

## WONG CHIN FOO

---

*In the Chinese immigrant community, not given to drawing attention to itself, the journalist Wong Chin Foo cut a conspicuous figure. Educated at American universities, Wong became a lecturer on Chinese culture and religion, attempting to correct popular misconceptions about his people. He twitted Christian missionaries with a mock-serious article called "Why I Am a Heathen," campaigned for the repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws, fell briefly under the theosophical spell of Madame Blavatsky, and later supported Sun Yat-Sen's New China movement. His efforts to start a Chinese-American newspaper failed, as he recounts in this piece for the humor magazine Puck.*

### EXPERIENCE OF A CHINESE JOURNALIST

IT IS not necessary for me to remark that I was born in the Middle Empire, and that I am now an American citizen; for ever since my advent in this land of the free I have been systematically styled a "pig-tailed renegade," a "moon-eyed leper," a "demon of the Orient," a "gangrened laundryman," a "rat-eating Mongol," etc.

I started life as a lecturer, and, through my connection with a Literary Bureau, was very successful in purveying to the intellectual pleasures of Western Sunday-schools and Southern clubs. That they seldom asked me to come back and lecture again does not invalidate my statement; neither is it inconsistent with popularity when an enthusiastic audience welcomes a speaker with revolvers and shot-guns, and otherwise induces him to depart via a second-story window rather than the stairs. These are incidents in the life of every lecturer.

In an unguarded moment I listened to the voice of the tempter, and fell from my high estate. Persuaded that I was the coming journalist of the Occident and Orient alike, I came to New York City and started the *Chinese American*. I knew nothing of journalism save in a vague way, and went to work accordingly. I took an American partner and a Chinese one, engaged a city editor, a staff, and an artist.

The first issue, after many sleepless nights, appeared. I shall never forget it. It circulated fifty thousand copies, and brought in one thousand five hundred dollars.

That is, it brought in three hundred dollars cash, and one thousand two hundred dollars in notes, bills receivable, and promises. I have a hundred of the latter assorted, which I will sell at one cent on the dollar. I was proud of the issue until I had read the criticisms upon it in my E. C.s. The American E. C.s were contradictory in substance, but unanimous in their drift. The English articles were badly written, poorly thought and wretchedly printed; they were also splendidly written and composed, but displaying signs of some trained journalist, who was posing in my name. The editor, they said, was a Chinese gentleman with more money than brains. He was also a myth and a joke. He was also a Jesuit, a Buddhist missionary, and an Imperial emissary in disguise. Then came the Chinese E. C.s. My native tongue, as I wrote it, was uncouth, illiterate, unintelligent, vapid, hollow, fantastic, bombastic and idiotic. I was a wretch who was endeavoring to ruin the Flowery Kingdom in the eyes of Christendom; I was a renegade, an apostle, and the victim of American gold.

I had written a moral screed against gambling and opium-smoking. The gamblers and joint-keepers invaded my office a week after, and proceeded to flog the associate editor, cashier, and city reporter. The trio did not wait for the end of the performance, but departed for the Empire the same day.

I heard from them at—Panama. They were intact; but the nine hundred and fifty dollars, my entire assets they had carried with them, were not.

I did not come out altogether unscathed. I was “knocked out” twice, arrested four times for criminal libel, once for civil libel, under twenty-five thousand dollars bail, locked up in Ludlow Street jail, and twice poisoned.

I think the paper would have succeeded, if I had had more experience—say a hundred years. But my artist, Jung Fan Tai, became a Bohemian and used too much beer in his designs. Chinese art does not present many differences to the civilized eye; but it does to the Mongolian connoisseur.

Jung's second sacred dragon contained a superfluous cocktail, and was denounced in Chinatown as blasphemy. The luckless draughtsman was thereupon put under the ban of ostracism, and in a fortnight had shaken the dust of Gotham from off his feet. My second cashier was a reporter in bad luck. I do not think he was dishonest; but when you miss your treasurer and treasury, and find the first paralyzed in a neighboring bar-room the next day, and don't find the second at all, it's high time for a head editor to kick. I kicked; but the reporter, with an indescribable oath, swore that no "almond-eyed double blank" could kick him with impunity, and in less time than it takes to tell it had converted me into a ghastly ruin.

My journalistic career culminated recently in the Supreme Court. I had, with the best intentions in the world, allowed an article to appear in my sheet which "showed up" a certain individual in a moderately sensational way.

The style was patented after that employed in many E. C.s, and contained such pleasing epithets as "assassins, cut-throats, viper, scorpion, thief, embezzler, robber, liar, and a member of the Young Men's Christian Association." In short, it was a thoroughly American article. Yet, an imbecile jury gave a verdict for the fellow against me in one thousand dollars. At present there is an order of arrest out for me, and a deputy-sheriff is watching my regular haunts.

It's the old story. I had the capital; now I haven't; but I have the experience. Any paper wishing the services of an experienced editor, who can write in every vein and on every subject, and create libel-suits, can obtain a gem by applying to

WONG CHIN FOO,  
CARE OF PUCK.