

The Gun Wa Trials: Chinese Doctors, Narrative Advertisement,
and Consumer Fraud in the Late Nineteenth Century
American West

Thesis by
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree of
History

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Pasadena, California

2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This senior thesis represents the single most ambitious project I have undertaken in my undergraduate career at Caltech. More so than any other research project I have worked on, I have had to take responsibility for every step along the way, from immersing myself in the background of the nineteenth century to digging for elusive tidbits of information to finally writing the document itself. None of this would have been remotely possible without the guidance and support of those around me. First and foremost is Professor Sarah Gronningsater, who inspired me with her enthusiasm to pursue a second option in History and who agreed to advise me throughout the process of writing this thesis despite the inconvenience of a long-distance mentorship. I am indebted to her for providing me with invaluable direction, from teaching me how the historian thinks of and tackles questions of the past to painstakingly reading and critiquing my writing to iron out the worst of the wrinkles. I would also like to thank Professors Warren C. Brown, Maura D. Dykstra, and J. Morgan Kousser, all of whom encouraged my interest in history and helped shape my writing and approach to the field. I am grateful, too, for my fellow thesis writers and friends, who let me bounce ideas off them and contributed numerous suggestions that made their way into this thesis. The task was that much less arduous and daunting with their continuous support and encouragement, particularly during late-night writing sessions. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for enabling me to pursue my intellectual interests in an academic setting saturated with brilliance and devotion to the pursuit of knowledge.

ABSTRACT

In the late nineteenth century, the United States experienced a surge of anti-Chinese sentiment that targeted both Chinese laborers and skilled Chinese professionals. Chinese doctors were thus caught between two disadvantageous developments as, during the same decades, the regular or allopathic school of medicine asserted increasing control over the medical profession and successfully lobbied for restrictive licensing laws. This thesis examines the relationship between TCM newspaper advertisements and the way Americans viewed Chinese doctors and culture in Denver, Colorado and Milwaukee, Wisconsin from 1888 to 1897. In particular, it focuses on the case of Gun Wa, a fake Chinese doctor created by a handful of white men to sell their medicines, and discusses the ways in which the company exploited TCM as it faced attacks from two fronts. To understand the unique interpretation of TCM and Chinese culture the white men brought, Gun Wa's advertisements are compared to those of real Denver Chinese doctors. By combining elements of Chinese and western culture, the company was able to create a convincing persona with convincing remedies in the newspapers to attract customers. The use of narrative testimonials was particularly important to capture ethos and respectability, revealing the relative social status Chinese doctors held in their adoptive communities. The subsequent Gun Wa trials exposed the fraud and damaged relations between Chinese doctors and their non-Chinese communities. Although Chinese doctors could repair their relations with the Denver community, they would ultimately fail to obtain the approval of professional medical societies, pointing to the limitations of Denver acceptance of Chinese culture.

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Introduction

CHINESE DOCTORS AT THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND MEDICINE

Three men sat in a dark room at 300 Grand Avenue, Milwaukee, where an ochre sign at the front of the building advertised the services of a Chinese doctor named Gun Wa. The room was decorated with Chinese paraphernalia – red umbrellas, joss paper, and medicine bottles with unintelligible labels, lending the place an “Oriental grandeur.”¹ One of the men – white, middle-aged and mustachioed – sat at a table with his hand on a book, wrist facing up. The bespectacled Chinese doctor, dressed in silk robes, felt the man’s pulse with three fingers, nodded sagely, and spoke a string of foreign words, which the third man, also white, duly translated to the customer. Minutes later, the customer left with a bottle of herbal medicine, a strict set of directions to follow, and a promise of a cure for his ailment. As soon as he vacated the parlor, the next customer, an African-American woman, was duly escorted into the consultation room.

A few months later on June 20, 1890, the Chinese doctor, his white coworker, and another white man stood on trial in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for using the mails to send fraudulent and obscene materials. The municipal courtroom was packed with curious onlookers, eager to catch a glimpse at what would prove to be just the start of a sensational months-long legal battle. The two white men, Joseph A. Wilt and Charles A. Janson, were “jolly-looking fellows, about 30 years of age, and [bearing] the indications of belonging to the fraternity known as ‘the boys.’”² Janson was the only trained doctor of the trio and had been acting as the “interpreter” for the

¹ “Gun Wa’s Chinese Remedies Cure All Diseases,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 21, 1889).

² “Gun Wa Making a Defense,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 20, 1890). The name of the latter man also appears as “Jeancon” and “Jaenson” in some other newspapers. For the sake of consistency, I stick with “Janson.”

supposed Chinese doctor “Gun Wa,” whose role had been played by James Lee alias Yum Chung, a “smooth-faced intelligent looking Chinaman, with the peculiar cool air that characterizes his countrymen on all occasions.”³ The last man, Wilt, had been the manager of the branch, handling its finances and buying advertisement space in the newspapers.⁴ The three had operated the local chapter of a Chinese medicine business that had opened branches in several large cities across the nation, including Milwaukee and Denver, over the span of two years. Each branch, including the Milwaukee one until it was raided by city authorities the day before, had sold lines of “Chinese vegetable remedies” prepared by “Gun Wa” (錦和), a supposedly renowned Chinese physician who had managed to open and staff every one of those locations and who was in reality a mascot of sorts for the syndicate. Now, the three men faced charges of “cheating by a kind of conspiracy and misrepresentations as to the identity of the Chinaman... [and] the circulation of obscene literature, under the name of ‘medical treatises,’” as well as a handful of other minor charges.⁵ Meanwhile, the man behind the entire Gun Wa business, an inveterate white conman from Denver named F. L. M. Smith, remained on the run from federal authorities.⁶

The advertisements of and response to Gun Wa, as well as other local Chinese doctors, provide a doorway into the relations between the Chinese of Milwaukee and Denver and the communities in which they lived. Because health and medicine were such integral and intimate

³ Ibid. Note that many of the Chinese immigrants in the 1800s came from Canton, and thus the romanization of many names follows the Cantonese pronunciation. Where the Pinyin (official standard Chinese romanization based on Mandarin pronunciations) of a particular Chinese name, e.g. Beijing, is more commonly used, I have used the Pinyin instead of the Cantonese romanization.

⁴ “Gun Wa Is a Full Citizen,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 1, 1890).

⁵ “Gun Wa Making a Defense.” It is interesting to note that of the charges, the only one with “a serious penalty attached is that of circulating obscene literature,” a reflection of late nineteenth century American priorities. The obscenity charge carried a punishment of one year’s imprisonment or a \$500 fine (equivalent to over \$13,000 today). The other charges carried penalties of at most a \$50 fine.

⁶ “All Pleaded Guilty,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 27, 1891).

parts of everyday life, Chinese doctors employed by non-Chinese Americans enjoyed a different set of interactions with their adoptive communities than did common Chinese laborers. The doctors' interactions with and patronage by white Americans endowed them greater financial prosperity and social status compared to their fellow countrymen.⁷ However, Chinese doctors also faced unique difficulties as the medical profession in America underwent drastic structural changes through the later decades of the 1800s. "Regular" physicians, those subscribing to the allopathic school of medicine, had founded the American Medical Association (AMA) in the mid-1800s, and in the late 1800s the organization lobbied for state medical licensing laws and medical examination boards to exclude undesirable competition. Among the practitioners they sought to bar from the trade were those subscribing to popular heterodox medical sects, such as eclecticism and homeopathy.⁸ The increasing exclusivity of the medical trade created shifting conditions and legal codes that complicated the social landscape Chinese doctors faced in America, one that was already fraught with racial tensions, stereotypes of Chinese primitiveness, and limited intercultural communication. Case studies of the ways in which Chinese doctors navigated this social minefield provide us with a view into the methods Chinese elites historically used to obtain acceptance in the United States. However, Gun Wa complicates the narrative. Created from western understandings of Chinese culture, this persona – which I refer to throughout as "Gun Wa" to distinguish him from the people who played his part – was specifically designed to appeal to non-Chinese Americans. Yet even the fictional doctor sheds light on the aspects of Chinese culture and medicine that most appealed to Americans and provides insight into how a Chinese doctor could gain widespread acceptance.

⁷ Kenneth H. Marcus and Yong Chen, "Inside and Outside Chinatown: Chinese Elites in Exclusion Era California," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (August 2011): 369–400.

⁸ Ronald Hamowy, "The Early Development of Medical Licensing Laws in the United States," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 3 (1979): 73.

One of the most important channels of communication between the Chinese doctors and their prospective patients were newspaper advertisements. With the invention of the penny press, improvements in transportation technology for both goods and information, and increased literacy rates, the 1800s saw a boom in the distribution and readership of periodicals. Initially reliant upon political parties and other interests for patronage, newspapers in the late 1800s began to turn to advertisements as their primary revenue source, a trend that picked up speed in the late 1880s and 1890s.⁹ Post-Civil War economic reconstruction and manufacturing growth led to the creation of businesses reliant on selling massive quantities of goods with small marginal revenues, necessitating widespread advertisements.¹⁰ One of the original giants of the advertisement industry, patent medicine – proprietary, over-the-counter remedies with supposedly miraculous results and jealously guarded formulae – began to reach even more Americans as newspapers boomed. In response to the flourishing patent medicine industry, the AMA restricted the advertisement of so-called “ethical” drugs, those endorsed by and prescribed by orthodox practitioners, to physicians only.¹¹ Chinese doctors, by advertising their services and remedies, thus joined the tradition of patent medicine and not regular physicians, due in no small part to the latter’s exclusive nature.

While historians have studied the Chinese in nineteenth-century California in great depth, scholars of Chinese-American relations in Milwaukee and Denver have primarily focused on interracial interactions through the lens of anti-Chinese violence. Initially welcome as a reliable, law-abiding, and cheap source of labor, the Chinese soon became reviled as the economy took a

⁹ Sidney A. Sherman, “Advertising in the United States,” *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 7, no. 52 (December 1900): 1–44.

¹⁰ Charles L. Allen, “The Press and Advertising,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 219, The Press in the Contemporary Scene (January 1942): 86–92.

¹¹ Julie Donohue, “A History of Drug Advertising: The Evolving Roles of Consumers and Consumer Protection,” *The Milbank Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2006): 659–699.

sharp downturn in the 1870s. The ire of white workingmen in these regions was primarily directed at Chinese laborers, but on the West Coast, where Chinese populations were fairly large, Chinese doctors also faced public hostility and their once-thriving practices among white Americans often dried up.¹² Race riots erupted periodically, such as the 1871 Los Angeles riot in which white mobs killed 28 Chinese immigrants. Anti-Chinese violence soon spread eastward, and in 1880 a major riot broke out in Denver, which Liping Zhu connects with nationwide Sinophobia spurred on by the year's presidential election.¹³ Partly in response to this riot and to overwhelming national anti-Chinese sentiment, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the first piece of federal legislature banning an entire group of immigrants based on race. However, even as Chinese populations shrank, racial tensions remained. In 1889 another bout of violence broke out in Milwaukee in response to allegations that two Chinese men had raped a number of white girls. While no blood was shed, the riot took on a "condensed" form as in the space of just three days a white mob numbering in the thousands formed in front of the courthouse. Broken up by police intent on protecting the two Chinese from a lynching, the mob on the fourth day prowled the streets of the city and destroyed at least seven Chinese-owned laundries in what Victor Jew characterizes as an intersection between changing notions of sexuality and anti-Chinese sentiments.¹⁴

This thesis examines cultural acceptance, exchange, and boundaries between Chinese doctors and the non-Chinese communities they lived in, primarily between the years of 1888 and 1897. Denver and Milwaukee take center stage in an attempt to give the history of these regions

¹² Nathan Sivin, "Traditional Chinese Medicine and the United States: Past, Present, and Future," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 39, no. 8 (1986), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20171839>.

¹³ Liping Zhu, *The Road to Chinese Exclusion: The Denver Riot, 1880 Election and the Rise of the West* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Victor Jew, "'Chinese Demons': The Violent Articulation of Chinese Otherness and Interracial Sexuality in the U.S. Midwest, 1885-1889," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 2 (December 1, 2003): 389-410.

the same nuanced and multifaceted analysis California and West Coast Chinese-American history have received, addressing deficiencies in the literature on the role of the Chinese in various aspects of American history. Chinese doctors who treated or sought patients outside of their race by necessity acted as cultural diplomats between Chinese and American communities. The way Chinese doctors, as elite members of their communities, presented themselves and their services in the newspapers influenced the way the local adoptive communities viewed the Chinese, allowing them to build bridges of cultural understanding between the Chinese and Americans. This was particularly so in areas with extremely small Chinese populations. For instance, the Chinese numbered around only 60 in 1889 Milwaukee, so a single Chinese doctor represented a significant portion of the Chinese population.¹⁵

The particular success of Gun Wa's advertisements revealed how clever advertisers could exploit cross-cultural understanding, or lack thereof, to promote the image of a Chinese doctor. In just a few short months after the 1889 Milwaukee riot, advertisements for Gun Wa's Chinese remedies populated two of the largest daily newspapers, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* and the *Milwaukee Daily Journal*. The Gun Wa business achieved such success in a city that had so recently exploded in anti-Chinese sentiment by carefully striking a balance between marketing Chinese exoticism and adopting enough western medical, business, and cultural customs to appear reputable enough to potential non-Chinese clientele. Other Chinese doctors in Denver followed the same strategy, using shallow understandings of Chinese culture to counteract the effects of negative Chinese stereotypes. The doctors achieved familiarity with their audiences by describing their products in terms palatable to their American clientele and by leveraging the ethos of community leaders' endorsements to actively gather more interest in their businesses

¹⁵ Ibid.

from non-Chinese Americans. An exploration of Chinese doctors' advertisements – particularly those of Gun Wa, as they originate from white perspectives of the Chinese – allows us to deepen our understanding of medical advertisements in the 1800s and how they communicated cultural notions between the Chinese and the Americans. Literature on medical advertisement history has widely focused on patent medicines and has mostly neglected advertisements for doctors themselves, so such an analysis helps us decipher the role of the doctors' images in selling heterodox remedies. Simultaneously, I hope to add to the understanding of the ways major English-language newspapers treated the Chinese, both sympathetically and not, and better understand how the press has influenced views of minorities throughout American history.

At the same time their profession allowed Chinese doctors to interact more with Americans, the medical field also represented yet another avenue in which the Chinese could be exploited and excluded from American culture. Many Chinese immigrants, especially those who came to the United States in the mid-1800s, could speak very little if any English. The language barrier created opportunity for misunderstanding, facilitating the creation of stereotypes and producing a divide between the communities.¹⁶ Poor communication could then be exploited, in combination with the inadequate state of the medical field, by white Americans such as those who ran the Gun Wa corporation. Additionally, as the medical profession itself underwent drastic changes in the late 1800s, new state laws proved another barrier to Chinese doctors. While Chinese doctors, operating independently or with white Americans, were able to appeal to many non-Chinese community leaders, they experienced difficulty in appealing to legislators, who often went against the wishes of their constituents by passing restrictive medical laws.

¹⁶ For instance, the 1889 trial of the two Milwaukee Chinese men had been granted two continuances because, supposedly, the only competent translator in the entire state had to travel from Evansville. The delay fanned the mob's anger as tensions neared a flash point. *Ibid.*

These laws often did not specifically target the Chinese but still denied them the ability to practice their trade, in a sense treating the “elite” of the Chinese no better than the average immigrant. The legal cases against Chinese doctors and the doctors’ defensive responses to the laws reveal the methods they employed to navigate the hostility and underlying racial tension that still existed between the elite Chinese immigrants and their adoptive communities.

Ultimately, the Chinese doctors’ advertisements and legal experiences pointed to the tenuous position of even elite Chinese in late nineteenth-century America. Chinese doctors relied on mixing western customs and conventions with their own to attract non-Chinese customers, revealing that Chinese customs could not be accepted as they were. Instead, Chinese medicine and doctors had to be sufficiently westernized or at least framed in terms of western experiences, which the testimonials of non-Chinese Americans provided, to be considered respectable. The Gun Wa fraud damaged the trust that Chinese doctors had worked hard to build up, and though some Chinese doctors would manage to repair local relations, the medical profession would remain prejudiced against the Chinese through the rest of the century.

Chapter 1

THE MAKINGS OF A CHINESE DOCTOR: CHINESE EXOTICISM IN THE CHARACTER OF GUN WA

Gun Wa was never a single person. He was the creation of one Frank L. M. Smith, a resourceful scoundrel and saloon owner who opened up “Gun Wa’s” first parlor in Denver and would go on to open more parlors in Milwaukee, Pittsburg, Indianapolis, Detroit, Kansas City, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Omaha, each supposedly staffed by the legendary Chinese doctor himself.¹⁷ In Milwaukee, four different Chinese men were passed off as Gun Wa within the span of about a year, the time the concern had operated in the city.¹⁸ At the time the Milwaukee trial began in June 1890, Jim Lee was the acting Gun Wa, with Joseph Wilt managing the business and Charles Janson performing the actual diagnoses in the consultation room, as he was the only one of them who was a trained doctor. In Denver, the local branch had surprisingly not even had a Chinese man acting as Gun Wa for some months; William H. Hale, manager of the Denver location, had simply passed himself off as a Chinese doctor kept in a separate room from the clients.¹⁹ What mattered was that the façade of a Chinese doctor was sufficiently maintained.

The first and most important product the Gun Wa concern sold was not its herbal remedies but Gun Wa himself. Because the patent medicine market was so easy to enter, it was oversaturated with products that were essentially identical, promising essentially identical results to fix essentially identical problems. Consequently, patent medicine manufacturers were forced

¹⁷ “All Pleaded Guilty”; “Decision in Gun Wa Case,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 23, 1891). The former article lists seven places still in business as of January 27, 1891. The latter includes Omaha, not on the first list, as one of the cities in which a Gun Wa parlor had been opened.

¹⁸ “Decision in Gun Wa Case.”

¹⁹ “Sage Was Away Up,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, July 31, 1894).

to advertise minute difference in their products and devise innovative methods of advertising to make their products stand out.²⁰ The success of the Gun Wa business, which in reality was a front for ordinary quack medicines made by white American men, relied then on creating a convincing image of a Chinese doctor that could be used to set the medicines apart from competitors' products. To do so, Smith and his collaborators blended elements of Chinese culture and life, particularly the experiences of Chinese immigrants in interracial American communities, with western frameworks of understanding.

The Gun Wa that was created by the gang of white men behind him is an insight into the white American view of what qualities the more respectable and elite of the Chinese in the late 1800s possessed. From his very first advertisement, which ran on October 29, 1888 in the *Rocky Mountain News*, Gun Wa promised to send a copy of his life history to anyone who inquired (and of course enclosed four cents in stamps for return postage).²¹ The document, or possibly a condensed version of it, was then published on June 23 and August 18 the next year in the *Rocky Mountain News*, where it treated readers to a sensational tale of a brilliant Chinese doctor who had faced much hardship but who had braved it all to finally arrive in the United States to sell his services for the benefit of all Americans.²²

Gun Wa's family and educational background, which shared elements with real Denver Chinese doctors' histories, lent him the grandeur of the Chinese Empire's long and storied past. Supposedly, Gun Wa was born on June 3, 1849 in Nanjing to a family of physicians stretching back 16 generations. As the eldest of two sons, he was destined to carry on the family tradition.

²⁰ James Harvey Young, "Patent Medicines: An Early Example of Competitive Marketing," *The Journal of Economic History* 20, no. 4 (1960): 648–656.

²¹ "Gun Wa," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, October 29, 1888).

²² "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 23, 1889). The two printed versions are essentially identical, so I reference only the June version here.

Gun Wa's ancient family background in medicine was similar to that claimed by, Lee Wing (李榮), one of the two other major Chinese doctors in town who, unlike Gun Wa, were real doctors and operated their businesses independently of white influences. Lee Wing supposedly hailed from a family "whose ancestors practiced medicine in the city of Canton for near one thousand (1,000) years," much longer than Gun Wa's ancestors.²³ The emphasis of both doctors' life stories on their ancestral traditions played into contemporary American stereotypes of the Chinese Empire as a nation carrying on (and often times mired in) its long history. The sheer length of time involved, particularly in comparison to the less than 300 years of Anglo-American history that existed in the late 1800s, evoked an ethos of cultivated and expansive learning. At the age of 16, Gun Wa graduated from Guig Woung Ho college in Beijing after eight years of study, continuing his studies at the Young Hop Ho Medical college and at the Ho Yan Zo university, the "highest medical college in China, being directly under the patronage of the Emperor," where he received his diploma "direct from the Emperor with his signature attached."²⁴ In this respect, he was more similar to Chung Hing, the other local and independently-operating Chinese doctor of Denver, who claimed to be "[t]he only graduate in Denver of a Chinese Medical College licensed by the Emperor of China."²⁵ Both men – the real Chung Hing and the fake Gun Wa – appealed to the authority and legitimacy of the Emperor, a figure with no direct American equivalent. In doing so, they conjured up both a sense of

²³ "Dr. Lee Wing Chinese Physician," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 28, 1889). Assuming a generation is about 25 years, Gun Wa claimed to have come from a family with only a 400-year history of practicing medicines. On the issue of the other Chinese doctors in Denver, there were two other men, but both had fairly insignificant advertising presences. Ling Sang seems to only have advertised in the *Rocky Mountain News* for about a year with very little variance in his advertisements, and Gee Woo used the same basic advertisement throughout his 4-year stay in Denver. Gun Wa appears to have been the only Chinese doctor who advertised in Milwaukee during the late 1800s.

²⁴ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

²⁵ "Sure Cure for Piles," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, July 7, 1890). Chung Hing also held a British diploma. Lee Wing, in comparison, simply claimed to be a graduate of Canton.

legitimacy, bestowed by the highest power in the country, and of distinct foreignness. Thus, the familial and education background Smith and his company gave to Gun Wa utilized elements of Chinese culture that evoked the majesty and influence of China through its contrast to America.

The next segment of Gun Wa's life more echoed the the adventurous spirit embodied in the romanticization of American Westward expansion. After receiving his final diploma from Ho Yan Zo university, Gun Wa took a "botanizing tour of the Chinese Empire" on which he "visited every city, climbed every mountain, and traversed the entire length of every river in China... perfecting himself in the study of Chinese botany."²⁶ He encountered "many narrow escapes and startling adventures," almost getting eaten by sharks and escaping from pirates' ransom before continuing his journey to "Japan, Siam, Burmah, Borneo, Sumatra, Hindoostan, Afghanistan, Persia, Arabia, Turkey," and finally making his way through Europe and the United States.²⁷ This element of his life story had no parallel in either of the other doctors' and represented a spirit of exploration that may have appealed particularly to the settlers of the American Midwest. His adventures also made him seem larger than life, setting him apart from the other doctors by portraying him in a similar way as a hero of a lurid novel would be. The locations he was said to have visited also helped boost his image as an adventurer. While several specific countries were listed from the Near and Far East, his travels in the western world were simply described as "a tour of Europe" and "three months viewing the points of interest" of the United States.²⁸ Gun Wa's story specifically emphasized the foreign and exotic aspect of his travels, piquing the interest of newspaper readers and adding more appeal to Gun Wa as a character.

²⁶ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

The description of Gun Wa's supposed life in China utilized emotional language that was familiar to western readers to describe Chinese customs, blending the two cultures to make Chinese concepts more comprehensible to western readers. Upon returning from his journeys abroad, Gun Wa found that his mother and brother had died, leaving him little choice but to settle down to take care of his "very old and feeble" father, inheriting his successful practice in the process.²⁹ Along the way, Gun Wa married the daughter of a wealthy merchant, combining his inherited wealth with hers. Gun Wa's devotion to his father evoked the notion of filial duty that lay at the heart of the Chinese family structure, yet the description of his show of filial duty and the context thereof made his actions sympathetic to American readers, who lived in a society in which notions of filial obligation had been steadily weakening.³⁰ Instead of settling down simply because his father willed it, Gun Wa did so out of genuine concern for his father. Gun Wa's lifestyle in China was even more clearly described in a blatant effort to mix the foundations of western and eastern societies. The history claimed that Gun Wa soon earned a reputation for charity of all kinds because he was a firm believer of "[t]he Bible doctrine that 'He who giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord,'" supposedly "an old [saying] in China [that] was taught by Confucius long before the Birth of Christ."³¹ The mixture of eastern and western ideas reinforced the notion that Gun Wa, while Chinese, still shared familiar and humanizing traits with westerners.

The life history next explained Gun Wa's motivations for leaving China to settle in America, again framing his life in terms more western than eastern in nature. Four years after

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gary G. Hamilton, "Patriarchy, Patrimonialism, and Filial Piety: A Comparison of China and Western Europe," *The British Journal of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (March 1990): 77–104; Willystine Goodsell, "The American Family in the Nineteenth Century," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 160 (March 1932): 13–22.

³¹ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

their marriage, Gun Wa's wife gave birth to a son, but one day in a boating accident, Gun Wa lost all three remaining members of his family – his wife, his son, and his father – in one fell swoop. After brooding for some time, he left his life in China, selling his business and his house, and headed to the United States, “hoping among new scenes and faces to find some relief from his great sorrow.”³² Once again, the life history blended eastern and western concepts of family and culture to aid western readers in understanding Gun Wa's motivations. Given such an elite family background, Gun Wa would likely have lived with a large extended family, including at least his father's siblings and their families, had he been real.³³ Yet, for the sake of convenience and to make Gun Wa's family more similar to western familial structures, his creators limited his family to a three-generational family that expanded only slightly beyond the basic nuclear family. For the narrative to be convincing, Gun Wa needed a compelling reason to leave China, and the complete lack of familial ties helped fill that requirement.

The next segment, dealing with Gun Wa's early legal troubles in the United States, mirrored the experience of other Chinese doctors in America to provide a realistic backstory for the character. After a short while touring the United States, Gun Wa, “[d]esiring to occupy his mind... fell back on his beloved profession” and opened up an office in Portland, Oregon.³⁴ However, he was soon arrested for “‘being a quack’ and for practicing medicine without a license,” and at the trial, his three Chinese diplomas were all disregarded as evidence of his competency.³⁵ The State Board of Medical Examiners, who had been responsible for Gun Wa's arrest in the first place, then refused his application for a license “with a curt remark that

³² Ibid.

³³ Guida C. Man, “Families in the Chinese Diaspora: Women's Experience in Transnational Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese Immigrant Families in Canada,” in *International Handbook of Chinese Families*, ed. Chan Kwok-bun (New York: Springer, 2013), 157–168.

³⁴ “Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman.”

³⁵ Ibid.

Chinamen knew nothing about medicine.”³⁶ His experience would have seemed all too familiar to real Chinese doctors: Lee Wing was indicted “for practicing as a physician without a license” in November 1889, and another Denver Chinese doctor, Gee Woo, was similarly charged earlier in January 1886 with “practicing medicine without a license.”³⁷ However, not all Chinese doctors met this fate. For instance, Chung Hing, who held diplomas “from [both] the British and Chinese governments,” was licensed to practice his trade in Colorado.³⁸ In this respect, Gun Wa for once was not an unusual and outstanding example of a Chinese doctor but instead faced the same difficulties as most of his fellow countrymen did in the trade. While in part a necessity because “Gun Wa,” a fictitious persona, could not have received a license, his struggle with the law also helped draw more parallels between him and other real Chinese doctors. While the purpose of the life history was to make Gun Wa as respectable and appealing to American audiences as possible, the company still recognized that certain negative events were so integral to the experiences of Chinese doctors in America that the events could not be glossed over.

How Gun Wa dealt with the legal problem revealed the company’s understanding of the law and ways to avoid punishment – ways that other Chinese doctors also practiced – and explicitly justified his business model to his potential clients. Just as he was about to return home to China in disgust at the pettiness of American physicians, he ran into an American acquaintance, a lawyer by the name of Judge L. G. Henningway, who read up on the medical practice regulations and informed Gun Wa that simply selling his medicine and not his service as

³⁶ Ibid. Note here an inconsistency in the story. Gun Wa’s story claims he was denied a license by the State Board of Medical Examiners of Oregon, the first state in which he settled down and opened a practice, but the Board was not created until February 1889. This is at odds with the fact that he began advertising in the *Rocky Mountain News* in October 1888. It is unclear whether any contemporary readers caught this contradiction, but I found it an interesting detail that proves Gun Wa’s story does not add up.

³⁷ “Criminal Cases,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, November 3, 1889); “A Chinese Doctor’s Trials,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, January 22, 1886).

³⁸ “Dr. Chung Hing Sure Cure for Piles,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, October 14, 1891); “All Private, Blood Diseases, and Cancer,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 26, 1895).

a doctor would be the perfect way to circumvent the law.³⁹ Gun Wa gladly took up the suggestion and opened an office in Virginia City, Nevada doing just that.⁴⁰ This pricing scheme, charging for medicines but not for consultation, was one that some other Chinese doctors used to circumvent laws that would not recognize their practices as legitimate. For instance, Lee Wing explained in one 1891 advertisement that “as the laws of the United States do not permit him to practice in this country he gives [clients], free of charge, his knowledge... and sell [them] his medicine at a very low cost.”⁴¹ Because Gun Wa’s business model was identical to that of other Chinese doctors, his potential clientele might harbor suspicions that his practice was as illegitimate as any other Chinese doctor’s. But, the involvement of an American lawyer in coming up with Gun Wa’s business scheme lent him the explicit approval of a white man with considerable education and social standing. The life story made clear that Gun Wa was not forced to adopt a pricing scheme different from the standard one used by regular physicians because he was a quack but because the laws and law enforcement were discriminating.

Other aspects of the treatment Gun Wa faced in the United States were similar to that of real Chinese immigrants, and the contrast between Gun Wa’s actions and his reception challenged racist notions of the Chinese. During the first few days of his Portland clinic, Gun Wa received few callers, and those who did seek his services tended to be other Chinese immigrants because “[t]he prejudice at that time against the Chinese was very strong in Portland, as well as on the entire Pacific coast.”⁴² Many of his non-Chinese patients “were ashamed to have others know that they ‘took Chinese medicine,’” and at his arrest, a jeering mob followed him to the jail

³⁹ “Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “A Desperate Case,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, March 8, 1891).

⁴² “Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman.”

shouting “‘Hang the damned Chinaman,’ ‘Throw him into the river,’ ‘Kill him,’ etc.”⁴³ In light of Denver’s 1880 race riot – one of the most violent to strike the Great Plains region – less than a decade before Gun Wa arrived in town, this virulent anti-Chinese hatred could only be all too familiar to residents reading his life story. At the same time, the harsh treatment of a Chinese doctor who had been portrayed as nothing but an embodiment of western virtues was meant to stimulate sympathy for Gun Wa. The history even pointed this contrast out specifically, boasting how “his arrest [had] only advertised his wonderful cures and shown [the regular physicians’] malice toward one whose only offense was alleviating the suffering and curing the sick at a trifling cost.”⁴⁴ By emphasizing the conflict between Gun Wa and regular physicians, who held increasing amounts of control and respect in the medical profession, the advertisers legitimized his defiance against the establishment. Additionally, though the purpose of the life history was ultimately to help the business sell more products, the emotional contrast between Gun Wa’s good intentions – and even better deeds – and the racism he faced may have prompted nineteenth-century Denver readers to reconsider their stereotypes of the Chinese.

Yet, the writers of the life history did play up the difference between Gun Wa’s treatment and that of other Chinese in the medical field, giving him an air of exceptionalism because of his medical prowess. Despite all of the hostility he encountered in America because of his race, Gun Wa managed to build up a thriving business not only in Portland but also in Virginia City, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; Portland once again; and in “many [other] cities, [where he stayed] a few weeks... effecting cures wherever he stopped that were considered miraculous and establish[ing] for himself a reputation that has made him the envy of all physicians.”⁴⁵ Again and

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

again his “fame spread so rapidly” that his practices were “overcrowded day and evening” at each location to which he traveled.⁴⁶ The Gun Wa writers contrasted the different receptions Gun Wa received as a Chinese and as a doctor, showing how the different aspects of his identity were treated differently. The implication, then, was that the medicines were able to earn him a high status among and acceptance by non-Chinese Americans in spite of his race and the prejudice against the Chinese. At the same time, the ad writers inadvertently posed the challenge again to Denver residents to rethink their views of the Chinese. If the way Gun Wa was treated because of his race was unacceptable, then the same must surely go for other Chinese immigrants in America.

The blending of Chinese and western cultural motifs throughout the description of Gun Wa’s life history helped make Gun Wa an exotic character yet keep him relatable and understandable to western readers. The sheer length of his family background in medicine and the prestige afforded to his education by the emperor's personal approval were both uniquely Chinese features and were shared by other Chinese doctors in the area. His adventures around the world lent him an air of adventurism to appeal to settlers of the more western portions of the United States. His life in China and his motivations for moving were likewise described in westernized terms. Although his life in the United States displayed many similarities to the negative experiences of other Chinese immigrants, the extraordinary acceptance and respect that he eventually garnered from some Americans highlighted his medical skill. Though Gun Wa’s entire life history was simply a made-up story designed to sell the medicines produced by Smith’s company, the elements of Chinese culture and experience the writers chose to highlight reveal what aspects of the Chinese were most valued by Americans at the time – education,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

charity, family loyalty, and perseverance in the face of hardship. At the same time, the history displayed the limits of American understanding of Chinese culture, as many aspects of Gun Wa's history and motivations were also presented in distinctly western terms, pointing to considerable but not exhaustive cultural exchange between the Chinese immigrants and their adoptive nation.

Chapter 2

A BITTER BREW TO SWALLOW: MAKING CHINESE MEDICINES
PALATABLE TO AN AMERICAN AUDIENCE

The Portland newspaper *Morning Oregonian* described on September 24, 1898 a shipment of ingredients for Chinese medicines. The “usual number of dried snakes,” “a number of plump lizards,” “a lot of ‘sea horses,’” “bundles of centipedes flattened out and pasted on sticks,” “cans full of preserved pollywogs and angleworms,” “pills as large as prunes,” “roots and ‘yarbs’ of many kinds,” and “boxes and bottles of unknown mixtures which would paralyze anybody” filled the customs office with a smell “like a fertilizer factory” and “made some of the men handling the stuff sick.”⁴⁷ Therein lay just one of the fundamental problems with introducing traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to Americans. As Haiming Liu describes, “herbal medicine could not change its ingredients, flavor, or dispensation to suit the taste of mainstream America; rather, it had to remain distinctly Chinese to be effective.”⁴⁸

But despite Liu’s suggestion that Chinese medicine could not suit American tastes, marketing TCM and making them appealing to Americans was precisely what the Gun Wa business had to do. Judging by the pages and pages of published testimonials, supposedly just a select few of “several thousand others” available for inspection at Gun Wa’s office, the business was remarkably successful in that endeavor. The white men behind Gun Wa, most if not all of whom had little to no mastery of the Chinese language, almost certainly did not possess an in-depth understanding of Chinese medicine. They did not have the benefit of years of study and

⁴⁷ “Fragrant Chinese Medicine,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon, September 24, 1898).

⁴⁸ Haiming Liu, *The Transnational History of a Chinese Family: Immigrant Letters, Family Business, and Reverse Migration* in Marcus and Chen, “Inside and Outside Chinatown.”

could not even give a cursory glance over popular Chinese-language reprints of medical works. For instance, “a slight knowledge of medicine [was] general among the [Chinese immigrants,]” who often bought and read medical works such the *Tsung e kam kám* or “The Golden Mirror of Medicine,” which was “a collection of medical works compiled by order of the Emperor Kienlung, in 1740.”⁴⁹ With the limited information the ad writers possessed, they had to make the remedies appealing to their American customers while still maintaining a credible air of Chinese tradition. While the descriptions the advertisement writers came up with might have passed as Chinese enough on the surface, the descriptions betrayed a heavy reliance on Americanization of the remedies to sell the medicines to an American audience.

Once Gun Wa’s medical prowess had been established, the life history writers had to set him apart from other Chinese doctors. They did so with a vague description of medicine that exposed their lack of understanding of TCM and instead more closely resembles patent medicine advertisement tactics. Similar to the situation in the patent medicine industry, the writers had to distinguish Gun Wa from “other Chinese physicians who use the same or similar remedies.”⁵⁰ They did so by claiming “the secrecy of his wonderful success” lay in three major differences between Gun Wa’s medicines and those of other Chinese doctors: first the “combination of remedial agents used,” second the “proportion in which they are mixed,” and third the “process by which the leaves, roots, barks, herbs, etc., are prepared, so as to retain all their medical properties.”⁵¹ All of these supposed differences lack details, suggesting they were not written by anyone with an in-depth knowledge of TCM. That variations in the “combination” and “proportion” of ingredients as well as the “process” of making medicines would change the

⁴⁹ Stewart Culin, “The Practice of Medicine by the Chinese in America,” *The Medical and Surgical Reporter* (March 19, 1887): 2.

⁵⁰ “Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

potency and action of medicine goes almost without saying. Yet, these ill-defined descriptions were the best that the ad writers could come up with and publish as representative of Gun Wa's remedies. At the same time, the secrecy also reflected the conditions in the patent medicine industry, in which the ad writers likely received a considerable amount of experience.⁵² The mystery associated with the unknown enhanced the exoticism of TCM, creating more intrigue that could draw curious Americans looking for alternative medicines. Thus, the vagueness of the advertisers' portrayal of TCM was a necessity due to their lack of cultural understanding but was a necessity that they could spin to their advantage as patent medicine manufacturers did.

Moreover, the medical theory and history of China were also described in distinctly western terms. According to Gun Wa's advertisements:

The most of them [the remedies] act directly on the blood, purifying it and destroying the microbes or bacteria, which the scientific men of Europe and America are only just discovering are the causes of almost all disease that affect mankind. This fact was known to the Chinese in the days of Confucius, though like many of their other discoveries they never cared to make it public.⁵³

This description of the action of medicines did not match very well with traditional theories of Chinese medicine, at least as it was understood by Chinese-American practitioners around the time. According to a treatise compiled in 1902 by the Foo & Wing Herb Company of Southern California, a Chinese company run by Tom Foo Yuen (known as Dr. Foo) and Tom Leong:

The theory of Chinese medicine, in general, is that a substance which can be used for food is suitable for use as medicine, and that a substance which would be poisonous or otherwise injurious as food is not only useless as medicine, but actually hurtful... They [Chinese doctors] strive to strengthen and build up by the use of vegetable substances, many of which are really foods in special form, which are readily absorbed into the system, make new and rich blood, and

⁵² "'Patent Medicine' Secrecy - A Tardy Admission," *California State Journal of Medicine* 21, no. 3 (1922): 134.

⁵³ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

through the blood nourish and sustain the body, just as any form of wholesome food nourishes and sustains.⁵⁴

The Foo & Wing Herb Company description of Chinese medical theory emphasized that through the ingestion and absorption of vegetable remedies, new and nourishing blood would be produced to sustain the patient's body and make them well again. In contrast, Gun Wa's medicine sounded more similar to the myriad "blood purifiers" advertised by patent medicine manufacturers around America in the nineteenth century. The reliance on American explanations of medicine again likely stemmed from both ignorance of Chinese medical theory as well as a desire to add familiarity to the medicines, making them sound more palatable to an American audience. Additionally, while the Chinese had been practicing microbiological techniques in the form of smallpox inoculation since the sixteenth century, the activity of the inoculation was explained in terms of *qi* (气), or the vital life force of TCM, and not bacteriology.⁵⁵ In claiming that the Chinese had already discovered the existence of bacteria, the ad writers appealed again to the newspaper readers' stereotypes of China's antiquity to convince them that contemporary western medical developments were known and indeed ancient concepts to the Chinese. Thus, the advertisement writers could keep western explanations of medicines, familiar and accepted by the American people, without losing the allure of Chinese exoticism.

Yet, Gun Wa's American life history writers were able to accurately portray certain aspects of TCM that could be appealing to Americans, displaying at least a surface-level understanding of Chinese medicine. The most conspicuous example, of course, was the

⁵⁴ Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1902). Both Dr. Foo and Tom Leong claimed to be graduates of the Imperial Medical College at Beijing. A certification of Dr. Foo's education and practice in China, issued by the Imperial Consul General to the Port of San Francisco, Li Yung Yew, is reprinted on page 91 of the treatise.

⁵⁵ Joseph Needham and Gwei-Djen Lu, "Medicine," in *Science and Civilization in China: Biology and Biological Technology*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134, 143.

advertisement of “purely vegetable” remedies.⁵⁶ TCM, as described by the Foo & Wing Herb Company, forbade “the use of all minerals and of all poisonous herbs,” and indeed some native Chinese practitioners even described Chinese medicine as “The Oriental *Herbal* System of Medicine.”⁵⁷ At the very least, the ad writers correctly identified the basis of ingredients for Chinese medicine. Very rarely, however, did Gun Wa’s advertisements address the reason for the purely vegetable composition of the medicines. The most explicit explanation given in Gun Wa’s advertisements was that:

In the treatment of diseases by the aid of minerals, they [the medicines] invariably leave the constitution in an unfavorable state, and do not strengthen it against future attacks; while, on the other hand, the advantage of treatment by such means as fresh infusions and decoctions of wholesome plants, carefully prepared, greatly improve the general health and enrich and renew the blood.⁵⁸

In comparison, the Foo & Wing Herb Company treatise explained that “[t]he Chinese, having made thorough investigations by means of vivisection, laid down the law at the start that no poisonous drugs whatever, and no minerals should be employed in the practice of medicine.”⁵⁹ The difference in emphases between the two explanation was small but nonetheless spoke to the distinctions between the cultural values of the Chinese and Americans. Gun Wa rejected mineral-based remedies primarily based on the harm the remedies bring to the body, while the Foo & Wing treatise instead emphasized the role of cultural norms and the rule of ancient law. The former explanation embodied a more western focus on the individual while the latter embodied more Chinese focus on

⁵⁶ “Multiple News Items,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, May 26, 1889).

⁵⁷ Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 6, 11. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁸ “The Romance in Marriage,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, March 21, 1890). “Mineral” remedies referred to non-plant-derived medicines, such as mercury, and compounds *isolated from* plants, such as strychnine, which were favored by American doctors. Additionally, to be fair, other Denver Chinese doctors did not attempt to explain the reasoning behind their vegetable remedies either and made no comparisons to mineral-based remedies. What makes Gun Wa’s advertisement significant is more that his explanation is not quite correct.

⁵⁹ Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 10.

continuity of social tradition. Though subtle, western cultural norms pervaded even the advertisers' most accurate descriptions of TCM.

When Gun Wa's advertisements described less commonly-known Chinese cultural practices that might appeal to American clients, other small cultural distinctions are also lost. For instance, Gun Wa's life history advertised the fact that he "[made] no pretensions to surgery, as the religious scruples of the Chinese prevent their practicing it, but he [accomplished] with his medicines what the most eminent [*sic*] are unable to accomplish with the knife."⁶⁰ While Chinese doctors indeed claimed to "never resort to the use of the knife," more invasive procedures requiring the use of knives did have their place in Chinese medical practices, as evidenced by doctors' widespread possession of certain frogs expressly for anesthetic purposes.⁶¹ Moreover, a close examination of Foo & Wing Herb Company's treatise suggests that the Chinese preference of herbal remedies over surgery was a result of worries about the "many painful, uncertain and risky" complications inherent in surgery and not of religious qualms.⁶² The accurate descriptions of TCM facts within the Gun Wa advertisements point to cultural transfer from the Chinese to their adoptive American communities. However, the incorrectly placed reasoning behind them suggests that this cultural transfer was incomplete and that Americans understood Chinese culture at only a shallow level. TCM, then, could act as a point of partial cultural transfer.

⁶⁰ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

⁶¹ Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 17; "A Celestial Anæsthetic," *Atchison Daily Champion* (Atchison, Kansas, June 13, 1888). The latter source describes a frog upon which the doctors sprinkle some flour and then prod with a needle. The frog excretes a viscous fluid upon irritation, which mixes with the flour to form a paste that is then dissolved in water and use as a local anesthetic. The Chinese doctor in the article claims that "this anæsthetic... has been known in China for many hundred years and in common use there for deadening the part that was to be cut... every Chinese doctor has in his medicine chest one or two frogs to be used in this way." Of course, this may reflect instead a combination in America, where professionals may have been more scarce, of the roles of doctor and surgeon, which Foo & Wing Herb Company claim are treated as separate professions in China (17).

⁶² Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 17, 151.

The repulsive physical characteristics of the medicines, however, could only be addressed and made appealing to Americans by dismissing parts of their Chinese cultural origin. TCM had an overwhelming reputation in America of smelling and tasting downright nasty. As the *Morning Oregonian* explained in its aforementioned 1898 article about the Chinese medicine shipment, “[f]oul smell [seemed] to be a requisite in most medicines, and if the beneficial effects of medicine [were] proportionate to its odor, the medicines of the Chinese should be the best in the world.”⁶³ A Little Rock paper, the *Arkansas Democrat*, likewise ran an article in 1899 informing its readers that “[t]he taking of a first dose of Chinese medicine [was] an ordeal which [could] be better imagined than described [and was] invariably a bitter decoction.”⁶⁴ Yet, Gun Wa was the only of the three Denver Chinese doctors to address this problem in his advertisements. His life history described his remedies as “not unpalatable or disagreeable to the taste.”⁶⁵ If readers did not take him at his word and perhaps wanted a stronger endorsement for the taste of the remedies, they could always refer to the testimonial of Peter Hanson, a fireman for a local railroad company, who claimed that he “was always glad when it came time to take the medicines, they are so pleasant to the taste.”⁶⁶ Or readers could consult the experience of Reverend Ferdinand Rasse, whose housekeeper had prepared “a pungent and quite agreeable herb tea” from “fragrant and pleasant smelling herbs” she obtained from Gun Wa.⁶⁷ Gun Wa’s advertisers actively attempted to distance themselves from the TCM’s reputation, which stemmed directly from the properties of its ingredients.

⁶³ “Fragrant Chinese Medicine.”

⁶⁴ “Chinese Physicians,” *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Arkansas, April 10, 1899).

⁶⁵ “Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman.”

⁶⁶ “After Years of Pain Mrs. M. J. Hunter Is Cured of Rheumatism by the Use of Gun Wa’s Chinese Remedies,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, January 21, 1890).

⁶⁷ “The Parish Priest!,” *Milwaukee Daily Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 5, 1889).

In contrast, neither of the other two Denver Chinese doctors mentioned the taste of their remedies in their advertisements. In fact, though he was not a Denver doctor, Dr. Foo published a testimonial from a patient, one Mrs. Henrietta Cowan, admitting that the medicines' "taste [was] often bitter."⁶⁸ In order to keep faithful to the roots and traditional formulae of TCM, real Chinese doctors were forced to sell medicines that did not necessarily taste good to Americans. That Gun Wa's advertisements did address this issue revealed a desire to use the superior taste of his remedies as a selling point, but in making the remedies better fit the American palate, Smith and company must have changed the formulations from their authentic Chinese recipes, which real Chinese practitioners could not do.

Gun Wa's denial of using outlandish, non-vegetable ingredients reflected debates within the Chinese-American TCM community itself. Late nineteenth-century newspapers often reported on remedies utilizing the various dried animals and bugs described by the *Morning Oregonian*. In 1889, the *Atchison Daily Champion* printed in 1889 two examples of Chinese prescriptions, one of which included "[p]ickled lizards two pairs, 4 males and 4 females... willow cricket skins, half a dozen, 8 males and 3 females... rattlesnake tail, ¼ of an ounce... [and] devil fish toes, ½ an ounce."⁶⁹ A year later, the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, a major San Franciscan newspaper, ran an article from the *Providence Journal* about a Boston girl who, while visiting the Californian city, received a prescription whose ingredients included lizard, caterpillar, an unspecified type of beetle, and bedbug.⁷⁰ Still again, in 1896, *The Milwaukee Journal* printed the contents of a Chinese medicine package that included "[o]ne large lizard skin

⁶⁸ Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 287.

⁶⁹ "Chinese Prescriptions," *Atchison Daily Champion* (Atchison, Kansas, June 12, 1889).

⁷⁰ "The Boston Girl in San Francisco," *Daily Evening Journal* (San Francisco, California, August 11, 1890).

stretched on a wooden frame... [t]wo small sea horses dried... [and one l]arge dried centipede on a wooden slab.”⁷¹

The problem with determining the prevalence of these ingredients in Chinese remedies lies in the fact that these articles were often sensationalized stories designed to grab readers’ attention by highlighting unconventional practices. Other sources without a stake in attracting readership through such means, however, do corroborate the usage of non-vegetable ingredients. For instance, Nathan Sivin notes that even into the late 1900s, rural Chinese medical workers practicing traditional medicine could be found using “crude drugs and extracts from the vegetable, animal, and mineral kingdoms.”⁷² Thus, while the newspapers may have been exaggerating or cherry-picking their stories, their articles did have at least some element of truth in them.

At the same time, other prescriptions did include vegetable ingredients only, and indeed some real TCM practitioners denied the use of any non-vegetable ingredients. Nineteenth-century American ethnographer Stewart Culin, for an 1887 report on Chinese medicine in America, visited a Chinese doctor in Philadelphia and received a prescription for “fifteen medicines... all of vegetable origin” to alleviate a chest cold.⁷³ So, not all white Americans received animal ingredients in prescriptions when they visited Chinese practitioners. Some Chinese doctors themselves took the claims that they used animal parts in their remedies as an insult and actively worked to debunk the rumors. The Foo & Wing Herb Company treatise characterized “the vulgar charge, which has been disproved hundreds of times, that Chinese physicians are in the habit of using unclean things, toads, lizards and other disgusting materials

⁷¹ “Chinese Medicine,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 1, 1896).

⁷² Sivin, “Traditional Chinese Medicine and the United States: Past, Present, and Future.”

⁷³ Culin, “The Practice of Medicine by the Chinese in America,” 2.

in their practice” as “a bitter attack upon the Chinese System of Medicine,” suggesting that no TCM remedies used animals and that all the claims to the contrary were false.⁷⁴ In light of the lack of agreement on the subject within the American TCM community, the Gun Wa company may not necessarily have been selling a product that was completely different from that advertised by other Chinese doctors. Rather, the insistence of the company, other Denver doctors, and even noted doctor Tom Foo Yuen that their Chinese remedies were “purely vegetable” may have been true for the specific branch of TCM to which they, and many other doctors who emigrated to America, subscribed.⁷⁵ The disuse of dried animals and bugs may have alternatively been a unique compromise of a hybrid Chinese-American traditional medicine that arose precisely in response to American disgust. In fact, this all-herbal characterization of Chinese medicine may have helped these remedies gain acceptance by Americans familiar with the school of eclecticism, which relied heavily on “botanical and herbal remedies” and was fairly popular in the Midwest and South.⁷⁶ By fitting TCM into the framework of a well-established school of alternative medicine, Chinese doctors would seem less foreign and consequentially appear as a more attractive alternative to regular physicians.

In the end, the hybridization of western and eastern medicine in Gun Wa’s advertisements proved a successful strategy. The imprecise or slightly inaccurate descriptions may have arisen from incomplete cultural sharing between the Chinese and non-Chinese Americans, but the blending in of western medical advances and perceptions of the Chinese helped to make the remedies more familiar to an American audience. When an aspect of Chinese

⁷⁴ Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 96.

⁷⁵ “Multiple News Items”; “Attention Sufferers,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, May 4, 1890); “Ling Sang Chinese Remedies,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, March 3, 1890). The last of these advertisements was by Ling Sang, mentioned earlier as one of the Denver Chinese doctors whose advertisements were largely the same during his stint in town.

⁷⁶ Hamowy, “The Early Development of Medical Licensing Laws in the United States.”

medicine – such as the absence of mineral ingredients or the limitations on surgery – might prove appealing to Americans, the writers of Gun Wa’s advertisements readily advertised such an aspect without fully understanding the cultural nuances behind the Chinese practices. The bitter taste of the medicine was something inherent to Chinese remedies, and that Gun Wa’s advertisements included testimonials to the contrary suggests that the business may have altered traditional recipes to better fit the American palate. The advertisement of the purely vegetable nature of the remedies was not unique to Gun Wa, but some Chinese doctors did seem to have used animal or bug parts in their prescriptions. The doctors who vehemently denied the use of such ingredients, then, may have also changed their recipes to better appeal to westerners. Thus, with a basic and incomplete understanding of TCM and with the knowledge of what Americans were looking for in alternative medical practices, the Gun Wa advertisers picked pieces from both western and eastern medical traditions to successfully advertise the Gun Wa remedies to Americans. As an exotic alternative to regular medicine, TCM and Chinese doctors were at the cusp of acceptance in America but required at least some level of westernization to achieve greater success, pointing to the limitations on the acceptance of the Chinese and their culture in the late nineteenth-century America.

Chapter 3

THE POWER OF A TESTIMONIAL: ADVERTISING MEDICINES AND DOCTORS THROUGH NARRATIVES

“Last February I was advised to try Gun Wa’s Chinese remedies, and I did so; I firmly believe I save my life by so doing,” Mr. A. L. Williams, “an old employee of the D. & R. G. Railroad... well known in Denver,” told Gun Wa advertisement writers in an interview conducted sometime in early 1889.⁷⁷ This bold claim was published in the June 28, 1889 issue of the *Rocky Mountain News* for residents of Denver to read with the hope that they too would be inspired to follow in the steps of the well-known and respected Mr. Williams. Again and again, Gun Wa’s advertisement columns were taken up by dozens of testimonials from local and long-distance customers outlining their ailments, their experiences with Gun Wa’s miraculous cures, and their heartfelt recommendations that fellow sufferers see the famous Chinese doctor and receive the same benefits they had.

Such use of testimonials from well-known and respected Americans was not a new development. Patent medicine had, in fact, pioneered the use of testimonials in the early 1800s, and through the late 1800s testimonials remained one of the “peculiar features” of patent medicine advertisements.⁷⁸ A patent medicine manufacturer would often “[accumulate] thousands of them [testimonials], which it [published] widely.”⁷⁹ That every Chinese doctor in Denver, including Gun Wa, relied on testimonials for their advertisements speaks to the usefulness of adopting advertising methods from patent medicine to market Chinese medicine,

⁷⁷ “Gun Wa Again Heard From,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, July 28, 1889).

⁷⁸ Sherman, “Advertising in the United States.”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

presenting their medicines as specialty items instead of regular medicine. At the same time, the Chinese doctors were not simply selling their medicines – part of what made Chinese medicine truly stand out was the entire cultural experience behind the remedies, including the doctors. Thus, to convince non-Chinese Americans of the efficacy of its remedies and the trustworthiness of the doctor, the Gun Wa business and other Denver Chinese doctors had to harness the respectability of non-Chinese spokespeople by carefully featuring the testimonials that would draw in the most customers from a diverse set of people in the United States.

There remains, of course, questions as to the authenticity and fidelity of the testimonials. The Gun Wa advertisers had certainly not shied away from embellishing, stretching, or outright manufacturing the truth in their quest to create an appealing fictional Chinese doctor who could stand up to scrutiny but still draw in business. Conceivably, these same ad writers would not be above fabricating more identities and stories to sell their products, a simpler task perhaps than soliciting, collecting, and sorting through testimonials from a hundreds, if not thousands, of customers. Yet, as made-up as Gun Wa himself was, most if not all of the testimonial writers were in fact actual citizens.⁸⁰ This use of real people certainly came in part from practicality. The testimonials appeared more legitimate with the inclusion of a physical address and open invitation for interviews, and if any reader were to attempt to contact a nonexistent individual, the fraud could hardly have lasted long. Although they did indeed obtain written endorsements from the individuals they claimed, the Gun Wa writers were not above embellishing the testimonials. For instance, *The Milwaukee Sentinel*'s January 1891 article on the Gun Wa case

⁸⁰ I provide cross-references in the footnotes for most testimonial writers. In some cases, this has not been possible. For instance, attempting to find an “A. L. Williams” who worked on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad is difficult due to the lack of specificity of the name and the fact that the search algorithm of the *19th Century U.S. Newspaper* online archive ignores single letter inputs, so the database returns thousands of results whose hits are for “W. W. Williams” and other such incorrect combinations. Nevertheless, the verification of several identities leads me to believe that all of the testimonials came from real people.

reported that the company “even secured endorsements from some sisters in a local charitable institution. . . one of the sisters was reported as saying ‘God bless Gun Wa,’ but this was afterward proven to have been added by one of the concern’s enterprising agents.”⁸¹ So, while specific language may not be entirely trustworthy, the general gist of the testimonials and the bulk of their content did originate from whom the advertisers claimed.

The Gun Wa advertisements used testimonials of religious leaders to counter Americans’ prejudice against the Chinese when considering the use of Chinese remedies. James Harvey Young points out that organized religion represented “institutions in which people put great trust,” and thus patent medicine advertisers considered clergymen to be “highly esteemed as testimonial-writers.”⁸² The Gun Wa advertisers were no exception. One of the Denver advertisements from June 1890 listed six “prominent clergy” members who had provided Gun Wa with their testimonials and asked readers whether “these people [would] indorse him if he were a fraud.”⁸³ The need to appeal to the respectability of the clergy members revealed a fundamental lack of trust in Chinese medicines that did not have a western voice selling them. Even TCM practitioners, who enjoyed a relatively elite social status among Chinese immigrants, held nothing close to the reputability of western organizations and institutions.

This trust in religious leaders, however, could successfully be harnessed to provide an easy means to gain the trust of non-Chinese communities. For instance, Mother Superior M. Alexia confessed that she had “placed but little if any confidence in the merit of [Gun Wa’s] being a Chinese, but [she] concluded, on reflection to give his herb and vegetable remedies a

⁸¹ “All Pleaded Guilty.”

⁸² Young, “Patent Medicines.”

⁸³ “An Open Letter,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 15, 1890).

trial.”⁸⁴ The testimonial thus implied that if a respectable leader of the religious community was able to overcome her prejudice against the Chinese, then other members of the community could likewise do so. In fact, the Mother Superior, as someone viewed as a pillar of moral and religious life, set an example for her fellow Christians to follow in terms of racial tolerance. Thus, the trust placed in organized religion could be used by the Gun Wa advertisers to convince people to give the Chinese doctor a chance despite their racial prejudices. Religious leaders, again due to their high social standing in an important cultural institution, also provided a spokesperson through which the Gun Wa business could target certain ethnic groups. In an open letter published in the *Rocky Mountain News* in June of 1890, Reverend J. Keizer of the First Holland Reformed Church at Zeeland, Michigan, “sincerely and heartily recommend[ed]... [Gun Wa’s remedies] particularly to [his] fellow countrymen, the Holland people of the United States.”⁸⁵ Because organized religion was one of the strongest cultural ties between immigrants, appeals made to immigrant groups through religious leaders could find a broad audience whose minds would be more open to suggestions from these leaders.

However, in using the testimonials of religious leaders, the Gun Wa company and indeed most Chinese practitioners had to water down certain aspects that lay at the heart of Chinese medicine. The history and practice of TCM were and are still rooted in Chinese religious and philosophical belief systems.⁸⁶ Yet, Gun Wa’s advertisements and the experiences of his patients

⁸⁴ “God Bless Gun Wa,” *Milwaukee Daily Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 30, 1889). Mother Superior Alexia is mentioned in an 1890 *Milwaukee Daily Journal* article reporting a fire at the St. Joseph Convent as well as in a report about the history of the convent sponsored by the city of Campbellsport, where it is located. “Destroyed by the Flames,” *Milwaukee Daily Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 1, 1890); *History of St. Joseph Convent, Campbellsport, 1873-1973* (Campbellsport, WI: Village of Campbellsport, 2005).

⁸⁵ “An Open Letter.” In an online directory of members of the Christian Reformed Church, John Keizer is listed to have served in the First CRC Zeeland in Zeeland, Michigan from 1888. “John Keizer” (Christian Reformed Church in North America), <https://www.crcna.org/node/268996>.

⁸⁶ Lin Shi and Chenguang Zhang, “Spirituality in Traditional Chinese Medicine,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 5–6 (December 2012): 959–974.

displayed little reliance on the religious or philosophical underpinnings to the remedies, which was likely a result of the company owners' own lack of cultural knowledge. In all of the descriptions of Gun Wa's remedies in his life history, the only real mention of the theory behind the efficacy of the herbs and roots was that they were "nature's own remedies," as observed by the the "wonderful, God-given instinct in animals [that] causes them, when sick or suffering, to search for certain leaves, plants or roots, which are a specific for their particular ailment."⁸⁷

Other Denver Chinese doctors do not even include this much theory in their advertisements, so the omission of the religious and philosophical explanations is not simply due to ignorance but was a conscious choice. Gun Wa's patients, like those of other Denver Chinese doctors, were also simply cured by "medicine"; they did not modify their lifestyles, take any special preventative measures against future illness, or strengthen their minds with Taoist, Buddhist, or Confucian exercises as TCM practitioners in China would suggest they do.⁸⁸ In order to gain the trust of western religious leaders and use their voices to sell the medicine, Gun Wa's advertisement and method of treatment had to be stripped of competing religious and philosophical elements. That other Denver Chinese doctors also left out these elements suggests that this cultural omission was necessary so TCM would not be unappealing to Americans, who already had their own religious and philosophical foundations.

The testimonials of well-known members of the community also provided a useful way of borrowing the social standing of white Americans to increase the prestige of TCM practitioners. One Denver Gun Wa advertisement from July 1889, for instance, featured the aforementioned A. L. Williams, an employee of the D. & R. G. Railroad "well known in

⁸⁷ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

⁸⁸ Shi and Zhang, "Spirituality in Traditional Chinese Medicine"; Foo & Wing Herb Company, *The Science of Oriental Medicine, Diet and Hygiene*, 11.

Denver,” who described his ailment of three years, the failure of western doctors, and the success of Gun Wa’s treatments, concluding with an earnest promise that Gun Wa was “the man you can depend on.”⁸⁹ Gun Wa, as a racial outsider in the mostly non-Chinese Denver community, held little social standing of his own in the eyes of people who were not already convinced of his remedies. Instead, he had to rely on the endorsements of established non-Chinese community members to appear dependable. The necessity of borrowing the reputation of a white man, even after the Gun Wa company had been in town for almost 10 months and had established a decent amount of fame for its supposed Chinese doctor, points to the disparity between the locals’ acceptance of the two men. However, the difference in trust placed in well-known American men and Gun Wa was not simply a function of the time spent working in an area. In an advertisement in *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, the testimonial of James Welsh, who lived in Leavenworth, Kansas, ended with his declaration that he was “well known here [in Kansas], lived here [in Kansas] for twenty-six years.”⁹⁰ A comparison of testimonials across different advertisements reveals that Gun Wa’s ad writers often published only excerpts from letters written to the doctor.⁹¹ Thus, the ad writers made a conscious decision to include Welsh’s length of residency in the advertisement even though his hometown was not located in even the same state as Milwaukee. Welsh’s trustworthiness was not built on the fact that he was well-known to locals but that he was a well-established non-Chinese man in general. The reputation that the Gun Wa advertisements sought

⁸⁹ “Gun Wa Again Heard From.” As I mentioned in an earlier footnote, I could not locate documents verifying the existence of this individual due to the ambiguity of his name as given in the testimonial.

⁹⁰ “Gun Wa’s Chinese Herb and Vegetable Remedies Cure All Diseases,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 6, 1889). A James Welsh is reported to have owned a stable at the corner of Ninth and Walnut in Leavenworth, KS, in 1886, which is precisely the address given in the testimonial. *The Leavenworth Times* (Leavenworth, KS, April 25, 1886), 5.

⁹¹ For example, the excerpt of John M. Jones’ testimonial in a September 1889 issue of the *Rocky Mountain News* was shorter than the one in the above-mentioned issue of *The Milwaukee Sentinel*. “When I Went to Gun Wa I Was in a Fearful Condition,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, September 10, 1889); “Gun Wa’s Chinese Herb and Vegetable Remedies Cure All Diseases.”

to borrow was not based solely on familiarity to local readers but on distinction in any American community.

Testimonials from well-known women were especially important to gain other women's trust in a setting as intimate as healthcare. This trust was particularly important in light of the racial tensions between the Chinese and white Americans. The issue was less salient in Denver, where the last episode of violence had taken place almost a decade before Smith founded the Gun Wa company and had been a result of labor competition among American and Chinese men.⁹² However, contact of any kind between Chinese men and American women was a sensitive subject in Milwaukee, where only a few months ago allegations of inappropriate relations between white girls and Chinese men had spawned a violent mob.⁹³ As a result, smoothing over these gendered racial tensions was important to build up Gun Wa's white clientele in Milwaukee. In California at least, Chinese doctors were particularly popular amongst white women, who often made up the majority of the doctors' white patients, because Chinese doctors preferred noninvasive examination methods whereas western doctors usually asked their female patients to undress for examinations.⁹⁴ Nineteenth-century attitudes on sexuality – famously embodied in the Comstock laws that criminalized circulation of explicit materials through the federal mail system – were fairly conservative, and the belief in a connection between sexual excesses and sexual or nervous debility prevailed.⁹⁵ Given public understanding of such diseases, many women affected with reproductive, sexual, or other diseases considered

⁹² Mark R. Ellis, "Denver's Anti-Chinese Riot" (University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 2011), <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.asam.011>.

⁹³ Jew, "Chinese Demons."

⁹⁴ Marcus and Chen, "Inside and Outside Chinatown."

⁹⁵ Charles E. Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role in 19th-Century America," *American Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (May 1973): 131.

specific to the female sex would have had a difficult time confiding in Chinese doctors unless said doctors held their confidence.

The testimonials of female socialites helped soothe American women's possible misgivings toward Gun Wa. Mrs. J. W. Laing, a "well-known lady of Colorado Springs," for instance, expressed that she would "be glad if any poor suffering woman would be led to trust in [Gun Wa] and try [his] wonderful chinese [*sic*] vegetable remedies," as "American doctors [were] a failure as far as women's diseases [were] concerned."⁹⁶ Her testimonial addressed women's doubts about the medical profession as a whole, attributing the poor experiences they may have had to western medicine alone. Instead, she presented Gun Wa as a superior alternative to western physicians. Such an endorsement elevating Gun Wa, a Chinese doctor, above white practitioners helped ease doubts that lingering racial tensions in the city created, and the emphasis on Laing's social status underscored her reliability as a recommender. Other testimonials from well-known women were not directed at women in particular but served a similar purpose of easing white women's racially-based doubts about Gun Wa. Mrs. James Harper, who self-professed to be "well acquainted in Sheboygan, and over at the 'Falls,'" wrote of her experience "overcoming [her] prejudice against medicines [she was] unfamiliar with" to finally seek treatment from Gun Wa for her "female weakness."⁹⁷ Many white patients were ashamed of their reliance on Chinese doctors, forcing Gun Wa to send his mail and packages without his name on them.⁹⁸ That a woman as well-connected as Harper would publicly declare

⁹⁶ "A Russian Horror," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 6, 1890). Cemetery Records Online states a J.W. Laing was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Colorado Springs on 8/27/1896. "Evergreen Cemetery, Colorado Springs, El Paso County, Colorado" (Interment.net), <http://www.interment.net/data/us/co/elpaso/evergreen/records-laa-laz.htm>.

⁹⁷ "From Sheboygan," *Milwaukee Daily Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 29, 1889). Mrs. Harper does not give enough identifying information to locate documents confirming her existence. However, considering the relatively close proximity between Sheboygan and Milwaukee, the advertisers were unlikely to have boldly claimed he was "well acquainted" if she were a made-up person.

⁹⁸ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

that she had seen a Chinese doctor, and on top of that for an ailment of such a private nature, would be strong incentive for other white Americans and particularly women to give Gun Wa a try despite what misgivings they might have about Chinese medicine. American women's wariness toward Gun Wa, due in part to his race, could be allayed by the public declarations of positive experiences from other well-known women.

However, Gun Wa's advertisements did not solely rely on the experiences of religious leaders and the social elite; the testimonials of workers cemented his reputation as a doctor in touch with everyday Americans. For many working-class Americans, their livelihoods depended on their continued health and physical ability to work. Once Gun Wa had gained their trust with testimonials from well-known community members, he could secure a large and dependable patient base if he proved to the working class that he could truly help them. To accomplish this task, his advertisements needed testimonials from ordinary people working in a variety of conditions. One such testimonial writer was Henry D. Taylor, the captain of a ship on the Great Lakes who was afflicted with a severe case of rheumatism he had contracted from "the life of exposure and hardship that every man must endure who sails."⁹⁹ The testimonial immediately established Taylor's status as man who had to endure a difficult working environment in order to earn his livelihood, presenting a case that would be relatable to many laboring readers. Because these readers either had suffered, were suffering, or conceivably could suffer from unfortunate illnesses that would also impair their working ability, Taylor's experience was more relatable to them than those of religious leaders or socialites. Readers had to be assured Gun Wa's cures

⁹⁹ "Sailed the Lakes," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 18, 1889). Taylor was said to be around 45 in the testimonial, placing his birth around 1845. In 1877, a Captain Henry Taylor is reported to have fallen into the hold of a schooner. As Taylor would have been around 32 at the time, it is plausible he was working on the ship and was in fact that man. "Marine Matters," *Milwaukee Daily Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 22, 1877).

were affordable and helpful under their circumstances, so the testimonials of ordinary working Americans provided an element of relatability to most readers, a purpose different from the testimonials of community leaders. Even though the working class might not have the same respectability as religious leaders or the social elite, their testimonials were still important for the Gun Wa character to gain broader acceptance from members of American communities.

In some cases, the testimonials of working Americans could help Gun Wa reach specific groups of people who might otherwise have paid him little attention, giving him a privileged status above other Chinese doctors within certain social circles. George F. Hughes offered Gun Wa entry into one such group. A Wisconsin brakeman, his experience with Gun Wa's remedies was so remarkable that he had "since sent a number of the railroad boys to GUN WA" sometime before September, 1889.¹⁰⁰ The advertisements of neither of the other two major Denver Chinese doctors included the testimonial writers' occupations. By including the information, Gun Wa could thus increase his appeal to other Americans who worked in similar professions and, experiencing the same workplace environment, may have suffered from similar health concerns. As evidenced by Hughes' story, these individuals could also act as ambassadors of sorts to create a more compelling reason for people from their occupation to visit Gun Wa. Indeed, William Cameron, a conductor of a car owned by the Milwaukee City Railway company, read "the testimonial of that railroad brakeman [Hughes, and] made up [his] mind to go and see the Chinese doctor [himself]."¹⁰¹ The testimonial that caught Cameron's eye was one made by a fellow railroad man, and without that specific testimonial and the detail of the writer's

¹⁰⁰ "A Brakesman Says So," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 17, 1889). I could not find information on a George F. Hughes in La Crosse or Milwaukee.

¹⁰¹ "Gun Wa's Chinese Remedies," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 20, 1889). A Mr. William Cameron, conductor on the Milwaukee & Northern railroad, married Miss Emma E. Burch on 5/26/1885. "About the State," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 24, 1885).

occupation, Gun Wa might not have secured the customer. So, to gain a competitive advantage over other Chinese doctors in securing business from certain groups of people with a common occupation, Gun Wa could rely on building relationships with single in-group individuals and then use the existing community bonds to insert himself into the group's collective awareness.

Female workers also appeared in Gun Wa's testimonials not only to catch the attention of other female workers but also to show the depth of Gun Wa's compassion for and integration into the Milwaukee community. As industrialization made it cheaper to buy goods instead of making them at home, the percentage of American women working outside of the home increased to about 18% in 1890, with these women representing about 17% of the total labor force.¹⁰² Among these working women was Rosalie Lemke, whose inflammatory rheumatism was a particularly unfortunate case because she had "no one to help [her] to earn [her] livelihood and [her] living depends upon [her] strength," leaving her in fear that she "would become an object of charity."¹⁰³ She was not the only woman in that situation; Katharina Alpen too was "a poor woman" whose "living depended upon [her] daily toil, and... from the effects of [her] sickness [*sic*] [she] had been obliged to give up work."¹⁰⁴ Thus, their plight was not uncommon and represented a serious issue to which other women with similar problems would be searching for a solution. As was the case with other specific groups of Americans, reading about the positive experiences of other people in their circumstances would motivate working women to seek the same remedies the testimonial writers had used. But, these testimonials also capitalized on the particularly heartbreaking circumstances of these women to garner more social approval

¹⁰² Esther Peterson, "Working Women," *Daedalus* 93, no. 2, (1964): 671–699. The statistics include female workers 14 years and older.

¹⁰³ "Good Deeds Never Die," *Milwaukee Daily Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 19, 1889). Mrs. Rosalie Lemke is on a list of people whose mail remained at the post office on 1/24/1890. "Letter List No. 4," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 25, 1890).

¹⁰⁴ "Good Deeds Never Die." Alpen did not seem to have left behind easily traceable records.

for Gun Wa. He was singlehandedly able to save the livelihoods of these two local women who had no one else to provide for them, displaying a deep sense of charity and benevolence toward some of the most vulnerable members of his adoptive community. Thus, instead of borrowing the reputation or connections of the testimonial writers, Gun Wa was able to highlight his own contributions to the community in the testimonials of poor working women.

Gun Wa's treatment of the laboring class also exposed how racial tensions could combine with class conflict in Denver and how a clever advertiser could take advantage of the situation. Mrs. M. J. Hunter, an African-American washerwoman, asked her fellow Denverites to consider that "if the rich white folks [could] support 600 Chinese laundrymen in Denver to the detriment of us poor wash women, we poor people ought to support one good Chinese doctor."¹⁰⁵ Her statement exposed the growing American resentment of Chinese laborers who were willing to work for lower pay, yet somehow Gun Wa, a Chinese man, represented to her a way to get back at the elite white Americans who were supporting her competitors. Race, then, was not a simple straightforward category to divide people in Denver but was tangled with notions of class. Gun Wa, who presented no threat to the livelihoods of the washerwomen but did to that of white physicians, could use the class tension underlying Denver society to distinguish himself from other Chinese immigrants and present himself as a friend, not a competitor, of the poor.

With thousands of testimonials supposedly on file, the Gun Wa advertisers had to carefully choose the ones likely to attract them the most customers to print. Of the most notable testimonials, three major categories emerge. First were the testimonials from religious leaders and well-connected socialites, from whom Gun Wa borrowed prestige and social standing in the

¹⁰⁵ "After Years of Pain Mrs. M. J. Hunter Is Cured of Rheumatism by the Use of Gun Wa's Chinese Remedies." I could not find any documents about Mrs. Hunter, but the testimonial gave her address as 1926 Blake Street. It is unlikely that the advertisement writers would include an address for any fictional characters they may have created, as it would be very easy for a Denver resident to call upon the address and discover the fraud.

community that he, as a Chinese man in predominantly white cities, did not hold on his own. In order to gain the trust of his adoptive communities, he had to insert himself into established groups and utilize the far-reaching connections of the community leaders. Second were the testimonials of working men, whose shared experiences with average readers provided proof that Gun Wa's remedies were affordable and not simply geared toward those in the upper echelons of society. These testimonials helped bring Gun Wa closer to the middling lot of the community. Lastly were the testimonials of working women, many of them poor. These women did not offer much social standing or connections for Gun Wa to borrow, so the advertisers used these stories to highlight Gun Wa's generosity and care for the community instead. In a sense, the varied purposes of the testimonials reflected the relative social standing of Chinese doctors in the local communities. The Chinese were less well-off and less respected than white community leaders but better off in both respects compared to poor working women. Thus, unlike their laboring brethren who competed with those on the lower rungs of society, Chinese doctors were more comparable to working men: neither the best off nor the worst. Ultimately, Gun Wa's advertisements reveal how targeted use of narrative in advertisement could bypass racial, gender, and class barriers that would have otherwise prevented a racial outsider from gaining the acceptance of an American community.

Chapter 4

THE HEAVY HAND OF THE LAW: THE GUN WA TRIALS

On November 22, 1889, the Denver branch of the Gun Wa business, not yet unmasked as an operation run by white men, “received another visit from the officers of the law yesterday... for dispensing medicines without a diploma.”¹⁰⁶ A few weeks earlier, around the 3rd of the month, Lee Wing had also “been indicted for practicing as a physician without a license.”¹⁰⁷ The crackdown on Chinese doctors reflected conflict between the doctors and the white-dominated communities in which they practiced, particularly among those white men in charge of the various arms of the law. Yet, the reactions of the Denver and Milwaukee communities revealed that the Chinese doctors also enjoyed the support of a nontrivial portion of the communities. For a moment, the Chinese doctors seemed to come close to bridging the cultural divide between local Chinese and Americans through their work, utilizing their connection with American patients to educate them about Chinese culture and prove the goodwill of the Chinese people. But as the Milwaukee Gun Wa fraud was exposed in sensational trials that riveted the national attention in 1890 and 1891, public trust toward the Chinese eroded in a regionally-dependent manner. Though covered by fewer newspapers, the Denver trials proved to have an even more destructive effect on the trust of the city’s American residents in the Chinese and Chinese doctors. Years later, after much hard work, Lee Wing would be able to help repair relations with white Americans in Denver, but through the rest of the nineteenth century, organized medicine would continue to remain skeptical of Chinese practices.

¹⁰⁶ “Local Brevities,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, November 23, 1889).

¹⁰⁷ “Criminal Cases.”

*Section 1*WHAT'S IN A NAME?: MEDICAL LICENSING LAWS IN DENVER AND WISCONSIN,
1890

At the heart of these cases was an ongoing battle over who could call himself a doctor. Following the end of the Civil War, the AMA began working with local medical organizations to lobby state legislatures in earnest for licensing laws. Early successes in Alabama provided regular physicians with confidence as they moved forward, and move forward they did, convincing more and more states to adopt some type of restrictive licensing law.¹⁰⁸ However, state laws in the late 1800s would often allow heterodox practitioners to obtain licenses, and indeed some state medical boards required the appointment of heterodox members, revealing the compromises the AMA and organized medicine had been forced to make to rival sects of practitioners.¹⁰⁹ Thus, these decades represented a period of transition and power consolidation. Regular physicians did not yet have a monopoly over the medical field, and heterodox practitioners still enjoyed support from both the public and its elected officials. Yet, the tide of legislation and judgment was moving against heterodox practitioners despite criticisms from vocal citizens distrustful of regular medicine's power grab.

The Colorado licensing laws in effect at the time of Gun Wa's 1889 arrest illustrated this concession of power and the influence that alternate schools of medicine still possessed. In 1881, the state had set up a board of medical examiners – to be comprised of “six physicians of the regular, two of the homæopathic, and one of the eclectic school or system of medicine” – with the power to issue medical licenses upon the applicant's presentation of a diploma from a

¹⁰⁸ Hamowy, “The Early Development of Medical Licensing Laws in the United States.”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

reputable medical college or passage of an examination.¹¹⁰ The division of representation on the board reflected the growing power of regular physicians, but at the same time the regular school of medicine faced ongoing challenges from the two other major schools. Mainstream medicine had not yet fully consolidated its control over medical regulation, try as it might. With the competition for state-recognized legitimacy already so fierce between the three largest schools, physicians from even smaller schools of medicine stood little chance of gaining representation on the state board.

One aspect to note about medical licensing laws is that they were all implemented on the state level. The United States federal government has never granted medical licenses; instead, the task of setting up medical standards, administering tests, and granting licenses was left wholly to the states.¹¹¹ In *Dent v. West Virginia*, 129 U.S. 114 (1889) the Supreme Court passed judgment for the first time on the constitutionality of licensing laws. West Virginia's law had followed the same basic structure as Colorado's, and indeed most states with laws had similar conditions to obtain a license.¹¹² Frank Dent was arrested for practicing without a license, as the state board of health had judged his diploma from the American Medical Eclectic College of Cincinnati, Ohio to be inadequately reputable.¹¹³ He appealed his conviction on the grounds that the statute deprived him of the right to practice his profession, which was protected under the Due Process

¹¹⁰ *The General Statutes of the State of Colorado, 1883* (Times Steam Print and Publishing House, 1883), 773–774. A third way to obtain a license was to supply proof of 10 years' practice in the state. This method was largely only used in initial legislation and would later be repealed. For instance, Indiana's 1885 law granted licenses to those presenting "the affidavit of two reputable freeholders or householders of the county, stating that he or she has resided and practiced medicine... in this state continuously for ten years." By 1897, the only way to obtain a license in Indiana was to present a diploma from a reputable college. Harrison Burns, *Annotated Statutes of the State of Indiana Showing the General Statutes in Force January 1, 1894*, 1894, 466; Harrison Burns, *Annotated Statutes of the State of Indiana Supplement of 1897*, 1897, 704.

¹¹¹ Jody A. Charrow, "Why Not a Federal Medical License?," *Renal and Urology News* (January 2014).

¹¹² *Abstract of Laws Regulating the Practice of Medicine in the Various States and Territories* (Boston, 1889), 20.

¹¹³ "Constitutional Law - Due Process of Law - Physicians - License. *Dent v. State of West Virginia*," *The Central Law Journal* 29, no. 11 (1889): 262–266.

Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court, however, rejected his contention, ruling that police powers allowed the states to “prescribe all such regulations as in its judgment will secure or tend to secure [its people] against the consequences of ignorance and incapacity, as well as of deception and fraud.”¹¹⁴ Thus, these medical licensing laws were justified in terms of consumer protection and not of excluding any sect of medicine judged to be “illegitimate” by regular physicians.

However, the citizens’ reactions to the laws in certain states, such as Wisconsin, revealed their doubt as to the supposed purpose of the licensing laws, underscoring the gulf between the citizens’ opinions of heterodox medicine and their lawmakers’. When the senate was in the process of passing a limiting the usage of any titles of doctors, physicians, and surgeons to those who were qualified to testify as such in courts, it received two petitions from its citizens against the bill. The first, signed with 31 names and including three self-professed M.D.s, argued that:

They [the petitioners] [did] not need any further or more legislation to protect their rights or dignity than the laws of the state now afford[ed] them... [T]hey believe[d] [the bill] aim[ed] to discredit and outlaw midwives, nurses, magnetisers and rubbers, whose services [had] been found to be serviceable and successful when the M. D’s have failed... and if the M. D’s require[d] the legislation... to protect them against the competition of quacks, they had better surrender at discretion, for the quacks, as they [were] falsely so-called, [would] win with a discriminating public.¹¹⁵

Support for alternative methods of medicine was still alive and well within Wisconsin. Indeed, a portion of the public felt strongly enough that alternative medicine was in fact beneficial to the health of the community that they wrote to their legislators specifically opposing a law that would impose more exclusivity on the medical field. They, as a discriminating public and

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ *State of Wisconsin Senate Journal, Thirty-Fourth Annual Session, 1881.*

consumer base, did not need the state to intervene to supposedly protect them from nonexistent dangers. The second petition, from Milwaukee resident Lewis Sherman, M. D., pointed out that:

the bill empower[ed] an irresponsible body of physicians in each county to decide in regard to the medical qualifications of their immediate rivals in practice, and to throw them out of practice if they choose... [and] this irresponsible body of physicians [was] to consist of practitioners of the so-called old allopathic or regular school of medicine, who [were] known to entertain a feeling of hostility toward physicians of other schools.¹¹⁶

Even more explicit here was the pushback against the consolidation of power by the regular physicians. To Sherman and the other 31 petitioners, the regular physicians' agenda of stamping out competition was clear, and the legislation would only serve to allow the physicians to abuse their power to pursue their aims. With no petitions submitted to the state Senate in favor of the legislation, the citizens of Wisconsin appeared to be unenthusiastic about the new law and more concerned than their legislatures were about the potential harm the restrictions would cause to the medical profession.

Despite the laws in place, Chinese doctors such as Gun Wa were still able to practice and advertise in Denver and Milwaukee by adapting to the law as it was applied to them. Lee Wing, in a business strategy similar to that of Gun Wa, avoided breaking the law by advertising his remedies only, "as United States laws [did] not allow Chinese physicians to practice in America."¹¹⁷ Interestingly, while Gun Wa's advertisements stated he could not legally practice from the very start, Lee Wing's initially only specified that his consultation was free, "as he only [sold] the remedies," until he clarified the point a few days after his aforementioned November 1889 run-in with Denver law enforcement.¹¹⁸ Gun Wa, like Lee Wing, came into conflict with the police because of his medical practice, but he was only summoned to appear before the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 345.

¹¹⁷ "Dr. Lee Wing, Chinese Remedies," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, November 10, 1889); "Gun Wa."

¹¹⁸ "Dr. Lee Wing Chinese Physician"; "Gun Wa."

magistrate and did not appear to have been formally indicted with any charges.¹¹⁹ Thus, the specific wording of the advertisements appeared to be able to placate local authorities to some degree.

Without the legal understanding of white Americans, real Chinese doctors in Denver were at a legal disadvantage to Gun Wa. Lee Wing, who operated independently of any white businessmen, did not seem to understand the laws as well as the American men behind “Gun Wa” did. Only after Lee Wing had encountered trouble with the law could he more successfully circumvent legal issues. His strategy was to learn from mistakes; in contrast, the Gun Wa business was largely able to avoid serious trouble from the start because of the knowledge and perspectives of white men. However, Lee Wing adapted quickly, suggesting he was readily able to find resources to learn more about the law and how to deal with the setback and simply needed to know what aspects of his practice needed to be changed.

Chung Hing’s advertisements likewise demonstrated his increasing awareness of Colorado law. While he noted he had a “certificate from the English hospital at Hong Kong” in his 1886 advertisements, his advertisements two years later emphasized instead that he “has his diploma from the British government, and is a registered physician of this city.”¹²⁰ By October 1891, when the Gun Wa trials were in full swing, he boasted in the *Rocky Mountain News* that he “is licensed to advertise his business as a physician (not compelled like other so-called Chinese Quacks to do business by advertising Chinese Remedies).”¹²¹ From the start, Chung Hing recognized that American customers valued education, particularly a western one, when

¹¹⁹ “Local Brevities.” No other mention of Gun Wa in terms of legal issues is mentioned in the *Rocky Mountain News* after this article until the Wisconsin trial.

¹²⁰ “In This Morning’s News,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 29, 1886); “Dr. Chung Hing,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, December 20, 1888).

¹²¹ “Dr. Chung Hing Sure Cure for Piles.” Indeed, based on the lack of any such reporting in the *Rocky Mountain News*, Chung Hing was never visited by the police or charged with practicing without a license, unlike Gun Wa and Lee Wing.

considering Chinese doctors. But, he did not begin to take the law into account in his advertisements until later on when Gun Wa presented a serious challenge to his business, and he took even longer until he used the legal distinction between himself and the other Denver Chinese doctors to the fullest extent. Thus, while the Chinese doctors were not always completely aware of American law, their response to legal issues showed they were willing and readily able to adapt to the legal restrictions of the American medical profession.

Moreover, Gun Wa and Lee Wing were able to spin the limitations the laws placed on them in such a way as to garner sympathy for themselves, demonstrating a strong enough grasp of American views on equality in law to use the concepts to their advantage. Lee Wing called attention to the “mistaken legislation” under which “no Chinese physician, whatever his depth of learning, is permitted to practice medicine in the United States.”¹²² Instead of simply letting the law limit his advertising, Lee Wing painted the state laws as unfair and thus garnered more sympathy for himself. Judging by his continued and growing presence in Denver and its newspapers, this method worked quite well. Gun Wa utilized similar language as Lee Wing did in advertising, pointing out that “though American laws prevent[ed] [Gun Wa from] practicing medicine, nothing [could] prevent his selling his healing remedies to sufferers from a small sum, or for giving friendly information and advice to the afflicted free of charge.”¹²³ Instead of treating his inability to practice as a sign that he was not a legitimate doctor, Gun Wa’s advertisers painted his actions as rebellion against unreasonable laws. Try as the government might to prevent him, Gun Wa would see to it that he would find some way to use his talents for the good of the American people. The advertisements thus effectively portrayed the law as discriminatory and actively hurtful to the public, tapping into both earlier Milwaukee resentment

¹²² “Attention Sufferers.”

¹²³ “The Romance in Marriage.”

of the state's laws and the ongoing struggle in Colorado between various medical schools of theory. The doctors' defiance of the statutes was made out to be a heroic effort performed for the sake of their potential clientele, not for their own business profit.

The ways in which Gun Wa and Lee Wing styled themselves also demonstrated their understanding of the *de facto* limits of the law and the local tolerance for their activity. Under Colorado statutes, anyone who “[professed] publicly to be a physician and prescriber for the sick, or [attached] to his name the title ‘M. D.,’ or ‘surgeon,’ or ‘doctor,’ in a medical sense” was considered to be “practicing medicine.”¹²⁴ Yet, both Gun Wa's and Lee Wing's advertisements were filled with phrases such as “Chinese doctor” and “Chinese physician,” and neither hesitated to print “Dr.” before their names. They continued using these titles, which under Colorado law constituted practicing medicine, even after local authorities paid them both visits in 1889. That this practice did not change in either of their advertisements, and that Lee Wing was not later arrested for the same offense, suggests the Chinese doctors understood what types of violations the local law enforcement was willing to tolerate. Though Lee Wing might not have had full knowledge of the law or how it was enforced before, once he did grasp the legal aspects involved in practicing as a Chinese doctor he appeared to understand the limits to which he could push the law as well as the men behind Gun Wa did. Thus, while Chung Hing obtained a license and could legally refer to himself as “Dr. Chung Hing,” he did not necessarily receive many additional benefits from it. The Denver authorities, at least, appeared willing to tolerate its unlicensed Chinese doctors so long as they tiptoed correctly around the law.

All-in-all, the Chinese doctors of Denver and Milwaukee, both real and fake, experienced a tenuous relationship with state laws. On one hand, authorities certainly enforced the restrictions

¹²⁴ *The General Statutes of the State of Colorado, 1883*, 775.

on medical practice but did so in ways not entirely consistent with the letter of the law. The challenge Chinese doctors faced, often with striking success, was determining the line between acceptable and unacceptable challenges to the law. On the other hand, some residents of Milwaukee had objected to the exclusivity of the medical licensing laws from the start, and similar public sentiment against the increasing power of the regular physicians existed in Colorado, where the composition of the state medical board reflected the ongoing struggle for legitimacy between different schools of medicine. Because of the changing landscape of the medical profession, Chinese doctors and advertisers could insert themselves into the discourse surrounding the professional developments and elevate their conflict with the law into a struggle for the sake of the public. Through their clever maneuvering and the framing of their narratives, the Chinese doctors displayed a remarkable understanding of not only their but also the American public's relations with medical licensing laws.

Section 2

“A SOMEWHAT SENSATIONAL LEGAL DRAMA”: PROCEEDINGS AND NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE GUN WA TRIALS

The beginning of Gun Wa's fall revealed just how convincing the Gun Wa deception was. When the police raided the Milwaukee branch on June 19, 1891, the warrant was for “unlawful practice of medicine, the said Gun Wa not being a regular practitioner or a graduate of any school of medicine in the United States.”¹²⁵ The image of the Chinese doctor that the business had created matched closely enough with the expectations of white Americans that the Milwaukee authorities had believed the Gun Wa of their city was a real Chinese doctor. The medicines too, were sufficiently Chinese that the Denver authorities had not pursued any further

¹²⁵ “Decision in Gun Wa Case.”

action against their local Gun Wa after summoning him to court. Evidently, despite the holes in Gun Wa's life story and TCM descriptions the advertisers inadvertently created, the Gun Wa character had been convincing enough for Americans to believe.

However, once the Milwaukee Gun Wa branch had been raided, the truth of the establishment came to light, and the United States pressed charges for "cheating by a kind of conspiracy and misrepresentations as to the identity of the Chinaman...[who was] only a common coolie, unable to talk English... [and] circulation of obscene literature, under the name of 'medical treatises.'"¹²⁶ While District Attorney John Toohey had also presented evidence in the initial state hearing "that the concern violates the pharmacy laws of the state in preparing certain alleged medicines," this charge was ultimately dropped.¹²⁷ The Milwaukee Gun Wa trio of Lee, Wilt, and Janson ended up pleading guilty to defrauding the public in exchange for a *nolle prosequi* of the only other charge, which was that of sending obscenity through the mail.¹²⁸ When the business was unmasked, the legal focus shifted from unlicensed practicing to the intent of the business and the white men behind it. Thus, Lee's role as an unlicensed doctor took a backseat to the company's other offenses.

This view that Lee was less responsible for the company's crimes revealed both exploitative and sympathetic attitudes toward the Chinese in Milwaukee. When the trio pled guilty "to save time and expense," the company lawyer, J. V. Quarles, argued that the Gun Wa company had not in fact committed any crimes because Lee had merely been "used for an advertisement, just as a wooden Indian was placed in front of a cigar store."¹²⁹ The white men of

¹²⁶ "Gun Wa Making a Defense."

¹²⁷ "Light Fines Imposed," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 10, 1890); Jerome A. Watrous, ed., *Memoirs of Milwaukee County: From the Earliest Historical Times Down to the Present, Including a Genealogical and Biographical Record of Representative Families in Milwaukee County*, vol. 1 (Madison, WI: Western Historical Association, 1909), 535.

¹²⁸ "Light Fines Imposed"; "All Pleaded Guilty."

¹²⁹ "Light Fines Imposed."

the company had considered Gun Wa little more than a mascot and were more than willing to admit the fact to try and obtain a lighter sentence. The exploitation of the Chinese and of Chinese culture for the profit of white men was normalized during the late 1800s in even areas like Milwaukee that had very few Chinese. However, some Americans were sympathetic to the Chinese. For instance, Judge Sloan, who presided over the state trial, would have preferred separate trials so he could “either acquit the Chinaman or else give him a nominal fine, as [Judge Sloan] believed him to be an innocent party to the transaction,” contrary to Toohey’s claim that the Gun Wa concern was “the greatest fraud that had ever been perpetrated upon the people of Wisconsin” and “there was no reason why the defendants should not be severely punished.”¹³⁰ Even if Toohey, who knew full well that Lee was unable to understand English, fully believed in Lee’s guilt and attributed as much blame to him as to the other Gun Wa men, Lee still had at least one supporter in the room who recognized that Wilt and Janson had taken advantage of him. Thus, while the exploitation of the Chinese did not seem to draw much of an emotional response from most of the white men involved in the trial, some white men in positions of power did show concern for Lee, indicating the Milwaukee legal circle was not completely mired in racial prejudice.

The judges of the federal trial, however, were less sympathetic toward Lee’s plight. The judge initially in charge of the trial, Judge Romanzo Bunn, had not been “satisfied in his mind as to the sufficiency of the indictments” and had previously allowed the defense to quash two indictments.¹³¹ But due to scheduling constraints, he was replaced with Judge James G. Jenkins, who not only denied the defendants’ motions to quash indictments similar to those that Judge

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Gun Wa Cases Continued,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 28, 1890); “Gun Wa Bound Is Over,” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 15, 1890).

Bunn had previously quashed but also imposed on each of the three men a \$500 fine, the maximum allowed for the charge of mailing obscene materials to which the trio had pled guilty.¹³² Despite the fact that the trio had pled guilty in both trials to spare themselves and the court time and expenses, the men received very different responses from the judges at the state versus at the federal levels, particularly in Lee's case. Considering the facts of the cases were the same, the major difference between the two trials boiled down to the judges' perceptions of the severity of their crime against the citizens of Wisconsin.

Similar to the judges' viewpoints of the case, the tone and descriptions of the trials' newspaper coverage differed by region, reflecting variations in the attitude toward the Chinese in different parts of the country. In Milwaukee, the newspapers were largely sympathetic toward Jim Lee. A few days after the initial state proceedings began, *The Milwaukee Journal* published an article, mostly quoting portions of other newspapers, that defended Chinese doctors. In the article, Dr. Wickersham, a Chicago physician, declared he could not reason "how a Chinese doctor could be very well examined if he couldn't speak English," and the *Daily Herald* suggested that American physicians might learn "much from [their Chinese counterparts] if they treated [them] respectfully" and collaborated with them.¹³³ The attitude prevailed in Chicago that the medical profession was growing unfairly exclusive, and this opinion was echoed in Milwaukee by its local newspaper. Even as regular medicine gained more control over the industry's regulation, Chinese doctors could still find sympathy among the most respectable of physicians and American newspapers. In fact, the Gun Wa trial helped ignite the sparks of discontent in Milwaukee that had been evident in the petitions against the 1881 licensing law. The advocacy for Chinese doctors, then, was tied to anti-exclusivity sentiments. As for Jim Lee

¹³² "The Gun Wa Cases," *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 26, 1891).

¹³³ "The Gun Wa Case," *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 25, 1890).

himself, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* pointed out that “it [was] doubtful whether the Chinaman... had any clear knowledge of the part he was playing” and that “he was the least guilty of the three, he is a poor and ignorant man, unacquainted with the language or the customs of the county.”¹³⁴

Like Judge Sloan, the journalists and editors believed that Lee had simply been exploited by the white men in charge of the operations. The characterization of Lee as a man in the bottom echelons of society further cemented his image as a victim of scheming businessmen out to turn a profit by any means they could. Thus, the newspapers’ sympathy for Jim Lee and Chinese doctors in Milwaukee was strongly connected to reactions against both developments in the medical field and racial exploitation of the Chinese.

The story the San Franciscan newspapers told of the trial was decidedly more negative and less sympathetic to the Chinese because the relations between the Chinese and Americans was drastically different on the West Coast. In its June 26, 1890 report covering the beginning of the affair, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported that “the Chinese doctor, Gun Wa, and two of his accomplices were arrested at Milwaukee yesterday by the United States authorities for conducting a swindle and using the mails to further disreputable work.”¹³⁵ The newspaper put a particular emphasis on “Gun Wa’s” role in the fraudulent enterprise and treated Wilt and Janson as merely aides to his schemes. In fact, Wilt and Janson were not even deemed important enough in the case to name. The circumstances the *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported were the opposite of what had actually taken place, which the Milwaukee newspapers had already reported on days before the *Daily Evening Bulletin*’s article. A later article in the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, published in July during the federal proceedings, likewise portrayed “Gun Wa” as the ringleader by announcing that “the United States have confiscated \$12,000 *belonging to Gun Wa*, the

¹³⁴ “The Field Still Open,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 14, 1890).

¹³⁵ “Telegraphic Notes,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California, June 23, 1890).

alleged Chinese physician,” and still later the newspaper announced that the state trial ended when “Gun Wa, a coolie who posed for a patent medicine firm as a great Oriental physician, pleaded guilty at Milwaukee” along with “the white men who managed the concern.”¹³⁶ Again and again, at various stages in the trials during all of which the Milwaukee newspapers’ articles sympathetic of Jim Lee, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* stubbornly stuck to its presentation of the story that the Chinese doctor was the true mastermind behind the fraud. Moreover, the newspaper refused to acknowledge “Gun Wa’s” true name, Jim Lee, until its last piece on the case, distorting the truth of the matter to make the Chinese man more villainous.¹³⁷ By calling the Chinese man involved “Gun Wa,” the *Daily Evening Bulletin* made “Gun Wa” appear more like a real person who could truly be blamed for the swindle instead of the mascot the company had created to sell its products. All-in-all, the San Franciscan tailored its coverage of the Gun Wa trials to make the Chinese man seem most at fault, which may have been more believable in a city with a large Chinese population and widespread racial tensions.

The different responses to the Gun Wa business reflected local opinions of the Chinese. However, because the character of Gun Wa was not simply an ordinary Chinese laborer but a Chinese doctor, opinions about the developments of in the medical field inevitably mixed with racial considerations in the minds of many involved in or reporting the trials. In Milwaukee, some residents may have not been exceptionally shocked by the exploitation of the Chinese, but both the state judge and newspapers displayed concern for Lee because of his low status and usefulness as a symbol of rebellion against regular physicians’ consolidation of power in the

¹³⁶ “The Gun Wa Case,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California, July 3, 1890); “Telegraphic Notes,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California, September 10, 1890). Emphasis mine.

¹³⁷ “Pleaded Guilty,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California, January 27, 1891). The problem was not simply that the *Daily Evening Bulletin* was unable to receive the news or did not understand how Chinese names worked. Take for instance *The Los Angeles Times*, which was located in the same state, also housed a large population of Chinese immigrants, and yet managed to include in its initial June 23, 1890 report that “Gun Wa” was merely the alias of Jim Lee. “Chinese Iniquity,” *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California, June 23, 1890).

professional medical sphere. On the federal level, the judges were more impersonal and did not see Lee as especially worthy of pity or special consideration. In San Francisco, where the Chinese population vastly outnumbered that of Milwaukee, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* largely pinned the blame on “Gun Wa” and not any real man involved, particularly not the white men, reflecting racial tensions on the West Coast. The response to “Gun Wa” and Jim Lee as a Chinese doctor, standing as he did at the intersection of a profession steadily gaining respectability and a race facing increasing hostility in the United States, was a peculiar mix of views of the two. While to some extent Chinese doctors held a more elite status and were better accepted by white Americans than everyday Chinese laborers, they still could not escape their race and the sentiments, both negative and paternalistically positive, that their fellow countrymen faced. The identity of Chinese doctors could not be separated into their race and their occupation, but rather those two most visible aspects of their identities combined to create a wholly unique mix that forced Americans to reconsider their conceptions of both the Chinese and medical practitioners.

Epilogue

REBUILDING TRUST: DENVER CHINESE DOCTORS IN THE AFTERMATH
OF THE GUN WA TRIALS

By the time Frank L. M. Smith, the founder and head of the infamous Gun Wa business, turned himself in to the United States in February of 1891, the national buzz surrounding the Gun Wa trials had largely died down. The only newspapers to cover the story of Smith's trial were *The Milwaukee Journal* and *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, both located in the city where Judge James Jenkins finally brought the months-long spectacle to an close with a \$1,000 fine.¹³⁸ In March of the same year, Denver authorities arrested the men in charge of the local Gun Wu branch: James T. Hale, D. K. Noss, and William H. Hale.¹³⁹ Over the course of the next year, the *Rocky Mountain News* covered this second round of trials largely by itself, as few other newspapers were interested in the story until 1894, when United States authorities apprehended W. H. Hale, who had been acting as the Denver Gun Wa. Yet, even this sparser set of newspaper reports on the Denver branch and W. H. Hale's trial revealed the depth of the the negative impacts on Denver views of the Chinese community. The Chinese doctors still in business responded to the increased hostility toward doctors of their race by distancing themselves from Gun Wa and highlighting their assimilation into western culture. In the end, while Lee Wing

¹³⁸ "Gun Wa Case at an End," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 25, 1891). Smith was convicted of two indictments: sending obscene materials in the mails and using the mail for fraudulent purposes. "Decision in Gun Wa Case"; "Gun-Wa Guilty," *The Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 24, 1891).

¹³⁹ "More Gun Wa Convictions," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, December 22, 1891). Interestingly, the Denver branch had only had a Chinese man posing as Gun Wa for the weeks Smith was personally running the business. Afterward, it appeared that "Gun Wa" was said to be sitting in a separate room. "Sage Was Away Up." According to the AMA in 1911, William H. Hale was a notorious quack whose involvement in the Gun Wa scheme was just the latest in a string of fraudulent operations. *Nostrums and Quackery: Articles on the Nostrum Evil and Quackery Reprinted from The Journal of The American Medical Association*, 1st ed. (Chicago: Press of American Medical Association, 1911), 15.

eventually helped bridge the divide between the Chinese and American communities in Denver that resulted from the Gun Wa fraud, he and other Chinese doctors could find no acceptance from professional medical organizations.

By the time criminal proceedings were well under way in Denver, the name “Gun Wa” had become a badge of shame, reflecting an increased aversion to Chinese doctors. Josie Smith, the former typist of the Gun Wa corporation, was nicknamed “Gun Wa II” by some of her friends for her involvement with the scheme, and “the burden of carrying around this malodorous sobriquet instilled in her heart a desire to end her life,” a task she did indeed attempt in December of 1892.¹⁴⁰ Once associated with miracles and ancient learning, the name of “Gun Wa” was now reserved to mock and shame its bearer instead. That a woman even attempted to commit suicide to escape her association with Gun Wa points to the deep scars the fraud left on the Denver community as a whole. The stigma remained with the name particularly in Denver. When W. Hale was arrested a year and a half later, the *Rocky Mountain News*’ headline read “Gun Wa is Taken in,” in contrast to *The Milwaukee Sentinel*’s headline of “Another Gun Wa Case” with the subheadline “W. H. Hale to Be Prosecuted in Denver for Fraud.”¹⁴¹ Though both cities had been plagued by the Gun Wa fraud, Milwaukee did not hold the name of Gun Wa in as low of regard as Denver did. As had happened during the Milwaukee trio’s trial, the Milwaukee newspapers acknowledged that white men, not Chinese doctors, were to blame for the fraud. In contrast, despite the fact that W. Hale had played the part of Gun Wa during most of the business’s operations in Denver, the newspaper seemed to place a disproportionate amount of blame on the Chinese.

¹⁴⁰ “Strychnine Fails,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, December 15, 1892).

¹⁴¹ “Gun Wa Is Taken In,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 19, 1894); “Another Gun Wa Case,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 20, 1894).

To counteract the impact of the deepened stigma against Chinese doctors in Denver, Lee Wing and Chung Hing moved to distance themselves from the Gun Wa model of business and emphasize the ways in which they conformed with western expectations of doctors. Lee Wing's advertisement published in August 1890, a month and a half after the *Rocky Mountain News* first reported on the Milwaukee Gun Wa trials, proclaimed that he:

[had] no Manager, Interpreter or American Doctors in attendance who [kept] him in a dark room and transact[ed] his business for him, as sound judgement will tell you that American doctors do not understand Chinese remedies. Neither [was] Lee Wing used as an ornament by which to advertise their so-called Chinese remedies. Lee Wing [stood] alone in his business, and also as a Chinese Doctor of Denver.¹⁴²

In order to escape from the suspicion against Chinese doctors the Gun Wa trials had instilled in the people of Denver, Lee Wing contrasted as many of his business operations to those of Gun Wa as possible. While he still took pride in his identity as a Chinese doctor, Lee Wing emphasized his independence, skill, and ability to personally treat patients as American doctors could. Likewise, in July 1890, Chung Hing began declaring in his advertisements that he “converse[d] in very fair English,” and in November 1891 he added that he was indeed a licensed physician, unlike the other Chinese doctors in Denver.¹⁴³ Even more so than Lee Wing, Chung Hing stressed that he followed the laws of the state and acted as the most respectable of western medical practitioners was expected to act. Thus, to overcome the Denver citizens' deepened prejudices against Chinese doctors, Lee Wing and Chung Hing were forced to reassert their identities in more American ways.

¹⁴² “Are You Blind?,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, August 3, 1890).

¹⁴³ “Sure Cure for Piles”; “Dr. Chung Hing Sure Cure for Piles.”

The goal of the Chinese doctors was not only to ensure their continued business but also to build more trust and understanding of the Chinese in Denver. In Gun Wa's life history, the company's ad writers had given Gun Wa an admirable goal, "that in ministering to the suffering inhabitants of his county [the United States]... he [might], in a measure, be able to partially allay the foolish prejudice that exist[ed] against his race in the minds of many Americans."¹⁴⁴ In actuality, the Gun Wa business did the exact opposite, creating more distrust of Chinese and Chinese doctors than before in Denver. However, the ideal that a Chinese doctor might be able to use his talents to act as a cultural ambassador between the Chinese and Americans in a community lived on. In a December 1890 advertisement that took on the interesting structure of a poem, Lee Wing described his experience as a Chinese doctor in Denver as thus:

Grateful hearts [in Denver] thrust gold upon him [Lee Wing];
 Made him rich despite his pleadings;
 Told him: "We were dying, surely,
 But you gave our lives back to us."
 Tears of joy and fulfilled promise
 Dimmed the eyes of grateful Lee Wing,
 And his soul was flushed with rapture
 When he saw the good accomplished.

"When I came among you," he said,
 "You received me not. And why for?
 Just because my skin was yellow,
 Just because your hearts were stony;
 And because you thought that nothing
 Good could come from ancient China.
 Oh, my brethren, my words fail me
 When I try to tell my feelings."¹⁴⁵

In contrasting the manner in which he was received, based purely on his race, with the Denver residents' supposed perception of him after he had effected his miraculous cures, Lee Wing highlighted the change in public perception that he had already brought for himself. As he had

¹⁴⁴ "Strange History of a Chinese Gentleman."

¹⁴⁵ "Come to Me When Care Assails You," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, December 21, 1890).

earlier in the poem been appalled at the way the Chinese were mistreated in San Francisco, the change in Denver must have been particularly gratifying for Lee Wing and gave his skills as a doctor meaning beyond simply healing the sick.¹⁴⁶

Lee Wing was indeed able to use his social status as a well-known member of the Chinese community to reach out to white Americans in Denver and spread awareness of Chinese culture. Around Chinese New Year dinner in 1897, for instance, he treated a number of his American friends to a “superb feast” that was “totally unlike the traditional idea of a Chinese dinner, and would have done credit to any first-class hotel or restaurant” and included “a number of Chinese delicacies... all of which were much enjoyed by those present.”¹⁴⁷ Afterward, he showed his guests how some of his medicines were prepared and “exhibited quite a number of objects of interest, such as pictures of the first emperor and physician, certificates from the Chinese ministers... volumes of medical works in Chinese, [and] a watch chain which has been handed down as an heirloom from father to son in a doctor’s family for over 400 years.”¹⁴⁸ Lee Wing took the opportunity of inviting white American friends over to help them experience various aspects of Chinese culture. In his own home, he was able to control the experiences of his culture that his guests received, giving them an authentic view of the best of Chinese life. In turn, the *Rocky Mountain News*, which had so harshly derided “Gun Wa” and the conceptions of Chinese doctors the name embodied, now spread the word that Chinese culture was both respectable and indeed fashionable. With greater appreciation of Chinese culture, the non-Chinese community might better accept Chinese immigrants in Denver and understand how

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ “A Chinese Dinner,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, February 10, 1897). His guests were Judge and Mrs. H. B. O’Reilly; Misses E. A. Mageon, R. E. Adams, E. M. Caulk, and H. Oliver; and Messrs. J. M. Burnell and W. S. Sloan.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

American stereotypes were not in line with reality. Thus, Lee Wing, was able to use his connections with white Americans to benefit his fellow countrymen who might not otherwise have an opportunity to interact in a close setting with Americans.

However, the scar Gun Wa left would not be forgotten so easily, and ultimately Lee Wing found that the American medical profession simply would not accept Chinese doctors. When the Colorado Medical Society held its meeting in June 1897, Lee Wing prepared a paper for the meeting detailing certain points of Chinese medical history, and though he was “not a member of the Colorado Medical society, and his school of practice may not be recognized by the society... [he] offered his paper in good faith... and [felt] that it should be given attention by the society in its deliberations.”¹⁴⁹ Once again, Lee Wing attempted to use his position as a doctor to reach out to an American community and help it better understand Chinese culture and the Chinese people. But, in contrast to his success with the socialites of Denver, the Colorado Medical society ignored his paper and his attempts to act as a cultural ambassador.¹⁵⁰ The different responses displayed once again that curious aspect of being Chinese and a doctor. On one hand, among those not involved in the medical field, Lee Wing held considerable respect and social standing as a “finely educated physician, a gentleman of broad views [who] can discuss the social economic problems of the day equal to a politician.”¹⁵¹ But among those who supposedly practiced the same trade, Lee Wing was still no better than any average Chinese immigrant, an outcast who would not even receive the medical society’s acknowledgement. His experience revealed, as did those of the other Chinese doctors, the limits of American acceptance

¹⁴⁹ “Centuries Behind Time,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 16, 1897).

¹⁵⁰ “Ancient Chinese Medical Science,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado, June 20, 1897).

¹⁵¹ “A Chinese Dinner.”

of the Chinese in the nineteenth century and how dialogues in medicine, culture, and the law could combine to alter perceptions of race and belonging.

The exploration of the Gun Wa company's advertising methods, its eventual downfall, and the its effects on residents' trust of Chinese doctors in Denver and Milwaukee brings to life a new perspective on Chinese-American relations in the late nineteenth century. Diverging from previous scholarship of the region, which has focused primarily on episodes of racially-motivated violence, this thesis instead examined how we can understand the struggle of the Chinese to be accepted through the lens of medicine. The proximity and trust the practice of medicine required between the patient and the doctor, the necessity of marketing to the non-Chinese in areas with small Chinese populations, and the debates surrounding the increasing exclusion in the medicine profession provided spaces for cultural contact and communication. As potential cultural diplomats, the actions and image of Chinese doctors had the potential to disproportionately affect non-Chinese perceptions of the Chinese. At the same time, the flux of the medical field and medical regulations in the late nineteenth century, combined with the vulnerable position of the Chinese, created an intersection of identities that white businessmen could exploit. Yet, even here is a chance to probe the views of the Chinese that Americans held and question how a variety of issues played into the development of interracial relations. By broadening scholastic focus from bouts of violence to the operations of diverse aspects of everyday life, the history of Chinese immigrants will begin to receive the same rich and nuanced treatment in the Great Plains and American Midwest as it has in the West Coast.

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