

# Wedge-issue dynamics and party position shifts: Chinese exclusion debates in the post-Reconstruction US Congress, 1879–1882

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## Abstract

Even when the stakes of party-building are high, political parties often find their members divided over a key policy position. In post-Reconstruction America, the hot-button issue of excluding Chinese immigrant workers strengthened Democratic cohesion while splitting the ‘party of Lincoln’. Previous research has not completely investigated the role of party competition and cohesiveness in paving the way for passage of the Chinese exclusion laws. In this investigation of the legislative politics of banning the Chinese from 1879 to 1882, it is found that cross-pressured members sometimes facilitate party transformation. The evidence demonstrates that partisan responses to potential wedge issues are a previously unnoticed source of explanation of eventual party position changes.

## Keywords

Chinese exclusion laws, party position change, rank-and-file members, wedge issue

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'Ought we to exclude them? The question lies in my mind thus; either the Anglo Saxon race will possess the Pacific slope or the Mongolians will possess it. We have this day to choose . . . whether our legislation shall be in the interest of the American free laborer or for the servile laborer from China.'

Senator James G. Blaine (R-ME)

(Congressional Record, 45th Congress, 3rd Session, 14 February 1879)

## Introduction

The making and breaking of parties' policy positions might come through diverse channels: campaign ads, platforms during conventions, presidential speeches, congressional leaders' messages and scandals. Among others, collective policy choices in Congress, such as roll-call votes, tend to create a brand name in the electoral market (Cox and McCubbins, 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Snyder and Ting, 2002; Woon and Pope, 2008). Through this branding process, voters obtain low-cost information about how the party will perform in Congress. Knowing that promoting the informative value of a party position gives an electoral boost to its candidates, party members seek to keep their own troops together and represent unambiguous party positions in the law-making process. This process of securing a clear and credible party brand name is inherently dynamic, as the two-party system in America has historically found party members not always united. As a result, with cohesive party-building at stake, party members try to figure out how to resolve their own internal disagreements.

When it comes to mending a divide in party ranks and managing party reputations, most of the literature considers the process as top-down, driven by party leaders. To build a reliable party position, so this leader-focused argument goes, party members act together in the legislative process, thus triggering the collective action problem that the party can only be successful if the entire party, as a 'procedural coalition' (Cox and McCubbins, 1993), switches positions at the same time (Sinclair, 1995). The role of party leaders is to perform the task of coordinating a shift in policy stance among discordant members of the party caucus (Aldrich, 1995; Moscardelli et al., 1998; Rohde, 1991). But what if the party leadership is trapped in the middle or tepid in putting a lid on party divides? Do party members collectively maintain the party's brand name? Or do they individually manage the demands for party position shifts? Under what conditions will party ranks keep staying the course or begin calling for a new party direction? While the existing studies have largely focused on the active leadership role in straddling party divides, we still lack a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the other side of the coin: legislative behaviour by rank-and-file members and its impact on party change.

This article finds that the impetus for changes sometimes comes from the bottom up. Rank-and-file party members do not necessarily shift their positions overnight, but rather switch positions gradually. Particularly, cross-pressured members sometimes facilitate party conversion, even when the leadership's hands are tied on a party-splitting issue. Once being caught up between the party's status quo position and the constituents' policy change, backbench members tend to look for a way to adopt a new stance without

losing credibility. By engaging in legislative activities such as bill amendments, veto overriding and vote reversal, party members handle a newly emerging party-splitting agenda in Congress.

American political history has often seen a new divisive issue introduced for the realignment of politics, which puts some members at odds with their party's policy commitment. In addition, historical case studies can shed light on the relevance of today's social scientific questions, theories and methods. An increasing number of social scientists are shifting their focus from 'static models of an unchanging time' to a more dynamic view of Congress and its behaviour over time (Brady and McCubbins, 2002: 1). Katznelson and Lapinski (2006: 243) succinctly testify that 'Congressional scholars have been thinking more and more in historical terms'. For a test of social scientific hypotheses related to the impacts of a wedge issue on party position shifts, this article revisits one of the rare moments in American political history – the end of the Reconstruction era (1865–77) – that spurred both Republicans and Democrats to rebuild their electoral coalitions in a new political environment.

As the Reconstruction era came to an end, electoral competition between the parties became tight (Kernell, 1977). The Republican Party, as the 'party of Lincoln', painfully came to realize that the electioneering slogan of 'waving the bloody shirt' was no longer effective (Cherny, 1997; Foner, 1990). The 'Grand Old Party' (GOP) dominance in the post-Civil War era quickly vanished as the Democratic Party rapidly recovered its electoral coalitions in the South. The off-year election of 1874, in the wake of the Panic of 1873, dramatically revitalized the Democrats below the Mason–Dixon Line. The 'Solid South' for the Electoral College votes fully emerged in 1880 (Morgan, 1963; Summers, 2000; Ware, 2006), and then the rival parties turned their attention towards swing states where presidential election outcomes were still in doubt (Kleppner, 1983; Trubowitz, 1998).<sup>1</sup>

Particularly, California was a 'contested territory' for both 1856 and 1880–92 (Ware, 2006: 49). Rutherford Hayes won the Golden State in the 1876 presidential election by fewer than 3000 votes – just a 1.8 percent vote margin. The Electoral College vote margin ended up being just one vote, 185 to 184, after a months-long compromise between the two parties. What was potentially more critical was that, although the number of the Electoral College votes allocated for the state of California was just six in the 1880s, there was a strong likelihood that California or Indiana could become a 'kingmaker' state in the House. Under the 12th Amendment, if no majority winner emerged in a presidential election, then the election would be thrown into Congress, where a balance of 18 to 18 was predicted with respect to the number of states (Gyory, 1998: 146).

In the important swing state of California, the hot-button issue was whether to embrace or exclude Chinese immigrant workers. The ban on Chinese labourers increasingly became a 'do-or-die' struggle among white workers in California. Since the California Gold Rush of 1848, Chinese immigrant labourers had come to America in large and growing numbers. These Asian immigrants were crucial for boosting a labour force thinned out by the Civil War. The railroad, mining, cigar and shoemaking industries, in particular, turned to the hiring of Chinese immigrant workers, but white labourers in California, who were hit hard by the Panic of 1873, accused Chinese workers of causing their own job losses and low wages. The number of anti-Chinese clubs and

organizations increased in the West, and the club members pleaded with their congressional delegations for exclusion laws.

Ultimately, the anti-Chinese movement in California contributed to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in Congress, which was the first law in American history to ban any group of people from entering America solely based upon race. Lyman (2000: 114) suggests that: 'The anti-Chinese agitation in California, culminating as it did in the Exclusion Law passed by Congress in 1882, was doubtless the most important single factor in the history of American labor.' According to Smith (1993: 559): 'The Chinese Exclusion Act was . . . the first repudiation of America's long history of open immigration and it was justified in terms of the postwar era's revived racial theories.'

This article integrates party politics in the post-Reconstruction era to explain how and why members of Congress came to support the California-driven bitterness against the Chinese to be translated into federal law. For congressional Democrats during the post-Civil War period, the 'Chinese Question' was a unifying cause. The same cannot be said of the GOP. The rancour over Chinese labourers divided the GOP between the western Republicans and the New Englanders. While not all members of the party viewed exclusion of the Chinese as an immigration issue, the party of Lincoln did not want to stray too far from the party's records on civil rights and equal citizenship. At the same time, Republicans were well aware of the need to court crucial swing voters in the West if they hoped to keep the highly rewarding presidential office under their control.

In this context, the law-making process over the issue of Chinese exclusion provides fertile ground for examining party transformations over potential wedge issues in Congress. Specific attention is paid to rank-and-file Republicans from different regions who managed their positions between championing equal civil rights and cheerleading the Chinese ban, when they knew that the party needed a new direction in a new political horizon. Findings from this article demonstrate how the inter-party struggles and intra-party splits eventually paved the way for passage of the Chinese exclusion laws in post-Reconstruction America.

My analysis is structured as follows: in the first section, I discuss the theoretical framework of this article regarding the effects of a wedge issue on party position reversals. The next section recounts the congressional politics of Chinese exclusion debates in the post-Reconstruction era. Then, the following two sections present various hypotheses to test the motives and strategies among party members and to highlight empirical findings showing that different groups of Republicans reacted differently to the Chinese Question. Finally, I discuss and conclude the article by illuminating the relevance of wedge-issue politics in understanding policy change in American politics.

## **Wedge-issue politics and party position shifts**

The notion that voters ought to be informed of the linkage between party positions in Congress and party labels in campaigns is a venerable one (Burnham, 1970; Cox and McCubbins, 1993; Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1974; Key, 1955; Miller and Stokes, 1963; Sundquist, 1973; Wittman, 1977). For a party position to be clear and credible, two conditions should be met: partisan commitment must be *cohesive* among members and *consistent* over time. A simple spatial model by Hinich and Munger (1997) shows that voters

do not necessarily support a party with an average policy position closer to their ideal policy preferences if the party is severely split over the policy stance. In other words, 'voters may accept an expected policy slightly away from their ideal point if the risk of being very far off is reduced' (Hinich and Munger, 1997: 124). Legislative scholars ranging from V. O. Key (1964) to Eric Schickler (2001) have long suggested that the notion of 'parties as diverse coalitions' constitutes a basic understanding of the major American parties. Aldrich (1995: 7) points out that 'the major American party is a broad and encompassing organization, a coalition of many and diverse partners, commonly called umbrella-like'. As a result, a majority party dilemma actually arises when far-reaching efforts made by the party to hold on to the majority coalition might end up creating a party whose members disagree on the party's policy position.

The temporal dimension is also critical for understanding the dynamics of party strength, split and shift. In fact, the demands of a vocal constituency do not necessarily bring about instant party position reversal. Downs (1957: 110) suggests, in his seminal work on strategic aspects of party ideology, that 'ideological immobility is characteristic of every responsible party, because it cannot repudiate its past actions unless some radical change in conditions justifies this'. It normally takes time and teamwork to build a sustainable party reputation. Party members who continue to benefit electorally from the existing party reputation tend to protect their party's policy records. At the same time, others who find their constituency interests increasingly contradicting the party stance are more likely to seize on a key wedge issue to initiate a vigorous public debate.

This article identifies partisan conditions under which changes in party positions are most likely to take place. In detecting the conditions for party position change, I give special attention to the dynamics of a wedge issue in legislative politics. A wedge issue, often drawing a new partisan cleavage line, is defined as a policy issue dividing one party into two or more camps without disturbing the other party.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, among many unique characteristics related to policy debates in America is the recurrence of wedge issues in partisan and electoral contexts. Many scholars have analysed the role of a wedge issue in reorganizing political debate (Hinich and Munger, 1997; Miller and Schofield, 2008; Riker, 1986; Schattschneider, 1960; Seo, 2010). The introduction of a new, divisive issue into the prevailing policy dimension sometimes divides the previously unbeatable coalition.

A spatial model of party competition is useful, given that I address how and why politicians manoeuvre issue dimensions to reshape party cleavage lines (Chappell and Keech, 1986; Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Hinich and Munger, 1997; Poole, 2005). Obviously, the losing minority is not satisfied with the status quo and is searching for a new political issue to divide the majority coalition. As Schattschneider (1960) and Riker (1982) argue, the introduction of a second issue dimension, the Chinese exclusion issue in this case, can exploit any possible tension within the majority coalition between the northeastern and western Republicans on the social axis. Without significantly changing the party's traditional stance on the dominant economic and protective tariff issue, the Democratic Party introduced a new policy dimension. The purpose was to attract disaffected voters, mostly in the West, who were likely to find the new issue attractive. Weingast (1998), for example, uses a similar spatial model to explain antebellum national politics and, especially, the role that slavery played in Republican efforts to

split the majority coalition forged between the Northeast and the Northwest. Irwin (2006) provides another example from the 19th century showing how internal improvements and tariffs were used to reshuffle regional and party alignments in antebellum America.

What these spatial approaches pay scant attention to, however, is how rank-and-file party members actually respond to the call for a new policy commitment. In fact, a potential wedge issue might increasingly break down the majority coalition and energize the out-of-power party. When this new party-splitting issue emerges, some party members are pressed to make a clean break from the politics of the past. They come to believe that a position shift is long overdue and is the only way to restore the party's credibility and competitiveness in elections. The existence of a party-splitting issue alone, however, does not always shake a party's foundation. The examination of the relationship *between* parties as well as members' rifts *within* a party is warranted to understand a complete picture of party conversion. As Schattschneider (1960) and Riker (1986) illuminate, minority party leaders are not oblivious to the majority party's intramural disputes. They marshal their forces to mount a fight that could help divulge a serious fissure on the other side of the aisle. With this wedge issue increasingly hurting the majority and helping the minority, some majority party members may opt to break ranks aimed at modifying the party's policy positions and arguments. One recent study shows that the unity of one party largely depends on that of the rival party and the party difference in the previous year (Lebo et al., 2007).

My principal argument is that cross-cutting cleavages between the previous party status quo and the newly emerging constituency interest presses party members to adopt a new voting strategy aimed not only at developing a new collective party reputation but also at downplaying their individual position change. In the course of law-making processes, such as bill amendments, veto overrides and final passage, rank-and-file members reveal a pattern of mending party divides in a gradual manner, but not in a stunning about-turn. Ultimately, party-splitting wedge issues in Congress often put pressure on party ranks to redefine their policy preferences and reshape party positions. This article provides an historical and theoretical lens to illuminate how this 'party-building' logic can influence cross-pressured members' legislative behaviour.

## **The congressional history of Chinese exclusion, 1868–1943**

In 1868, the Chinese government asked Anson Burlingame, the first American minister living in Beijing, to lead a diplomatic mission to America. Burlingame and his associates stopped by major cities in the United States and visited Washington, D.C. to meet with President Andrew Johnson. Having received a large and friendly welcome across the country, the Burlingame mission secured Senate ratification of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, which established reciprocal and most-favoured-nation rights, including immigration (Article V), travel (Article VI) and educational privileges (Article VII), between the United States and China. Subsequently, the vast majority of Chinese immigrants settled in the New Frontier on the Pacific Coast. Roughly 30,000 Chinese immigrants left Hong Kong for San Francisco in 1852 alone (Barth, 1964). Chinese labourers steadily

increased in the western states, with 20,000 arriving in 1873, 14,000 in 1874, 16,000 in 1875 and 23,000 in 1876 (Tichenor, 2002). Between 1860 and 1870, the city of San Francisco saw its population more than double, to almost 150,000, and 'by 1871 one of every three workers in the city was Chinese' (Mink, 1986: 74).

As wartime labour shortage problems gradually receded, resentment of Chinese immigrant workers quickly intensified in the West. White workers in California came to place blame for low wages, longer working days and a low chance of employment on Chinese immigrant labourers. Coolidge (1909), in her defence of Chinese immigration, first elaborated on the 'California thesis', as termed later by Miller (1969). Detailing the situation in mining camps in California where racial hostilities erupted, Coolidge claims that it was mainly working people's antagonism in California that functioned as a critical agent for Chinese exclusion laws. Sandmeyer (1939) further advanced the emphasis on the anti-Chinese movement in the Far West as a driving force for restricting Chinese immigration. Recent empirical analyses of the two elections in 1871 and 1879 by Fong and Markham (2002) find that organized group workers in California played a pivotal role in facilitating anti-Chinese political activity.

By the late 1870s, a large number of anti-Chinese clubs and the Chinese Exclusion League had formed across the country. Thus, the question of how a local labour and racial issue in California became a national political issue has drawn a huge amount of attention from scholars of Chinese exclusion. Barth's (1964) early analysis of the Chinese immigrants and their distinct orientation directed homeward was an effort to understand not only why Californians but also the American South and Northeast were troubled by Chinese labourers. In addition, the importation of Chinese strikebreakers into Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the early 1870s contributed to a hostile mood against Chinese (Barth, 1964; Daniels, 1988). Some labour unions in the East became increasingly suspicious of the value of Chinese labourers, and they joined their colleagues in the West in holding the Chinese immigrants responsible for the economic hard times of the 1870s. According to Mink (1986), organized labour, led by Samuel Gompers and others, endorsed Chinese exclusion, thus contributing to the nationalization of the Chinese exclusion movement. Rhoads (2002) particularly recounted the case of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, one of the first places in the East where the Chinese labourers went, and elaborated on how different working groups reacted to a local agenda of the Chinese Question, which ended up being a national issue.

In the meantime, merchants, industrial and agricultural employers, and religious leaders still supported the expansion of trade with China, the employment of low-cost Chinese labour and the promotion of missionary work in China. According to McKee (1977: 23): 'Centered in the northeast, especially New York and Massachusetts, business interests and missionary-minded Protestants stood for the status quo.' Indeed, a number of Republicans feared retaliation by the Middle Kingdom if Congress approved the exclusion measure (Cohn and Gee, 2003; Daniels, 1988). The pro-China coalition during this period, however, did not constitute a solid political force against the Chinese exclusion alliance (Tichenor, 2002). *The New York Times* (31 January 1879) conceded: 'It is not necessary for us of the East to argue the question of the desirability of the Chinese as dwellers on American soil.' Baum (1983: 76) summarized that 'the popular prejudice against the Chinese was simply too powerful to overcome'.

Gyory's (1998) account of the Chinese exclusion debate is one notable exception to these prevailing emphases on race, labour and California. Echoing Okihiro's view (2005: 77) that the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was 'not as a culmination of California efforts from the bottom up but as an initiative by Congress from the top down', Gyory argues that it was neither California nor labour, but national politicians and their electoral calculations, that ultimately passed the legislation to prohibit the entry of Chinese immigrant workers.<sup>3</sup> The joint resolution passed in 1879 by the Connecticut General Assembly confirmed that the anti-Chinese sentiment outside the West was relatively silent: 'Restricting Chinese immigration is a flagrant violation of a sacred and honorable treaty, and is wholly inconsistent with the principles and traditions of our republic' (Bensel, 2000: 151). In the end, a top-down perspective from Gyory and others suggests that the Chinese exclusion laws were a product of national political parties that were pushing to capitalize on a divisive issue in the post-Reconstruction electoral politics.

When it came to legislating attempts in Congress, the Fifteen Passenger bill in 1879, as it was popularly called, was a concerted action to block any vessels carrying more than 15 Chinese passengers. Saxton (1971) concurs with Sandmeyer (1939) that the year of 1879 was a 'turning point' in the federal effort to restrict Chinese immigrants (Gyory, 1998: 168).<sup>4</sup> By pressing the Chinese Question as a national issue, southern Democrats tried to forge a reborn West-South alliance 'dedicated to white supremacy and defeat of Northeastern radicalism' (Tichenor, 2002: 103). The main supporter for the Fifteen Passenger bill was Senator James G. Blaine of Maine, a pre-eminent politician of the post-Reconstruction era and front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination in 1880.<sup>5</sup> Gyory (1998) explains how Blaine calculated that the congressional delegation from California might cast the tie-breaking votes in the upcoming presidential election of 1880.<sup>6</sup> In spite of Blaine's push, the party of Lincoln in 1879 was not necessarily enthusiastic about the idea of banning Chinese labourers from entering American soil. California Republican Horace F. Page, a veteran anti-Chinese crusader, branded the 'Chinese labor contract system and polygamy the twin relics of the barbarism of slavery' (Jung, 2005: 677). The northeastern Republicans, such as Senators George Frisbie Hoar and Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts and Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, however, disagreed and stood up to the discrimination against Chinese workers. They not only invoked the party's heritage of equal civil rights, but also raised concerns about potential foreign policy costs such as losing the lucrative China market due to the potential Chinese retaliation.

The controversial Fifteen Passenger bill galvanized congressional Democrats and the Democratic majority of the 45th Congress (1877-79) overwhelmingly endorsed the bill by 104 to 17, with 33 not voting. 'It is conceded by the Republicans, and joyfully claimed by the Democrats that the Democratic House is entitled to the credit of passing the bill', *The New York Times* commented on 31 January 1879. Although President Rutherford B. Hayes, on 1 March 1879, vetoed the Fifteen Passenger bill, his main concern was about the unconstitutional abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty and the safety of merchants and missionaries, not the protection of Chinese immigrants (Riccards, 2000). Pressed by both parties, President Hayes in the following year ultimately sent James B. Angell, president of the University of Michigan, to China to negotiate a new treaty. The Angell Treaty of 1880 marked a legal turning point for restricting Chinese immigrants.<sup>7</sup>



As soon as the 47th Congress (1881–83) opened its first session, Senator John F. Miller and Representative Horace F. Page, both California Republicans, introduced similar bills in both chambers to restrict Chinese immigrants. Debates began on 28 February 1882, and Senator Miller sparred with his colleague from New England, Senator Hoar of Massachusetts. Senator Miller, echoing Blaine and other western members of Congress, stressed the positive impacts of Chinese exclusion on the American labourer. Although Senator Hoar was still endorsing the partisan commitment to the ideals of civil rights and racial equality (Cohn and Gee, 2003), his voice was becoming a minor one. The upper chamber approved the Chinese Exclusion Act, by 32 yeas to 15 nays, on 9 March 1882. The House also passed the Senate version on 23 March, following the same partisan division, with overwhelming Democratic support (97 to 4) and the Grand Old Party divided (58 to 62).

Then, on 4 April 1882, President Chester Arthur sent his veto message to the Senate. Arthur, explaining his veto position, confirmed that ‘experience has shown that the trade of the East is the key to national wealth and influence’ (*The New York Times*, 5 April 1882). His alternative suggestion was that ‘good faith requires us to suspend the immigration of Chinese laborers for a less period than 20 years’. Accordingly, within two weeks of the veto, a leading anti-Chinese GOP member from San Francisco, Horace F. Page, readily introduced a new bill. The main revision was the reduction of the exclusion period from 20 years to 10. Over this second attempt to pass the Chinese exclusion bill, 35 House members and six senators switched their positions from either pro-China or abstention, to anti-Chinese. As expected, President Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act on 6 May 1882 (see Table 1).

Once the Chinese Exclusion Act had been passed, congressional Republicans became less and less divided over whether to extend the exclusion period, but showed solid convergence on Chinese exclusion. In 1902, Republican senators supported the permanent extension of Chinese exclusion by 49 to 1, with 5 not voting. The year 1924 marked the climax of anti-immigration sentiment in the name of the National Origin Act, supported by a bipartisan majority in Congress. Figures 1 and 2 compare and contrast party positions over immigration policy towards Chinese from 1879 to 1924. This quota system placed in the National Origins Act of 1924 remained in effect until 1965, when the Immigration and Naturalization Services Act of 1965 abolished the national-origin quotas. With respect to Chinese exclusion in particular, it took almost 60 years for Congress to repeal the laws banning Chinese immigrants, when China emerged as a key wartime ally during World War II. To secure Chinese support in the war against Axis aggression, President Roosevelt, in 1943, chose to rescind the Chinese Exclusion Law.

## Explaining the political parties’ position shifts

The legislative attempts to ban Chinese immigrant workers involved complex decision-making processes in Congress. While historical studies have focused on various anti-Chinese movements, a micro-level analysis of party members’ vote choices and changes is another key to understanding the translation of ‘Chinese-must-go’ sentiments into the Chinese exclusion laws. To test the motives of rank-and-file party members from a social science perspective, I derive several hypotheses along the dimensions of constituency

**Table 1.** House votes on Chinese exclusion, 1879–82

Date	Description	Outcome	Total vote	Democratic Party	Republican Party	Northern Democrats	Southern Democrats
28 Jan 1879 45th Congress (1877–79)	To block any vessels carrying more than 15 Chinese passengers	Passed by Congress then vetoed by President Hayes	157–75	102–16	51–6	50–10	52–6
23 Mar 1882 47th Congress (1881–83)	To outlaw Chinese immigrant labourers for 10 years (Kasson Amendment)	Failed to pass by Congress	101–133	3–94	93–29	2–43	1–51
23 Mar 1882 47th Congress	To restrict the Chinese immigration for 20 years	Passed by Congress but vetoed by President Arthur	169–69	97–4	58–62	45–3	52–1
17 Apr 1882 47th Congress	To ban the Chinese immigration for 10 years	Passed by Congress then signed by President Arthur	204–38	102–3	88–34	46–3	56–0

Source: Congressional Records, various editions.

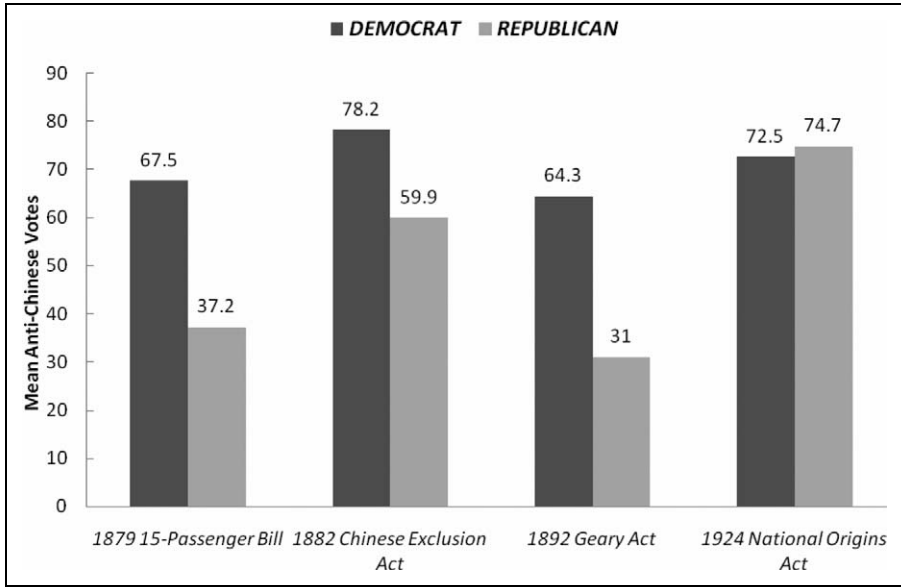


Figure 1. Party positions on key Chinese immigrant legislation in the House

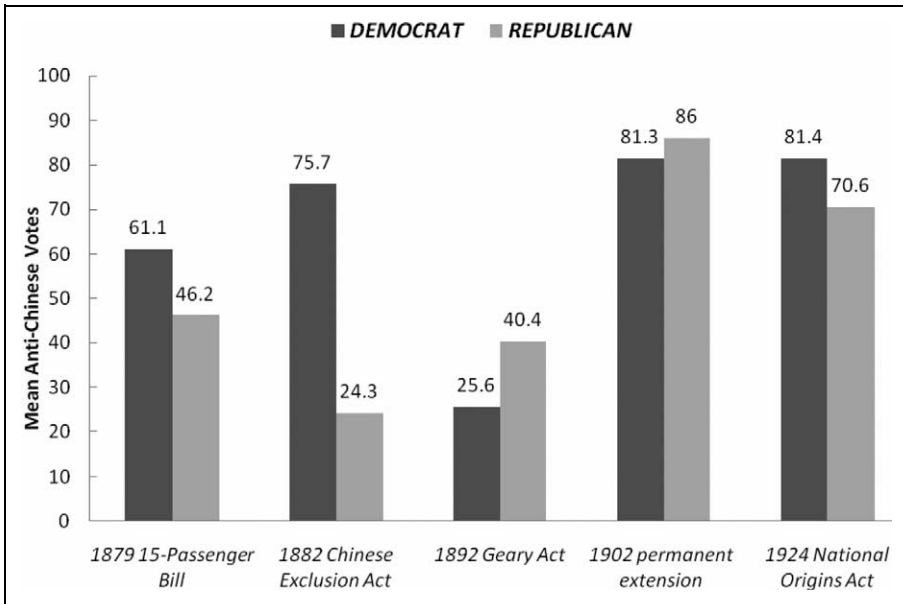


Figure 2. Party positions on key Chinese immigration legislation in the Senate

interests, member characteristics and partisan decisions. A special focus is on cross-pressured party members and their position shifts over the passage of the Chinese exclusion laws as a party-splitting agenda.

### *Constituency Interest Hypotheses*

*Hypothesis 1:* Agricultural districts are likely to have their members of Congress oppose the ban of Chinese immigrant labourers.

*Hypothesis 2:* Law makers from high-population density districts are likely to be supportive of Chinese restriction.

*Hypothesis 3:* Catholic immigrants tend to distinguish themselves from Chinese labourers by calling for Chinese exclusion.

The Constituency Interest Hypotheses test the nature of electoral connections in the post-Reconstruction Congress. Representatives from both parties acted to cope with the demands from their districts' economic conditions and demographic structure over the issue of Chinese exclusion. The first hypothesis suggests that agricultural areas are expected to favour the continuing influx of inexpensive Chinese labourers. Rural districts, most of the time, needed more of a low-cost labour force, so Chinese immigrant workers were generally welcomed. Higham (1955: 107), in his ground breaking study of the nativism of the Gilded Age, points out that: 'In California, agriculture expanded so swiftly that farmers short of hired hands even demanded a relaxation of the Chinese exclusion law.' In the meantime, given that the South was also highly agricultural but hardly short of labour during this period, a distinctive *wheat production in the South* variable was wedded to the model for the purpose of examining how the same constituency interests might play out differently by region.

On the demographic side, members representing a high population density district were assumed to oppose any further arrival of foreign labourers, including the Chinese. Particularly in urban areas such as San Francisco, many white labourers viewed Chinese immigrants as a threat to their job security and pressed their congressional members to call for restrictions. In addition, legislators in need of Catholic votes appeared to see little problem with their support of Chinese exclusion (Tichenor, 2002). Through their Chinese exclusion efforts, Democrats who were opposed to anti-Catholic nativist movements attempted to make a distinction between European free immigrants and contract labourers from the Middle Kingdom. For an empirical test of these economic/demographic-related hypotheses in the post-Reconstruction era, I used a historical dataset compiled by Parsons et al. (1990), as Jenkins et al. (2004) did in their analysis of homogeneity and polarization in Congress from 1857–1913.

### *The Electoral Competition Hypotheses*

*Hypothesis 4:* Legislators facing competitive elections are more likely to choose Chinese exclusion.

*Hypothesis 5:* Members of Congress who have served longer are less likely to endorse Chinese exclusion.

As an application of the ‘marginality hypothesis’ to the disputes over Chinese exclusion, the Competition Hypotheses assume that legislators elected by narrow margins paid closer attention to the prevailing anti-Chinese mood among the electorate (Cohn and Gee, 2003; Mink, 1986; Sandmeyer, 1939; Saxton, 1971; Theriault, 2005). In a thorough examination of the Republican Party during this period, Marcus (1971: 6) suggests that new elements for electoral contests were ‘close party balances, high turnout, and party regularity’. Figure 3 shows the level of electoral competition for the 47th Congress, with the average vote margin in the West absolutely slim compared to other regions in America.

Also, senior members in Congress are hypothesized to have relatively free hands for supporting the rights of Chinese immigrant workers. Particularly, given their post-Civil War experience in pursuit of legislating equal civil rights, those senior members are assumed to oppose Chinese exclusion measures. As Baum (1983: 77) points out, however, ‘the most idealistic among them found themselves gradually stripped of their power within the Republican Party by others more dedicated to keeping Republicans in office’. That is, junior members of the post-Reconstruction Congress faced more challenge for temporal position shifts over the Chinese Question. Backbenchers were allegedly more vulnerable to pervasive anti-Chinese sentiments, compared to the ‘Old Guards’, particularly among Republicans.

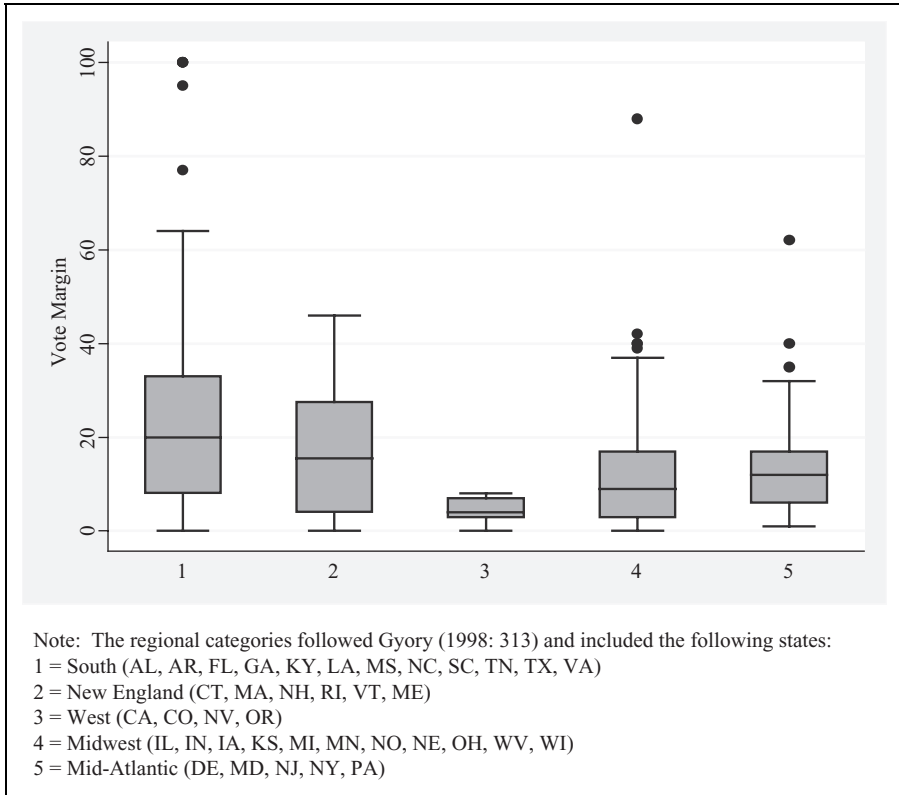
### *The Position Change Hypotheses*

*Hypothesis 6:* Democratic members of Congress are more likely than Republicans to be united in their support of Chinese exclusion.

*Hypothesis 7:* Cross-pressured Republican members are more likely than their co-partisans to engage in vote-switching over Chinese exclusion.

The Position Change Hypotheses examine the logic of vote choice and change over wedge-issue politics towards Chinese exclusion. Democrats showed their united and consistent opposition to Chinese immigrant labourers through the cases of the Fifteen Passenger bill in the 45th Congress (1877–79) and the Chinese Exclusion Act in the 47th Congress (1881–83). There was little doubt that Chinese exclusion was a Democratic measure.<sup>8</sup> Anti-Chinese sloganeering was a perfect tool for the Democratic Party to court white workers outside the South. When President Arthur sent his veto message urging a reasonable and responsible exclusion, his disapproval ‘confirmed Chinese exclusion as a Democratic issue’, as Mink (1986: 10) suggests. By portraying the anti-exclusion position as hostile to labour and the Pacific Coast, Democrats were ready to use the roll-call votes as ammunition against Republicans. Thus, Democrats are hypothesized to collectively and consistently support Chinese exclusion.

To illuminate the role of Chinese exclusion as a wedge issue for party shifts, it is imperative to note that the *length* of exclusion – 10- or 20-year-long restrictions – became the key debate point. Congressional dispute over the question of ‘how long’



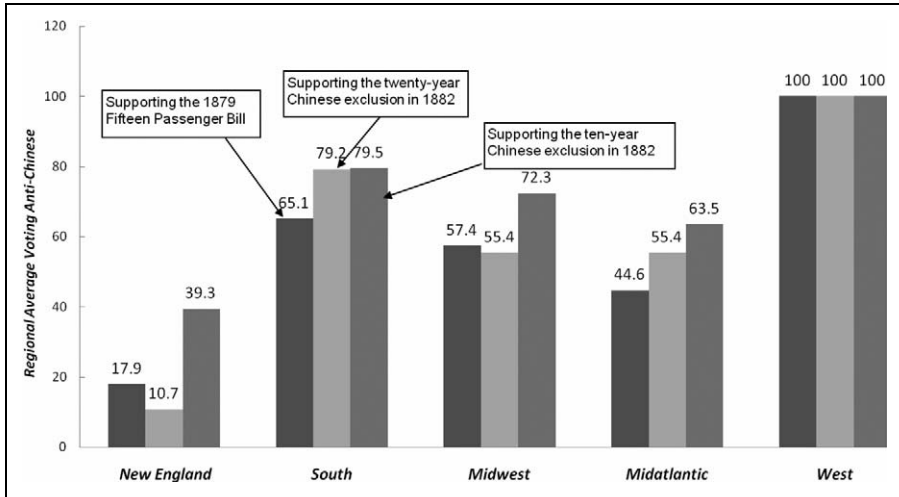
**Figure 3.** Electoral competition (vote margin) by regions in the 47th Congress (1881–83)

broke out, especially after Republican Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont, one of the Senate's most senior and respected members, basically endorsed the exclusion idea on the ground of 'majority as morality' (Gyory, 1998: 230–4). Senator John Sherman (R-OH) also weighed in, proposing that length 'is the most important feature of the whole bill' (Gyory, 1998: 233). With the exception of a few isolated Old Guards, such as Senator Hoar of Massachusetts, the Republican Party was ready to move on over the issue of Chinese exclusion. The real question came down to the decision over a 10-year versus 20-year exclusion.

John A. Kasson, an Iowa Republican, proposed a last-minute amendment to exclude the Chinese for 10 years, and Congressional members from New England, mostly Republicans, were unanimously supportive of this 'reasonable' length of exclusion. As the Kasson Amendment was killed by overwhelming opposition by Democrats (97 percent of all Democrats), the New England GOP members quickly turned around and took issue with the 20-year exclusion proposal from Rep. Pacheco, another Republican from California. Representatives from the New England region were collectively fine with the 10-year Chinese exclusion, but vehemently against the idea of the 20-year-

**Table 2.** The New England and the 'Chinese Question': 'Endorsing exclusion for one decade, but absolutely not two'

State	Party	Member	Kasson (R-IA) Amendment 10-year exclusion (Roll-Call 72, 23 March 1882)	Pacheco (R-CA) bill 20-year exclusion (RC 73, the same day)
MASSACHUSETTS	R	CRAPO	Y	N
	R	HARRIS	Y	N
	R	RANNEY	Y	N
	D	MORSE	N	N
	R	BOWMAN	Non-vote	Non-vote
	R	STONE	Y	N
	R	RUSSELL	Y	N
	R	CANDLER	Y	N
	R	RICE	Y	N
	R	NORCROSS	Y	N
CONNECTICUT	R	ROBINSON	Y	N
	R	BUCK	Y	N
	D	PHELPS	N	Y
	R	WAIT	Y	N
	R	MILES	Non-vote	Non-vote
	R	REED	Y	N
	R	DINGLEY	Y	N
	R	LINDSEY	Non-vote	Non-vote
	I	LADD	N	Y
	I	MURCH	N	Y
NEW HAMPSHIRE	R	HALL	Y	N
	R	BRIGGS	Y	N
	R	RAY	Y	N
RHODE ISLAND	R	SPOONER	Y	N
	R	CHACE	Y	N
	R	JOYCE	Y	N
VERMONT	R	TYLER	Y	N
	R	GROUT	Non-vote	N



**Figure 4.** Average support level for Chinese exclusion by congressional delegations from various regions, 1879–82

long ban. Table 2 presents the two completely opposite views shared by New England law makers over the length of exclusion.

In the meantime, another group of cross-pressured Republicans is also hypothesized to engage in vote-switching in legislative processes of Chinese exclusion law-making. GOP rank-and-file members from the Midwest, including Iowa, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio, were stuck in the middle of multifaceted interests related to the Chinese Question: agricultural district interests, a strong nativist tradition in the area and political expediency for winning elections (Jensen, 1971).<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Democratic contenders might spotlight voting decisions on Chinese exclusion that could put pressure on some Midwestern Republicans from anti-Chinese districts. Thus, the GOP members from the Midwest are hypothesized to be more likely to alter their positions over different bills for electoral safety. Figure 4 illuminates the variance among different regional delegations to Congress over the Chinese Question.

## Analysis

To test the various hypotheses on the Chinese exclusion votes in the House, I code the dependent variable 1 for a vote in favour of restricting Chinese, otherwise 0. Using multivariate regression, empirical tests show how rank-and-file party members take on legislative measures, ranging from restricting a vessel containing more than 15 Chinese immigrants in 1879 to closing the gate on Chinese labourers for the period of 10 years in 1882. Because the coefficients from a logistic regression do not necessarily provide substantive interpretations, I have also reported the impact of relative independent variables on the predicted probability of members' voting, with other variables held at their baseline values.



**Table 3.** Multivariate analysis of the Fifteen Passenger bill in 1879

Variable	Coefficient		Coefficient	
	Change in probability		Change in probability	
Wheat output	-0.0001	(0.0001)	-0.0001	(0.0001)
Population density	0.0004	(0.0005)	0.0003	(0.0005)
Catholic	-0.023	(0.038)	-0.021	(0.038)
Electoral margin	-0.013	(0.008)	-0.009	(0.008)
Republican seniority	-		-0.186***	(0.054) <b>-61%</b>
Democratic Party	1.289***	(0.308) <b>+31%</b>	-	
New England	-1.610***	(0.608) <b>-37%</b>	-1.685***	(0.600) <b>-38%</b>
Mid-Atlantic	-0.679*	(0.408) <b>-17%</b>	-0.826**	(0.398) <b>-20%</b>
Midwest	0.209	(0.405)	0.006	(0.389)
Constant	0.128	(0.394)	1.213	(0.342)
Log likelihood	-164.44		-166.16	
% correctly predicted	66.7%		69.6%	
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.12		0.11	

$N = 270$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

Dependent variable coded 1 for a vote in favour of the Fifteen Passenger bill in 1879, otherwise 0.

*Change in Probability* (in bold italics) reflects the percentage change in the predicted probability of voting for the Fifteen Passenger bill when a relevant independent variable moves from minimum to maximum values, while holding all other variables at baseline values.

First, Table 3 reports the results from the logistic regressions of the model explaining party members' vote choices over the Fifteen Passenger bill in 1879. The outcomes vindicate that Democrats are vehemently supportive of the restriction measure. Being a Democratic member of Congress was a statistically significant predictor of voting for the Fifteen Passenger bill, and the chance for Democrats to endorse the measure increased by 31 percent. On the contrary, the predicted probability of a New England legislator voting anti-Chinese is 37 percent lower and the Mid-Atlantic representatives' likelihood is 17 percent lower than congressional members from other regions. In addition, a Republican member with 27-year-long congressional career through the 45th Congress (1877–79) showed to be about 61 percent more hostile to the restriction measure.

With President Arthur having vetoed the 20-year exclusion bill and calling for some 'reasonable' approach, a congressional majority finally emerged over the consensus to ban Chinese workers. Interestingly enough, the GOP leadership did not provide any clear voting cue for its members, which reflected some degree of fear among representatives that a pro-Chinese stance could touch off a wave of voter anger in a high-stakes election year. Joseph Warren Keifer (R-OH), the Speaker of the House, and George M. Robeson (R-NJ), the Republican Caucus Chair, did not cast their votes. Though the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was finally passed by a majority of congressional members, some party ranks consistently registered their opposing views against the backdrop of party position shifts.

Tables 4, 5 and 6 report the results from the test of the Position Change Hypotheses and offer considerable support for the wedge politics argument developed in this study. First of all, the Kasson Amendment calling for a 10-year Chinese exclusion led Democrats (3 years,

**Table 4.** Testing the Position Change Hypotheses in the House, 1882

Variable	Kasson Amendment (10-year exclusion) 23 March 1882	
Wheat output	0.014	(0.016)
Population density	-0.018	(0.025)
Catholic	0.013	(0.015)
Electoral margin	0.024**	(0.011) <b>+49%</b>
Years in the House	0.035	(0.038)
Democratic Party	-3.570***	(0.604) <b>-50%</b>
New England	2.329***	(0.751) <b>+50%</b>
Mid-Atlantic	1.404**	(0.637) <b>+26%</b>
Midwest	2.017***	(0.609) <b>+35%</b>
Constant	-1.738	(0.640)
Log likelihood	-104.08	
% correctly predicted	81.8	
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.402	

$N = 269$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$ . Entries are maximum likelihood estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. Change in probability in **bold italics**.

**Table 5.** Testing the Position Change Hypotheses in the House, 1882

Variable	20-year exclusion bill 23 March 1882	
Wheat output	-0.0002*	(0.0001) <b>-40%</b>
Wheat output (South)	0.0001	(0.0006)
Population density	0.00005	(0.0001)
Catholic	0.025	(0.039)
Electoral margin	-0.011	(0.008)
Years in the House	0.008	(0.028)
Democratic Party	0.761***	(0.315) <b>+18%</b>
New England	-2.856***	(0.746) <b>-54%</b>
Mid-Atlantic	-1.165***	(0.475) <b>-28%</b>
Midwest	-0.454	(0.463)
Constant	0.862	(0.496)
Log likelihood	-159.19	
% correctly predicted	72.6	
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.14	

$N = 269$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$ . Entries are maximum likelihood estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. Change in probability in **bold italics**.

94 nays) and Republicans (93 yeas, 29 nays) to totally disagree along the party line. The results indicate that Democratic Party membership decreased the probability of supporting the 10-year exclusion amendment by 50 percent. By not moving an inch from their support of a 20-year ban, Democrats pushed hard to take the advantage of Chinese exclusion as a

**Table 6.** Logistic regression of position change in 1882 (Republicans only)

Variable	Kasson Amendment (10-year exclusion) 23 March 1882	20-year exclusion bill 23 March 1882	10-year ban (final passage) 17 April 1882
Ideology	2.848*** (1.212) <b>+67%</b>	-1.643 (1.184)	-0.756 (1.241)
Wheat output	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Population density	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.005* (0.003) <b>+48%</b>
Catholic	0.011 (0.060)	0.082 (0.056)	-0.010 (0.057)
Electoral margin	0.033* (0.018) <b>+35%</b>	-0.015 (0.016)	-0.023 (0.016)
Years in the House	0.069 (0.052)	0.055 (0.047)	0.039 (0.051)
New England	2.536*** (0.990) <b>+37%</b>	NA	-2.421*** (0.972) <b>-49%</b>
Mid-Atlantic	1.387* (0.796) <b>+27%</b>	0.051 (0.550)	-1.858** (0.886) <b>-33%</b>
Midwest	2.102*** (0.779) <b>+44%</b>	0.874* (0.538) <b>+20%</b>	-0.937 (0.844)
Constant	-2.955 (0.965)	-0.545 (0.777)	2.079 (0.999)
Log likelihood	-74.45	-83.41	-81.99
% correctly predicted	69.63	67.65	65.44
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.153	0.083	0.103

*N* = 135. \*\*\**p* < 0.01; \*\**p* < 0.05; \**p* < 0.1. Entries are maximum likelihood estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. Change in probability in **bold italics**.

wedge between the eastern and western GOP members. On the contrary, law makers from New England (50 percent), the Mid-Atlantic states (26 percent) and the Midwest (35 percent) threw their support behind the amendment offered by a Midwestern GOP member. In other words, in managing this cross-cutting cleavage – commercial interests, civil rights, labour conflicts and party positions – New England Republicans tried to settle on the 10-year exclusion. Also, representatives from the electorally safe districts endorsed the initial legislative attempt to provide a ‘reasonable’ length of exclusion.

As the Democrats’ united opposition derailed the Kasson Amendment (101 yeas to 133 nays), coalitional dynamics in the legislative process dramatically changed on the same day. What is noticeable was the position shift by the Midwest representatives, whose statistical significance of being hostile to the 20-year ban suddenly disappeared. Once the 10-year ban amendment collapsed, the Midwestern House members no longer registered their regional positions to Chinese exclusion for the period of 20 years. Also, the wheat output variable shows a distinct response from the South, where a strong opposition to Chinese exclusion could not be detected. Similar economic interests were not automatically translated into congressional votes.

The evidence from Table 6 presents the analyses of Republican votes only. It shows how quickly some party members altered their voting decisions. First, with the party variable replaced with an ideological position (DW-NOMINATE Score), it turned out that ideology was an even better indicator of predicting members’ positions regarding

a 10-year exclusion measure. Second, vote-switching by the Midwestern Republicans follows the predictions by the cross-pressured member hypothesis (H7) almost perfectly. After a strong Democratic opposition killed the Kasson Amendment, the GOP ranks from the Midwest changed their minds to join Democrats in favour of the 20-year-long Chinese exclusion.

Third, voting positions by the New England Republicans are also striking. Although both the Kasson Amendment and the final passage of Chinese exclusion after presidential veto proposed exactly the same length of Chinese suspension (a 10-year exclusion), GOP members from the six New England states took the opposite positions. Being a New England Republican *increased* the predicted chance of voting for the Kasson Amendment (*10-year exclusion*) by 37 percent, while it *decreased* the probability of endorsing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (*10-year exclusion*) by 49 percent. Baum (1983: 76) claimed that 'the Chinese question . . . forced Massachusetts Republicans to demonstrate to what degree they would adhere to the principles they had set forth . . . Most failed the test'. What was unnoticed, however, was the fact that New England GOP ranks did not desert their principles of civil rights and racial equality overnight, but engaged in vote-switching strategies and finally turned their backs on the final passage of Chinese exclusion bill.

## Discussion and conclusion

Despite the voluminous literature accumulated on the subject of Chinese exclusion in the post-Reconstruction period, there have been few studies integrating the role of the political party in translating the anti-Chinese rancour in California into the national exclusion laws in Congress. This article has taken a step towards filling in this gap by examining the dynamics of members' dynamic voting decisions. When the era of failed Reconstruction ended, the issue of restricting Chinese immigrant workers became crucial for a new coalition-building in national politics. Indeed, the debate over Chinese exclusion signified diverse issue dimensions, including race, labour, foreign policy and party politics. Both Democrats and Republicans confronted similar party-building demands, but constructed distinct voting dynamics in post-Reconstruction America.

Empirical findings of this study show that Democrats played the Chinese Question card to put western Republicans at odds with their party's traditional base in the Northeast and the Midwest. Despite their internal disagreements over other issues, Democratic rank-and-file members rallied firmly behind the 20-year exclusion bill. On the contrary, the Republicans were split. GOP members from the Northeast found the measure conflicting with the region's commercial interests and the nation's foreign policy imperatives, not to mention their previous party positions. The New Englanders worried that a national ban on Chinese for 20 years would endanger America's growing trade with China and her reputation over treaty obligation. In addition, the Midwestern Republicans also needed to weigh in on both a strong nativist tradition and agricultural interests in the area. At the same time, however, it was increasingly obvious that the political wind was blowing against Chinese immigrant workers, particularly in California, a crucial swing state for contested presidential races.

With party-building in a new electoral challenge at stake, the Republican ranks from different regions took different voting choices. As soon as their compromised proposal

for a 10-year Chinese exclusion was defeated, the fear of being portrayed as 'pro-Chinese, anti-labour' led the Republicans from the Midwest to cross the aisle. They threw their support behind the Democrats to pass the 10-year exclusion bill. The New England GOP members, on the other hand, voted against the final passage of the 10-year measure, although they knew that they were on the losing side. In essence, the legislative politics of Chinese exclusion in the post-Reconstruction era drove a significant number of Republicans to reconsider their vote choices and changes. Not only one party's unity but also the rival party's split was a game-changer for partisan responses to potential wedge issues. This article signifies that rank-and-file members' responsiveness to electoral pressure offers a previously unnoticed predictor of, and source of explanation for, eventual party position changes.

## Notes

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1. Burnham's (1970) comprehensive calculations indicate that among doubtful states were New York, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, Connecticut and California in America's Gilded Age (see also James, 2000).
2. Hillygus and Shields (2007: 18), for instance, list as wedge issues in American politics 'gun control, abortion, global warming, immigration, affirmative action, school prayer, free trade, gay marriage, stem cell research, welfare reform, education, and internet taxation'.
3. For an extensive debate over Gyory's (1998) argument, see Lyman (2000).
4. While Peffer (1986) and Volpp (2005) correctly pay important attention to the role of the Page Act of 1875 in facilitating exclusion, there was virtually no debate or opposition in Congress to the legislation aimed at outlawing the importation of Chinese women for purposes of prostitution (Gyory, 1998).
5. For a detailed account of Republican factionalism in the Gilded Age, see Marcus (1971), Peskin (1984) and Summers (2000).
6. Blain's strategic support of Chinese exclusion paid off, not in 1880, but in 1884, when the 'Plumed Knight' lost the presidential contest to the New York Governor Cleveland, but carried all western states including California, Colorado, Nevada and Oregon.
7. China during this period was primarily concerned about a possible Russian attack, the threat of war with Japan and unreliable British support (Riccards, 2000).
8. Every bill in the House to ban Chinese immigrants was introduced by western Republican members such as Rep. Wren of Nevada and, Rep. Pacheco and Page of California.
9. For a great source on this strong nativist and Protestant tradition of Midwest Republicanism in this era, see Richard Jensen's (1971) book entitled *Winning of the Midwest*. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer on this point.

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