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Transcolonial Influences on Everyday American Imperialism: The Politics of Chinese Domestic Servants in the Philippines

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From the first years of the American occupation of the Philippines, the American colonial elite ran their households with the help of Chinese servants. The preference of government officials, including Governor William Howard Taft himself, for Chinese domestic labor was in flagrant disregard for the policy of Chinese exclusion as well as the principle of “benevolent assimilation,” according to which the Americans claimed to be “uplifting” the Filipino people by providing them with the opportunity to experience the dignity of labor. In opting for Chinese rather than Filipino domestic labor, elite Americans were replicating the traditions of the “Old World” colonizers, particularly the British in Asia.

Key words: domestic labor, U.S. imperialism, Chinese servants, Philippines, colonialism, Chinese exclusion

U.S. labor policies in the Philippines played an important part in the American colonial vision, and one of the first steps taken toward labor reform was the implementation of Chinese exclusion laws. In his study of labor in the Philippines, Greg Bankoff observed that Governor William Howard Taft emphatically opposed Chinese labor, citing the need to concentrate instead on instructing Filipinos in the dignity of labor. Americans viewed with concern the dominance of Chinese labor in the neighboring British colonies of Singapore and Malaya and the corresponding relegation of Malays “to an inferior and altogether

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negligible condition.”¹ Despite this professed disapproval of British labor policies, in private the U.S. elite and Governor Taft himself were more ambivalent on the question of Chinese labor. According to a recent study by Adam Burns, Taft favored limited Chinese immigration from the first year of his arrival in the Philippines, although he couched his comments not in terms of his own beliefs but as a response to the demands of the mercantile community.²

On one subject Taft was quite adamant: He was prepared to ignore the principle of Chinese exclusion in order to secure for himself and other members of the American elite a supply of Chinese labor for domestic service. In fact, contrary to his public stance, he demonstrated a personal preference for Chinese over Filipino domestic servants. In the racialized hierarchy of the colonial world, Chinese men were deemed more skilled and reliable than Filipino servants. Chinese cooks in particular were highly prized for their cooking skills. Chinese migrants, who were most often employed as single men, were also preferred for being without family ties. The employment of Chinese servants, who in most cases were male, was an important marker of social success in a society dominated by the “Old World” colonial customs of the British and Spanish.

The literature on American domestic service arrangements in the Philippines has thus far been concerned with understanding the relationship between Americans and their Filipino servants as that between colonizer and colonized. In *White Love*, Vicente Rafael argued that, in the Philippines, like “valuable possessions, native servants furnish the means with which to romanticize the inequality and celebrate the consequences of conquest.”³ Rafael pointed to the colonial home, and the domestic service domain in particular, as a site where the rhetoric of American exceptionalism was shown to be hollow and concluded that U.S. colonialism

1. Greg Bankoff, “Wages, Wants, and Workers: Laboring in the American Philippines, 1899–1908,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 74 (2005), 59–86, especially 61 and 72.

2. Adam David Burns, “An Imperial Vision: William Howard Taft and the Philippines, 1900–1921” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2010), 119.

3. Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Philippine History* (Durham, N.C., 2000), 75; see also Meg Wesling, *Empire’s Proxy: American Literature and U.S. Imperialism in the Philippines* (New York, 2011).

was “far from an exception to, and in some ways continuous with, the European colonialisms of the early twentieth century.”⁴ Our study of Chinese servants also questions the exceptionalist view of U.S. imperialism. We argue that the U.S. preference for Chinese domestic servants reveals the extent to which the Americans were content to set aside their reformist agenda and to emulate the cultural traditions of “Old World” imperialists.

Drawing on the work of Ann Laura Stoler and others on the political significance of “matters of intimacy” in colonial societies, this article explores American imperialism in its everyday contexts through private letters and published personal accounts.⁵ Like Kristin Hoganson, we treat American homes in the Philippines as “contact zones” in which American, Spanish, and British traditions of domesticity and imperialism mixed and mingled.⁶ We begin our discussion by examining the underlying ideas of American imperialism in the Philippines and how these compared with British traditions of colonial governance. We then offer an analysis of American responses to the Spanish, Filipino, and British traditions of having numerous servants. Finally, we consider the importance of Chinese servants in the Philippines and the extent to which Americans came to rely on their services.

4. Rafael, *White Love*, 14; Vicente Rafael, “Colonial Domesticity: White Women and United States Rule in the Philippines,” *American Literature*, 67 (1995), 640. On exceptionalism, see Daniel T. Rodgers, “Exceptionalism,” in Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, eds., *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton, N.J., 1988), 21–40; George M. Fredrickson, “From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History,” *Journal of American History*, 82 (1995), 587–604; Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review*, 96 (1991), 1031–1055; and Robert Gregg, *Inside Out, Outside In: Essays in Comparative History* (New York, 1999), 1–26.

5. Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History*, 88 (2001), 829–865; Stoler, “Matters of Intimacy as Matters of State: A Response,” in *ibid.*, 893–897; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002), 8; Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie, “Introduction: Reflections on Sex, Race, and Region,” in Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie, eds., *The Devil’s Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York, 1997), xv; John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago, 1997).

6. Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium, The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007), 4, 8, 10–11; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Hoboken, N.J., 2007), 7.

American imperialism in a transcolonial context

The U.S. government took power in the Philippines by force in a war against the Filipino people that lasted for several years. In an attempt to whitewash over these violent beginnings, in official rhetoric, U.S. imperialism claimed to be governed by the principle of “benevolent assimilation” that aimed to “uplift” the Filipino people. The narrative of American exceptionalism, with its emphasis on democratic ideals, proclaimed the desire to win the “confidence, respect and affection” of the colonized people. According to President William McKinley, the United States sought to cultivate the “perfection of the Philippine people” by educating them in the ways of “the higher civilization of mankind.”⁷

A British woman, Mrs. Campbell Dauncey, who lived in the Philippines during the first decade of American occupation, had heard of this American claim and wrote with some disapproval of the American rule over Filipinos, whom she described as Malays:

I am told that the United States does not pose as either “white” or “ruling” in these islands, preferring, instead, to proclaim Equality, which seems a very strange way to treat Malays. . . . I only hope it won’t mean that we shall have unmanageable servants and impudence to put up with.⁸

Dauncey worried that any suggestion of equality would make the domestic service relationship, and indeed the colonial relationship itself, untenable. But while Dauncey viewed the British and U.S. modes of imperialism as diametrically opposed, there is much to suggest that Americans, like the British, were overtly conscious of their status as white and ruling, and were equally governed by colonial notions of racial hierarchy.

This critical British view of the American project reminds us that such discussions were part of everyday conversation. Americans in the Philippines were being watched and judged by the other colonial powers and found wanting. The British believed themselves to be more experienced in matters of colonial rule and better suited to maintaining the reputation of the Anglo Saxon.⁹

7. President William McKinley cited in Rafael, *White Love*, 21.

8. Mrs. Campbell Dauncey, *An Englishwoman in the Philippines* (New York, 1906), 13.

9. Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), 11; Kramer, “Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910,” *Journal of American History*, 89 (2002), 1315–1353.

Thus, the treatment of servants, far from being a matter of private individual preference, took on larger proportions as a means to defend the U.S. reputation for competence as a colonial power.

Whether or not American officials in the Philippines chose to emulate British imperial practice, there is no doubt that in the early years of occupation, under the Republican administration, British policies and cultural forms were scrutinized closely. British academic Alleyne Ireland, whose work on the *Far Eastern Tropics* was published in 1905, had been appointed Colonial Commissioner of the University of Chicago in 1901. His comparative study covered the British colonies in Asia, as well as Java, Indochina, and the Philippines. He held up the British model as the ideal, in particular citing Hong Kong as “one of the most striking chapters in the history of the white man’s work in the tropics.” On the question of self-rule for the peoples of the region, he implicitly rejected the more liberal interpretations of American policy, concluding that “control must rest with the white man.” His work also sought to justify a reliance on Asian labor, as he reminded readers that “in no part of the tropics can manual labor be performed by white men.”¹⁰

On their arrival in the Philippines, Americans would have observed the cultural practices of the British firsthand. British prominence in Manila was not surprising, given the city’s geographical location in the South China Sea and the frequent shipping connections between Hong Kong and Manila. Since their occupation of Manila from 1762–1764 after the Spanish defeat in the Seven Years’ War, British capital had continued to dominate the colony. When the Americans arrived in Manila, there was already an English Club, a Tiffin Club, a Jockey Club, and tennis and cricket grounds. Even in the 1920s, Governor Francis Burton Harrison described the British in Manila as forming “a large and very important colony, influential both in business and in society.”¹¹ The British in Manila, like their counterparts in Hong Kong, had a reputation for enjoying the luxuries of colonial life, and one of the most iconic images of British colonialism was the figure of the Chinese manservant or “houseboy.”

10. Alleyne Ireland, *The Far Eastern Tropics: Studies in the Administration of Tropical Dependencies* (New York, 1905), 16, 14, 4, 17.

11. Rafael, *White Love*, 5; Willis Bliss Wilcox, *Through Luzon on Highways and Byways* (Philadelphia, 1901), 20; Francis Burton Harrison, *The Corner-Stone of Philippine Independence: A Narrative of Seven Years* (New York, 1922), 275.

The influence of Spanish and Filipino cultures on American residents was also apparent. Prior to 1898 Manila society was layered, with three main influences—the Spanish colonists, the Chinese merchant class, and the Filipinos, including those of mixed descent. The term “Filipinos” in this context did not refer to all the indigenous peoples of the islands, but more narrowly to those who had assimilated into Spanish Catholic society while retaining the cultural legacy of the pre-colonial period. After 300 years of Spanish colonial rule, the social mores of Manila’s households reflected these diverse influences.

On the need for numerous servants

In his portrait of the colonizer, Albert Memmi distinguished between the colonizer “who refuses” and the colonizer “who accepts.” The latter, he argued, “basks in the privileges of his chosen life: easy living, numerous servants, abundant pleasures.”¹² While the British imperialists in Asia were usually portrayed as accepting of their privileged position, the Americans in the Philippines did not fall neatly into either category. The writings of the U.S. elite point to an ongoing debate over how to understand their role as colonizers. They wrote with a self-conscious awareness of the problem of claiming to be democratic, on the one hand, and being colonial rulers, on the other. Helen Taft, wife of Governor William Howard Taft, was at pains to inform her readers that the keeping of servants was necessary in the Philippines, as both Filipinos and Europeans in Manila expected a degree of ceremony and were not impressed by “democratic simplicity.” She concluded that, “believing in the adage about Rome and the Romans, we did what we could.”¹³

Like Helen Taft, many Americans attempted to justify their employment of numerous servants on the grounds that it was necessary to maintain their social status in the eyes of the Filipinos. Dwight Longfellow ran a “mess” with two other men in public service in Capiz on Panay Island, employing a cook and two Filipino houseboys. According to Longfellow, they had no option but to adapt to local customs, given that the Filipinos had “no respect for a man that will carry anything.”¹⁴ Living on Luzon, Caroline

12. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London, 1974), 101.

13. Mrs. William Howard [Helen] Taft, *Recollections of Full Years* (New York, 1914), 125.

14. Dwight Webster Longfellow, *Letters from the Philippines* (Minneapolis, 1906), 104, 72.

Shunk, the wife of an army man stationed in Pampanga province around 1909, similarly claimed to be bowing under the pressure of local custom. She wrote: "One has to keep many servants as each does one kind of work and nothing can induce the natives to depart from an established routine."¹⁵

American teacher Mary Fee, who lived in Capiz, preferred to keep fewer servants and was inclined to reject the culture of employing many servants, blaming outdated European traditions. She wrote: "The Filipinos, the Spanish, and even the English who are settled here cling to mediæval European ideas in the matter of service. If they have any snobbish weakness for display, it is in the number of retainers they can muster."¹⁶ While Fee attributed the local domestic service culture to European customs, it seems likely that this was also a carryover from the Malay tradition of measuring wealth and power through the keeping of numerous servants in debt bondage.

The homes of the Filipino and Spanish elite in Manila were generally run by numerous servants, who were each assigned a particular task. While the American elite may have emulated these traditions, they were less inclined to employ the very large numbers of servants seen in Filipino elite households. Edith Moses, wife of Professor Bernard Moses, president of the Civil Commission to the Philippines, described the homes of the Filipino aristocracy, where there were commonly some ten to twelve "servants engaged in working the horses, cleaning carriages and washing dishes."¹⁷ According to Hamilton Wright, whose *Handbook of the Philippines* was published in 1907, this was the life that ordinary Americans there might expect to lead:

The most humble American finds himself able to live in a big, low-ceilinged dwelling, with numberless servants, all costing exceedingly little. One boy may bring him tea in the morning when he awakes; another will prepare the shower bath; while a third, who has properly whitened his boots, may assist him to dress. Another boy serves him at breakfast, and still another acts as *cochero* or driver.¹⁸

In glowing terms, Wright's *Handbook* told of the many opportunities in the Philippines, with the specific intention of encouraging

15. Caroline S. Shunk, *An Army Woman in the Philippines* (Kansas City, Mo., 1914), 39.

16. Mary H. Fee, *A Woman's Impressions of the Philippines* (Chicago, 1910), 241.

17. Edith Moses, *Unofficial Letters of an Official's Wife* (New York, 1908), 76.

18. Hamilton Wright, *Handbook of the Philippines* (Chicago, 1907), 38.

colonists. He assumed that this life of “numberless” servants would prove attractive to Americans and that such a desire for overt mastery was not outside the ambitions of the ordinary American. In reality, the life he described was that of the American elite who had embraced the local traditions on their arrival in the Philippines. The “humble” Americans, such as the teachers brought to the Philippines, usually employed only one or two local servants.¹⁹

Wright used the rhetoric of “American ideals,” but he articulated these in a way that connected the employment of native servants with the goal of uplifting the Philippine people. He wrote: “If one lives in the provinces where labor is least expensive, there will always be a great number of nice boys and young men who will consider it a privilege to do odd jobs or regular work, so that they may attend the public schools.” American ideals, he argued, would be put into practice, because “the wide distribution of honestly earned money” would teach Filipinos “industry and self-reliance.”²⁰ This paternalistic language of imperialism was common to all European colonial powers during this period and was an inherent aspect of the supposed “civilizing mission.”

The American military men who were the first to reside in Manila quickly took up the local culture of domestic service. Col. D. L. Brainard, who arrived in the Philippines in 1898, lived in a shared home, referred to in military parlance as a “mess.”²¹ In Brainard’s mess, there was a shared Chinese cook and a Filipino personal servant for each man.

In the caption for this photograph from Brainard’s time in Manila, the Chinese cook, on the right, is named Choy, but the others are designated “boys,” a term used regardless of age: Andres is described as Colonel Brainard’s “boy,” Juan as Col. John Bellinger’s “boy,” and so forth.²² This use of personal servants was also common practice for less high-ranking military officers. Caroline Shunk noted that on Luzon it was normal for unmarried

19. William B. Freer, *The Philippine Experiences of an American Teacher: A Narrative of Work and Travel in the Philippine Islands* (New York, 1906).

20. *Ibid.*, 38–39.

21. Angus Campbell, *The Manila Club* (Manila, 1993), 40.

22. Item Number 176, box 3C, Prints of D. L. Brainard’s Family Albums, 1884–1910, Papers of Brig. Gen. David L. Brainard, 1854–1938, Series BR, Record Group 200, Still Picture Records Section, National Archives, College Park, Md. (hereafter RG 200).

Figure 1. Domestic servants employed in Colonel D. L. Brainard's "mess" in 1910. From right to left: Choy (cook), Andres, Juan, Bruno, and Felix. Image 176, Prints of D. L. Brainard Family Albums, 1884–1910, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

officers to eat dinner with their own personal *muchachos*, the Spanish word for boys, standing behind them.²³ Apart from the house servants, it was usual in Manila for the elite to employ a coachman who lived in the stables with his family. In his family album, Brainard preserved four photographs of himself in a coach with a coachman and a footman, suggesting that he took some pride in displaying his entourage.²⁴

It was widely assumed that Americans going to live in the Philippines would require more servants, as was the case in other tropical colonies. In British tropical colonies such as Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, and Northern Rhodesia, for example, the average white family employed eight to twelve servants, while in Britain only three to five servants were employed in upper-middle-class

23. Shunk, *An Army Woman in the Philippines*, 38.

24. Item Numbers 146–149, box 3A, Brainard's Family Albums, 1884–1918, RG 200.

homes. According to contemporary “race” science, it was believed that the employment of numerous servants was essential to ensure white survival in the tropics.²⁵ Governor Taft also justified this luxurious lifestyle on such grounds, writing:

The truth is I have lived here a good deal better than I did at home. I have a better cook than we could get at home, and the method of living with a good many servants, which is of course adopted in the tropics, leads one to considerable luxury.²⁶

Taft was apparently able to satisfy himself that these were merely necessary, practical adaptations to life in the tropics.

Chinese servants as the ideal

When the Americans arrived in Manila, the Spanish had long maintained the custom of employing Chinese servants. Even when the Chinese were banned in 1581 from living within the city walls of Manila, the Spanish made an exception for Chinese servants. Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, a Spaniard living in the Philippines at this time, described the Chinese in Manila as “vile” and wanted to rid Manila of their presence, and yet he also employed Chinese servants.²⁷ In the seventeenth century, the Spanish continued to rely on the Chinese for domestic service. Chinese were also

25. John Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880–1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1979), 79–80; Christopher Munn, “Hong Kong: 1841–1870: All the Servants in Prison and Nobody to Take Care of the House,” in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, eds., *Masters, Servants and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 372–373; Alison Blunt, “Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886–1925,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24 (1999), 429; Karen Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900–1985* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 45; Ronald Perry, “A History of Domestic Servants in London, 1850–1900” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1975), 13–17. For a discussion of the perceived “problems” of white survival in the colonial tropics, see Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne, 2005), and Timothy Keegan, “Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (2001), 462.

26. William Taft to Charles Taft (his brother), Aug. 11, 1900, Presidential Papers, Reel 18: 1894 Nov 8–1900 Oct 30, Series 1, W. H. Taft Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter W. H. Taft Papers).

27. John Newsome Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos Coronel and the Spanish Philippines in the Golden Age* (Farnham, U.K., 2011), 40.

Figure 2. Colonel Brainard and Coachman, Manila, c. 1898–1899. Image 148, Prints of D. L. Brainard Family Albums, 1884–1910, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

used on the docks of Manila and as skilled labor and were able to command higher wages than indigenous workers, being viewed as being more skilled and more efficient.²⁸ In 1898, when the Americans took over, there were roughly 23,000 Chinese and 46,000 Chinese mestizos in the Manila area.

Census figures from 1903 indicate that the Chinese population of the Philippines in the early twentieth century was predominantly Hokkien, with many coming from the port of Quanzhou in Jinjiang province. Others came from Lungxi, Tongan, and Nanan in southern Fujian. Those from Guangdong came primarily from Taishan and Kaiping counties. The population was also largely male, with the 1903 figures showing only 517 females to 40,518 males.²⁹

28. Bankoff, "Wages, Wants, and Workers," 69.

29. Kwok-Chu Wong, *The Chinese in the Philippine Economy, 1898–1941* (Manila 1999), 15–18.

In terms of employment, the 1903 census indicated that in Manila 44.4 percent of cooks were Chinese, while 54.9 percent were either Filipinos or mestizos. Wealthy Chinese merchants also employed Chinese cooks, probably from Macao.³⁰ With the British, the Spanish, and the Chinese all employing Chinese servants, it was not surprising that the American elite took this aspect of life in the Philippines for granted as well. The employment of Chinese men was common in most tropical colonies throughout North and Southeast Asia and northern Australia.³¹

The American preference for Chinese servants was not merely acquired upon reaching the Philippines. Chinese male servants were also commonly employed in some parts of the United States including California and the Territory of Hawai'i as well as in American Puerto Rico and Guam.³² Lucy Salmon estimated that in 1880 Chinese men made up 11.62 percent of the foreign-born domestic servants in the United States. In California, however, Chinese men dominated domestic service up to the turn of the twentieth century. While immigration restrictions led to a decline in the availability of Chinese servants, this only served to enhance their reputation.³³ In 1891 a woman writing in the magazine *Good*

30. Lucille Chia, "The Butcher, the Baker, and the Carpenter: Chinese Sojourners in the Spanish Philippines and their impact on Southern Fujian (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 49 (2006), 509–534, especially 515–516; Antonio S. Tan, "The Chinese Mestizos and the Formation of the Filipino Nationality," *Archipel*, 32 (1986), 141–162, 144; Richard T. Chu, *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila, Family, Identity, and Culture, 1860s–1930s* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2010), 199.

31. Christine Chin, *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian Modernity Project* (New York, 1998), 69–73; Munn, "Hong Kong: 1841–1870," 365–401; Julia Martínez and Claire Lowrie, "Colonial Constructions of Masculinity: Transforming Aboriginal Australian Men into 'Houseboys,'" *Gender and History*, 21 (2009), 305–323.

32. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. 7: 1860–1890 (San Francisco, 1890), 347, 391, 412; Shunk, *An Army Woman in the Philippines*, 14.

33. Lucy M. Salmon, "A Statistical Inquiry Concerning Domestic Service," *Publications of the American Statistical Association*, 3 (1892), 95; Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920–1945* (Philadelphia, 1989), 67. For a broader discussion of domestic service in the United States, see also David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York, 1978); Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1983); Elizabeth L. O'Leary, *At Beck and Call: The Representation of Domestic Servants in Nineteenth-Century American Painting* (Washington, D.C., 1996); and Victoria Haskins, *Matrons and Maids: Regulating Indian Domestic Service in Tucson, 1914–1934* (Tucson, Ariz., 2012).

Figure 3. American woman and a servant outside house, c. 1910–1915 (1430), Philippines Photographs Digital Archive, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Housekeeping described Chinese men as “the best servants that we ever had,” and another, writing in 1906, lamented that these servants were “growing extinct.”³⁴ As Chinese servants became a scarce commodity, they were transformed into an elite luxury, endowing their employers with even greater social cachet. White middle-class American women decorated their homes in Orientalist fashion, seeking to emulate the lifestyles of the British in Asia.³⁵ The American woman in Figure 3 appears quite proud to have her photograph taken alongside her immaculately dressed Chinese servant as a record of life in the Philippines.

These trends were not restricted to the American West Coast. A *Washington Post* report from 1903 stated: “Every city in the East now boasts many establishments whose domestic affairs are in the hands of China boys.”³⁶ Chinese servants were similarly popular in Vancouver, British Columbia, at least until 1914 when the trial of a

34. Salmon, “A Statistical Inquiry Concerning Domestic Service,” 98; Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 221–222, 279–280.

35. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium*, 9, 13–56.

36. *Washington Post*, Feb. 22, 1903.

Chinese “houseboy” for the murder of his mistress provoked many to abandon their Chinese servants.³⁷

After the extension of the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act to the Philippines in 1903, Chinese workers became harder to secure.³⁸ This exclusion was framed in terms of protecting Filipino workers from competition with Chinese labor migration. During the debate over the exclusion, merchant Charles Ilderton Barnes noted that foreign merchants favored allowing Chinese into the Philippines, and they particularly wanted servants. As Barnes put it, “Everyone wants his own Chinaman.”³⁹

The question of Chinese versus Filipino labor was highly politicized. John Bancroft Devins claimed that this issue divided Americans more than any other.⁴⁰ He wrote that those with business interests and most other writers on the Philippines favored Chinese labor, while Governor Taft and his associates in the Philippine Commission stood in opposition. Taft had defended his policy in 1903, stating that, contrary to those who doubted their capacity for labor, the Filipinos were working well in constructing roads and cleaning streets.⁴¹ In an address to the Union Reading College, Taft also cited domestic service as a suitable use of Filipino labor. He did so with a degree of reservation, however, stating: “I know that the habits of the Filipino servant are trying to the American who first comes to these islands.”⁴² Taft omitted to mention that neither he nor the other members of the Philippine Commission were prepared to employ only Filipino workers in their own homes. Taft himself had opted for Chinese house servants in flagrant disregard for his own official anti-Chinese labor platform.

37. Karen Dubinsky and Adam Givertz, “‘It Was Only a Matter of Passion’: Masculinity and Sexual Danger,” in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto, 2003), 65–79, here 75.

38. Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 401. For Chinese exclusion from the United States, see Adam McKeown, “Ritualization of Regulation: The Enforcement of Chinese Exclusion in the United States and China,” *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), 377–403, and Erika Lee, “Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882–1924,” *Journal of American History*, 89 (2002), 54–86.

39. Charles Ilderton Barnes, cited in Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850–1898* (Manila, 2000), 112.

40. On the lobby for Asiatic labor exclusion, see Kornel Chang, “Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation,” *Journal of American History*, 96 (2009), 678–701.

41. John Bancroft Devins, *An Observer in the Philippines* (New York, 1905), 129, 132.

42. William Howard Taft, address given before the Union Reading College, Manila, Dec. 17, 1903, cited in Devins, *An Observer in the Philippines*, 396.

According to Governor Taft, writing in 1900, when he took up his role as Chairman of the Philippines Commission for Civilian Government, Chinese servants in Manila were in short supply and were thus able to demand high wages.⁴³ Before leaving for the Philippines, he had sought and been granted special permission from Elihu Root, the U.S. Secretary of War, to import Chinese servants into the Philippines.⁴⁴ Taft's letters home to his wife and family provide details on this important question of servants. On his outward voyage to Manila in May 1900, Governor Taft stopped over in Hong Kong where he paid his respects to the Governor of Hong Kong and afterwards visited the Hong Kong Club for "tiffin."⁴⁵ He also picked up Chinese servants who had been sent from Shanghai and were waiting for him onboard. Taft had already discussed the prospect of obtaining Chinese servants for his new home in Manila, observing in a letter home to his brother: "A good Chinese cook and a good Chinese boy and a good Chinese laundryman are a thing of joy forever." In choosing Chinese servants, Taft was following the advice of his predecessor, Admiral George Dewey. Dewey had asked his own servant, Ah Maw, to arrange for a Chinese cook and four other Chinese servants for Taft.⁴⁶ The letter recounted the process, including the letter sent from Ah Maw to a steward on board the *Brooklyn*, Ah Ling:

My Dear Ah Ling . . . The Admiral asked me to write to you and ask if you please find som [*sic*] good Chinese servants for Mr Taft. He like to have a very good cook just like myself, the Admiral said, and two men to wait on the table, a butler and a second man just like you. Now, would you be so kind as to try and find some very nice people that will take good care and understand their business.⁴⁷

43. William H. Taft to Helen Taft, May 30, 1900, Reel 24: 1895 Mar. 25–ca 1900, Series 2, W. H. Taft Papers.

44. Burns, "An Imperial Vision," 117. Even though Taft was granted this exemption, for others it remained illegal to import Chinese servants into the Philippines. In 1901 Captain Weigall of the *Loonsang* was fined \$300 in gold for not preventing the desertion of his Chinese cook. See Immigration Circular No. 21. Master of vessel fined for failure to prevent landing of Chinese cook in Philippine Customs Service, *Chinese and Immigration Circulars (Annotated)*, vol. 1: Nos. 1–197 (Manila, 1908), 20.

45. William H. Taft to Charles Taft, June 2, 1900, Reel 18, Series 1, W. H. Taft Papers.

46. William H. Taft to Charles Taft, May 18, and June 2, 1900, in *ibid.* For more on Governor Taft in the Philippines, see Michael Adas, "Improving on the Civilizing Mission?: Assumptions of United States Exceptionalism in the Colonisation of the Philippines," *Itinerario*, 22 (1998), 44–66.

47. William H. Taft to Charles Taft, June 2, 1900.

The servants were sent from Shanghai and were awaiting Taft's arrival in Hong Kong.

War correspondent Murat Halstead, who interviewed Admiral Dewey and Gen. Wesley Merritt for his 1898 publication, noted the American desire for Chinese servants, suggesting that it was only fitting that American officials enjoy the luxury of Chinese servants who were "constant, handy, obedient, docile, so fitted to minister to luxury." He rejected the idea of using Filipino servants, claiming "that the Filipinos are not admirable in menial service."⁴⁸ He believed that, if they were not granted some degree of self-government, the people of the Philippines would fight back, and it was this prospect that led him to reject the use of local labor as domestic servants.

Many other writers offered their own version of this comparison between Chinese and Filipino servants. Englishwoman Dauncey described the Chinese as "straight and tall and intelligent," compared to "the stumpy, stupid, little Filipinos."⁴⁹ American Dwight Longfellow, who was a civil engineer employed by the Philippines government to build bridges and roads in Capiz on Panay Island from 1908 to 1911, maintained that the Chinese were honest and industrious while the Filipinos were lazy and stole from their employers. His first experience of Chinese servants was as the stewards on the ship coming from the United States. He wrote that they worked quickly, attended to their own business, and had "good faces."⁵⁰

By the time Taft became Governor-General and moved into Malacañan Palace, his household servants included a Chinese *amah* for his children, two Chinese houseboys, a Chinese male cook, a Filipino footman, three Filipino coachmen, and a Filipino gardener.⁵¹ The Filipinos were thus given only outside employment, while the more intimate inside work of house servants was reserved for Chinese workers.

Later, Helen Taft hired three more Chinese male servants from Hong Kong: an assistant cook and two "tableboys" to help with official functions.⁵² It was this very public display of Chinese

48. Murat Halstead, *The Story of the Philippines and Our New Possessions* (Chicago, 1898), 39.

49. Dauncey, *An Englishwoman in the Philippines*, 342.

50. Longfellow, *Letters from the Philippines*, 116–117, 8.

51. William H. Taft to Mrs. Harriet Herron (his mother-in-law), Jan. 19, 1901, Reel 19: 1900 Nov. 6–1902 Oct. 31, Series 1, W. H. Taft Papers.

52. William H. Taft to Louise Taft (his mother), Aug. 5, 1901, in *ibid.*

servants that led to criticism of Governor Taft's inconsistent stance on Chinese labor. Dauncey, writing at the time of the second governor, Luke Edward Wright (1904–1905), pointed out the political hypocrisy of the U.S. policy. She believed that elite Americans considered it "rather common" to employ Filipino cooks and preferred the more fashionable Chinese servants. She argued that, in the face of the employment of Chinese in Malacañan Palace, the "American Ideal of Philippines for the Filipinos begins to fall through." She noted that at the time of Taft's administration some described him as a "high-souled, disinterested philanthropist," while others vowed that he was "quite capable of turning imperialist." Dauncey suggested that it was his personal charm that "helped to make up for the *faux-pas* about the Chinese servants, which still rankles in the native mind."⁵³

Helen Taft had not initially been a strong advocate for Chinese servants, suggesting instead a mix of Chinese and Filipino servants. She did, however, support her husband's decision in the end, writing: "I have no doubt that they will be more efficient."⁵⁴ Chinese servants were an expensive choice. Governor Taft noted that he was obliged to pay his cook and "number one boy" \$15 American per month, while the "number two boy" received \$11.25 American per month.⁵⁵ Despite this expense, Taft was not entirely satisfied. He complained that, while the cook was satisfactory, he needed suggestions; the number one boy drank too much, and the table boys grumbled. He looked forward to the arrival of his wife to help with disciplining the servants.⁵⁶ But even after Helen Taft, whom he called "Nellie," arrived in the Philippines, they remained unable to gain the kind of control they had evidently been used to in the past. He wrote: "Our difficulty is that our cook seems to be a good deal of a tyrant and that some of the other servants do not like his severity. He is a good cook, however, and I do not know what Nellie would do without him."⁵⁷

53. Dauncey, *An Englishwoman in the Philippines*, 141–142.

54. Helen Taft to William H. Taft, June 10, 1900, Reel 24: 1895 Mar. 25–ca 1900, Series 2, W. H. Taft Papers.

55. William H. Taft to Charles Taft, June 2, 1900.

56. William H. Taft to Helen Taft, June 15, July 1, 1900, Reel 24, Series 2, W. H. Taft Papers.

57. William H. Taft to Charles Taft, Oct. 4 1902, Reel 19, 1900 Nov 6–1902 Oct 31, Series 1, in *ibid.*

The Philippines Commission implemented the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1903. Among its provisions, it called for a registration of the Chinese residents. Some 49,659 certificates of residence were issued in the first year.⁵⁸ According to Singapore's *Straits Times*, the registration of Chinese was intended to control the escalating wages being demanded by Chinese cooks in Manila. At the same time, a similar policy of registration was being put into practice in Kuala Lumpur in British Malaya, where the British were also concerned that they were now completely "in the hands" of their Chinese servants.⁵⁹ By 1907 there were fresh complaints that Chinese cooks in Manila were demanding wages of between \$40 and \$70 in silver per month.⁶⁰

While the Exclusion Act is sometimes presented as a blanket ban on Chinese immigration, there were important exceptions. Chinese merchants, for example, were permitted to bring in their servants, wives, and minor children, and, with the help of false identities, these exemptions allowed a number of new Chinese immigrants to enter the Philippines.⁶¹ As for Governor Taft, he responded to the implementation of the Exclusion Act by writing to Root, asking him to safeguard his access to Chinese servants. Taft reminded Secretary Root that he had special permission to import Chinese servants and asked him "to certify this arrangement with the Collector of Customs." He noted that Root should confirm that he had "given authority for the Commission to bring into the Islands domestic servants for their own use: this will put upon a proper status the servants whom we now have and whom we had prior to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act."⁶²

In 1903, toward the end of his time in the Philippines, Governor Taft again wrote to Root, asking for permission to bring his Chinese personal servant back to the United States, noting that Dewey had been granted this exemption.⁶³ Cameron W. Forbes also remarked in his diary that Taft had become so attached to his Chinese servant that he would have taken him home if he had been

58. Wong, *The Chinese in the Philippines Economy*.

59. *Straits Times*, Sept. 12, 1902, p. 4.

60. *Ibid.*, Aug. 13, 1907, p. 6.

61. Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), 215.

62. Burns, "An Imperial Vision," 117.

63. *Ibid.*, 118.

able to bypass the Chinese Exclusion Act.⁶⁴ In his study, Burns speculated that Taft was more concerned that his Chinese servant was a cheaper option, since Taft had indicated that he would not be able to afford a personal servant once he returned home. On the other hand, Burns provided evidence that Helen Taft had shown her support for one of her Chinese servants by finding him a position as a steward on a U.S. gunboat.⁶⁵

The ships of the U.S. Asiatic fleet, which were used by American diplomats, were also permitted the use of Chinese servants. A note in the Singapore *Straits Times* in 1907 explained that the U.S. cruisers *Cincinnati* and *Raleigh* were waiting in Manila for the arrival of the *Denver* and the *Cleveland*. Before heading home to San Francisco, where the U.S. Chinese exclusion laws would be invoked, the *Cincinnati* and *Raleigh* had to remove their Chinese servants and swap them for the African American servants on the incoming *Denver* and *Cleveland*.⁶⁶

Cameron W. Forbes, who became Governor-General in 1909, also supported Chinese servants. He had arrived in the Philippines in 1904 and been presented with a Chinese steward, Yu Dong, who had been personally selected by Ah Sing, Governor Taft's former steward, who had remained on at Malacañan Palace to serve Governor Wright. Forbes explained that, although he had already agreed to take on a different Chinese servant, that servant had immediately withdrawn when he heard that Ah Sing had organized his own man.⁶⁷ Thus, from the time of Dewey onward, it seems that it was the Chinese servants themselves who controlled the recruitment of servants for the homes of the American administration.

On moving into his new home, Forbes placed his trust entirely in Yu Dong. He observed in his journal that "Yu Dong has taken charge of me." He wrote a few days later: "Yu Dong has now a household of six, two Filipinos to scrub the floor, one cook who was Governor Wright's chef, . . . one table boy and one cook's boy." A month later, after his first large dinner party, Forbes declared with some satisfaction: "These Chinamen are a great institution."⁶⁸

64. Cameron W. Forbes, journal, Jan. 23, 1909, Ms Am 1365, Series 1, Cameron W. Forbes Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

65. Burns, "An Imperial Vision," 118.

66. *Straits Times*, Aug. 13, 1907, p. 6.

67. Forbes, journal, Aug. 12, 1904.

68. *Ibid.*, Sept. 9, 12, 1904, Oct. 21, 1904.

According to Shunk, her Chinese cook chose her, arriving at her hotel in Manila and explaining that the cook of another army family had sent him. He asked for fifty pesos a month for his services. He was to travel to Luzon with them but did not arrive on the morning of their departure, sending another friend instead.⁶⁹

Charles Denby, a member of the Philippine Commission, brought at least one servant with him from his previous post in Shanghai as Minister to China, and they picked up a Chinese *amah* and “boy” in Hong Kong. On her way to the Philippines in 1899, his wife, Martha Denby, wrote to her family stating: “It is said that no good servants are to be had in Manila.”⁷⁰ Edith and Bernard Moses also seem to have organized their own Chinese servants. They employed five Chinese men, including a cook, a “head-boy” (Ah Ting), a houseboy (Quay, later replaced by Chung), a “coolie,” and a laundryman. Edith Moses, perhaps more than others discussed here, was inclined to exercise control. She wrote that she had sent one of her “second boys” back to China because he was “a lazy fellow.” She replaced him with two more Chinese servants, “a boy” for the bedrooms and a “coolie” for general housework. While others had suggested that the Chinese were superior servants, Moses described them in terms of “racial” inferiority, claiming that Chung, “the coolie,” who cleaned floors, washed dishes, and polished the shoes, was “more like a monkey than anyone I ever saw.” Of her “houseboys” she wrote, “I am disciplining myself not to have any standards, and to shut my eyes to all but the most glaring faults of my domestics.”⁷¹

The politics of Chinese labor comes through most prominently in Edith Moses’s writings. She observed: “I wish those persons in the United States who talk about the cheap labor of the Orient were obliged to depend on it for a time.”⁷² While Vicente Rafael suggested that North American women sought to cleanse their domestic relations of “political entanglements,” it seems that Edith Moses was overtly political, revealing her imperialist leanings and her impatience with the anti-Chinese labor lobby.⁷³ It is

69. Shunk, *An Army Woman in the Philippines*, 27, 29.

70. Martha Fitch Denby to her children, March 29, 1899, container 7, Denby Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

71. Moses, *Unofficial Letters of an Official's Wife*, 22, 19, 16, 39.

72. *Ibid.*, 39–40.

73. Rafael, *White Love*, 56.

somewhat surprising that the wife of the President of the Philippine Commission, the body responsible for excluding Chinese labor, should express such views even in the form of “unofficial” memoirs.

Chinese servants were also recommended for the government-run health sanitarium. In 1905 the highlands sanitarium in Benguet was authorized to discharge its Ilocano waiters and to employ instead a Chinese steward and assistant cook, five Chinese waiters and room boys, and two Chinese “coolies.” They noted in their annual report that the Chinese waiters had given them “very great satisfaction during the busy season just passed.”⁷⁴ The sanitarium was used as a respite for Americans, and others, suffering from the debilitating effects of life in the tropics, and thus it was a matter of some concern that the domestic staff be efficient. Medical opinion of the time had even gone so far as to suggest that the inefficiency of native servants might account for cases of poor health among colonists.⁷⁵

While Chinese were viewed as the more efficient choice for domestic service, an entirely different view of Chinese workers was put forward by those engaged in building the Benguet Road. Greg Bankoff noted that in 1903 Chinese workers were sacked for being apparently too “difficult to manage,” with allegations that opium use had made them less tractable. Some also argued that Chinese laborers worked harder when employed on a piecework basis but were not reliable when engaged by the day. Another complaint was that Filipinos did not work well under Chinese bosses.⁷⁶ None of these allegations appeared in the private writings on Chinese domestic servants to any great extent. Rather, the U.S. elite was full of praise for Chinese labor. Given what we know about the particular attention paid to the recruitment of Chinese servants by the Chinese themselves, it is likely that domestic servants were something of a special category of worker.

We have demonstrated that Chinese domestic servants were preferred by the elite, but many found wages of up to \$15

74. Annual Report, Civil Sanitarium, Benguet, July 1, 1905, in *Sixth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission, 1905* (Washington, D.C., 1906), 259.

75. For a discussion of American health in the Philippines, see Warwick Anderson, “The Trespass Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown,” *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1343–1370, esp. 1354, 1365.

76. Bankoff, “Wages, Wants, and Workers,” 69–70.

American per month not affordable, leading some to reconsider hiring Filipino servants. However, according to Dauncey, based in Iloilo in 1904, since the time of the Spanish, wages for Filipino servants had doubled, from five to ten pesos per month for a head servant. She concluded that "An American would give them twice as much, if not more, which would simply turn them into drunkards, or gamblers or both, or worse."⁷⁷

In the provinces, many elite Filipino households retained the use of bonded child labor, and servant wages were generally lower than those paid by Americans.⁷⁸ American teacher Mary Fee compared Filipino and American wages in the provinces, where a Filipino would pay a coachman \$2.50 in gold per month, but an American would have to pay from \$3 to \$6. She argued, however, that the work done in American households was more labor-intensive, writing: "We employ adults and demand more labor, because our housekeeping is more complex than Filipino housekeeping, and we expect to employ fewer servants than Filipinos do."⁷⁹ Writing in Capiz, American engineer Longfellow paid his houseboys less than four pesos. He noted that a Filipino houseboy could be employed in Capiz for as little as two pesos a month or \$1.00 in gold. He attributed the low wages to the Spanish tradition of "taking small boys" into their homes for a year and "giving their parents a few pesos" in return. Longfellow explained that children could be indebted fifteen to twenty pesos to their masters for clothes at the end of a year.⁸⁰

William Freer went to the Philippines as a teacher and published a narrative of his experiences in Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, in 1906. His book contained a chapter on the topic of housekeeping. Freer's description of the domestic service relationship suggests that he, more than most Americans, had adopted the Filipino custom of bringing young boys into his home. His experience was that it was not a simple transaction of labor for wages. He had taken two houseboys, Raymundo, the thirteen-year-old son of his landlord, and his eleven-year-old cousin Francisco, at the request of the landlord so that the boys might learn English.⁸¹

77. Dauncey, *An Englishwoman in the Philippines*, 27.

78. Michael Salman, *The Embarrassment of Slavery: Controversies over Bondage and Nationalism in the American Colonial Philippines* (Berkeley, 2001).

79. Fee, *A Woman's Impressions*, 241.

80. Longfellow, *Letters from the Philippines*, 65.

81. Freer, *The Philippine Experiences of an American Teacher*, 48.

Despite the high wages paid to Chinese servants, it seems that some Americans found this preferable to becoming entangled in the Filipino system of reciprocity. One of the main reasons for employing Chinese rather than Filipino servants was that Chinese men arrived from China or Hong Kong without families. The question of supporting the extended family of Filipino servants was a common theme in American writings. Most domestic servants in the Philippines were “live-in” servants. They slept on the floor inside the house or in servant’s quarters or stables at the back of the house.⁸²

According to Governor Taft, it was common practice that, when you hired a coachman, he would move his whole family into the premises and live in the stables. Taft himself had three coachmen and a gardener, all with their families living in the house. The result, according to him, was a “regular Filipino settlement in the neighborhood of the stable.”⁸³ Live-in servants had only recently become unfashionable in the United States, where the practice had been declining since the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁴ Most Americans complained about the practice on the grounds that it cost them more money or that they would be inconvenienced in some way. Helen Taft, who was apparently more concerned about maintaining her good reputation, described the practice as a “patriarchal arrangement” that she had been forced to accept. She argued that her “protest was met with the simple statement that it was *el costumbre del pais*” (the national custom).⁸⁵

Edith Moses employed five Chinese servants and at least six Filipino servants, all of whom lived in the home. She too was afraid that if one of her servants were to marry, the whole family would move into her home. To avoid this, she tried to employ only single men. When one of her servants married, he kept his new wife hidden from her. When he was discovered, he and his wife came to her crying and begging her not to let “el Señor” take his wife away. Edith Moses agreed and persuaded her husband that it “was narrow-minded to force our customs on these people, where the principles of government were not involved.”⁸⁶ This incident

82. Dauncey, *An Englishwoman in the Philippines*, 253, 29.

83. William H. Taft to Charles Taft, Oct. 15, 1900, Reel 18, Series 1, W. H. Taft Papers.

84. Katz, *Seven Days a Week*, 44.

85. Taft, *Recollections of Full Years*, 118–119.

86. Moses, *Unofficial Letters of an Official's Wife*, 209–211, esp. 211.

demonstrates the degree to which Americans could control their servants, interfering even with their right to marry.

Edith Moses compared the American masters with the elite Spanish Filipinos in whose homes servants were likely to remain all their lives. She wrote that servants living with Spanish Filipinos

feel themselves dependent on their masters and the idea of their going away or being dismissed never occurs to either master or servant. There is, consequently, a family feeling between them and a freedom of intercourse that we, democrats though we are, would not tolerate.⁸⁷

She thus set out the limits of American tolerance. There was little room in their modern world for Filipino customs based on communal living and reciprocal obligation.

While Chinese servants were preferred in the first decade of American colonial rule, there is evidence that the practice declined somewhat over the following decades. By 1939 the proportion of Chinese cooks had fallen to 25.9 percent. In the category of personal servant, 96 percent of those registered were Filipino, but no figures were given for Chinese servants. The decline in Chinese servants was not merely a matter of American policy, but part of a broader decline in Chinese labor in most colonies during the 1920s, which was partly due to the growth of Chinese nationalism that led the overseas Chinese to be less willing to take on menial roles.⁸⁸

Despite the Filipinization policy introduced in 1913 by Governor Francis Burton Harrison, no attempt was made to remove Chinese servants from Malacañan Palace. Even in the 1930s, when the family of Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., was in residence, they, like the Tafts, employed a Chinese *amah* and a Chinese “number one boy,” but they also employed Filipino house servants with a Filipina maid and two additional Filipino “boys.”⁸⁹ In her memoirs, Eleanor

87. *Ibid.*, 348.

88. Daniel F. Doeppers, *Manila, 1900–1941: Social Change in a Late Colonial Metropolis* (New Haven, Conn., 1984); Claire Lowrie, “In Service of Empire: Domestic Service and Colonial Mastery in Singapore and Darwin, 1890–1930” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wollongong, 2009), 170–179. For more on the politicization of Chinese servants, see Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia* (London, 2004), 53, and C. F. Yong, *The Origins of Malayan Communism* (Singapore, 1997), 146, 128.

89. Eleanor Butler Roosevelt to her mother, March 1, 27, Aug. 24, 1932, box 6, Family Correspondence 1858–1962, Presidential Papers: Theodore Roosevelt Jr Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Butler Roosevelt wrote favorably of the colonial culture of domestic service, which by now had been established as tradition. She noted in particular the role of the “venerable Chinese paragon, Ah King, the number-one boy who had been there for over thirty years and ruled the domestic staff.”⁹⁰

Conclusions

From the first years of the American occupation of the Philippines, the American elite ran their households with the help of Chinese servants. In the households of Governors Taft and Forbes, and others, Chinese stewards were appointed to organize the household servants. From the time of Admiral Dewey, these stewards had been recruited via Chinese networks. While U.S. policy officially opposed the importation of Chinese labor into the Philippines, the elite preference for Chinese servants stood out as an exception. Americans sought out Chinese servants in preference to Filipinos, citing their need for more efficient servants and invoking the racial stereotyping that was inherent in colonial policy in all Southeast Asian colonies.

The American view of Chinese labor was often contradictory. Several different stereotypes of Chinese operated in the Philippines. War correspondent Halstead’s 1898 description of Chinese as “docile” and “obedient” servants was contradicted by most Americans living in the Philippines. Chinese were presented as quiet and efficient, but at the same time it was apparent that they expected a degree of autonomy in their running of the household. Most Americans were prepared to grant this autonomy in return for their valued services. The representation of Chinese as being “difficult to manage” also appeared in Bankoff’s study of road-building labor.

While colonial historiography is dominated by images of Chinese workers as “cheap labor,” there is no question that this did not apply to Chinese servants in the Philippines. It was only the elite who could afford the services of a well-qualified Chinese steward or cook. Wealthy government officials such as William Howard Taft could afford to bring Chinese servants over to the Philippines and pay them high wages. The British in Hong Kong, Singapore,

90. Eleanor Butler Roosevelt, *Day Before Yesterday: The Reminiscences of Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.* (New York, 1959), 269.

and Malaya had relied on Chinese servants in their colonies, but they too had found that, as Chinese labor organizations gained strength, Chinese servants were increasingly able to demand higher wages.⁹¹

Despite their intimate relationships with Chinese servants, there was no sense that U.S. officials were inclined to change their overall anti-Chinese policy. It was one of the key characteristics of colonial society that personal reliance and even private respect did not translate into a broader questioning of white imperialist objectives. In their enjoyment of the luxury that came with Chinese servants, Americans were following in the footsteps of Spanish, British, and other European traditions, and these same traditions were also apparent in the preference for Chinese servants within the United States itself. Indeed, the American preference for Chinese servants belied many of the professed ideals of U.S. imperialism.

91. *Straits Times*, Sept. 12, 1902, p. 4.