California Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library has the best collection of materials relating to the Chinese Empire Reform Association in U.S., but at this time the only digitized resources online is the 1900-1904 run of Chung Sai Yat Po (http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt0g5016h6/entire_text/), the most important Chinese American newspaper at the time and, for the period covered, sympathetic to the reformers. It is searchable roughly by date. For other items in the Ethnic Studies collection, such as the 1905 and 1907 meeting charters and 1904 issues of the New York newspaper, Zhongguo Weixin Bao, digital photos may be taken.

Baohuanghui Scholarship (http://baohuanghui.blogspot.com/) was first created as a collaborative forum in 2009 in conjunction with the WCILCOS conference at Jinan University in Guangzhou, but now is difficult to view in China because it is a Google blog. It includes news, archival findings, research questions, and new leads. Perhaps most useful to researchers are the frequently updated lists of archives, scholars working in the field, and bibliographic sources, as well as a slowly forming organizational map, organized by continent, of the Baohuanghui’s chapters, schools, businesses, newspapers, women’s auxiliaries, and other institutional
appendages (formatted as Google Docs, requiring a gmail address to access). CINARC or Chinese in Northwest American Research Committee (http://www.cinarc.org/#anchor_254) is a regional blog that has lively coverage of Baohuanghui topics and is especially strong on artifacts such as the photographic posters produced by Association chapters and women’s auxiliaries.