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"WE CAST ABOUT FOR A REMEDY": 
CHINESE LABOR AND AFRICAN OPPOSITION 
IN THE GOLD COAST, 1874–1914 

By Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry

One major problem British officials had to confront in the Gold Coast (colonial southern Ghana) from the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the scarcity of labor—the "native labor question"¹ in the parlance of colonial officials. This study examines colonial policy makers' preoccupation with importing Chinese mine labor as a means of solving the labor question between 1874 and 1914 and probes their beliefs in the superiority of Chinese over African labor. I show that in their challenges to this prejudicial ideology, the Gold Coast African intelligentsia² revealed that the Gold Coast laborers'³ disinclination to accept wage labor was not innate. Rather, the African intelligentsia argued that Africans' refusal to work was due to problems inherent in the prevailing wage labor economy in the Gold Coast. Following considerations of comparative and historiographical perspectives, the study is divided into three major sections. The first section discusses the evolution of the idea of using Chinese labor in the Gold Coast. The second section examines the African intelligentsia's opposition to these proposals, and the third evaluates the arrival of Chinese laborers in the Gold Coast and African responses in 1897, 1902, and 1914.


²This group comprised literate Africans and diasporic Africans, including African-Caribbeans and African-Brazilians. They were the opinion leaders, described as the new elites, social elites, and the Western-educated elites. See, for example, David Kimble, A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850–1928 (Oxford, 1963), 135–41; Mary McCarthy, Social Change and the Growth of British Power in the Gold Coast (Lanham, MD, 1983), 107–125; and Philip Foster, Education and Social Change in Ghana (Chicago, 1968), 48–69. Following Foster, Education and Social Change, 68, I use the term intelligentsia to show "a considerable heterogeneity within the educated group itself."

³I use "Gold Coast laborers" and "African laborers" interchangeably, not referring to any specific ethnic group but to the generality of laborers. The early colonial critique of African labor seems to be limited to the Akan region; from the end of the nineteenth century, however, such criticism referred to Gold Coast laborers in general, including those from the Northern Territories, who increasingly resisted recruitment into the labor force. See, for example, G.T.Z. Chada, "Labor Protest, Group Consciousness and Trade Unionism in West Africa: The Radical Railway Workers of Colonial Ghana" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1981), 63–69.
From the late 1870s on, successive Gold Coast colonial governments made concerted efforts to solve the perennial labor crisis, but were unable to do so until the 1930s. Colonial public works, porterage services, and expansion in gold mining called for massive labor recruitment drives. Furthermore, the British abolition of slavery and pawnship in 1874–75 was intended to transform precolonical forms of unfree labor to wage labor in the Gold Coast. One way of achieving this goal was to recruit wage labor to sustain the burgeoning colonial economy. However, labor recruitment in the Gold Coast remained woefully inadequate, a problem that was complicated by the belief of colonial authorities and policy makers that African labor was inferior. These factors forced successive colonial governments and some mining companies to turn their attention to the broader West African region, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone, to recruit labor. In addition, both colonial policy makers and mining companies also focused on Chinese mine labor.

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7 See, for example, Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “‘Missy Queen in Her Palaver Sayes de Gole Coose Slave Is Free’: Abolition of Slavery/Pawnship and Colonial Labor Recruitment in the Gold Coast (Southern Ghana), 1874–1940” (Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1998), 139–78.

8 See, for example, Chada, “Labor Protest,” 50–52; Dumett, El Dorado in West Africa, 144, 211 and 249–51; and Crisp, Ghanaian Miners’ Struggles, 19–20.

The proposal to use Chinese labor in the Gold Coast was given extensive coverage by the Gold Coast newspapers,\(^{10}\) patronized by the African intelligentsia. As source materials, the newspapers provide information on African initiatives and responses to official prejudice that Gold Coast labor was inferior to Chinese labor. In spite of the African intelligentsia’s compelling articulation of the “native labor question,” their viewpoints and grievances have been relatively neglected in the labor history of the Gold Coast. Most scholars have concentrated on workers or laborers’ responses to capital.\(^{11}\) While wage laborers rejected the existing poor working conditions, it was the African intelligentsia who articulated wage laborers’ concerns and crusaded for better working conditions for them.

**Comparative Perspectives**

In the aftermath of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and domestic slavery in Africa, indentured Asian labor became an important means of meeting global labor demands.\(^{12}\) Indentured Chinese labor was considered cheaper than local wage labor. Since such Chinese laborers were barred from citizenship, mining companies could subject them to harsher social control and work regimens than local laborers.\(^{13}\) Overall, indentured Chinese labor in overseas gold mining illustrates the expansion of international capital and the circulation of labor tied to the commodification of gold as currency.\(^{14}\)

The quest to use Chinese mine labor in the Gold Coast began in the early 1870s as a result of the growing colonial and mining companies’ interest in the Wassa and Akyem gold fields.\(^{15}\) During the mid-1890s, the need for skilled mine

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\(^{13}\) Gonzales, “Chinese Plantation Workers,” 385.


\(^{15}\) See, for example, a spate of reports on the potential of the Wassa gold fields in *The African Times* (London), between 1862 and ca. 1901; Richard F. Burton and Verney L. Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold* (London, 1883) 2 vols; Gold Coast Reports on Gold Mines, Parliamentary Papers, 1889, C. 5620–24 (hereafter C. 5620–24); Gold Mining Prospects; Problems of Land,
labor, such as carpenters and "engine pumping hands," increased. This resulted in Governor William E. Maxwell's statement that the use of Chinese labor would lead to "the development of alluvial gold-fields by a class of miners, who are more industrious and better instructed than the Gold Coast negro." Finally, in July 1897, Governor Maxwell brought some Chinese mine laborers to the Gold Coast. This was a pilot scheme aimed at assessing the viability of using large-scale Chinese labor to increase gold production. Maxwell's sudden death in September 1897 effectively ended the pilot project. Subsequently, in 1902 and 1914, Chinese mine laborers were imported into the Gold Coast.

Compared with the large populations of indentured Chinese laborers elsewhere, the number of Chinese who arrived in the Gold Coast in 1897 was tiny, although the various newspapers gave conflicting accounts. The Gold Coast Chronicle and the Gold Coast Independent reported that there were 16 Chinese, the Gold Coast Express put the number at "thirty strong," and the Gold Coast Methodist Times first mentioned 18 and later 16. Furthermore, these early Chinese laborers spent only about a month in the Gold Coast, and their contribution to the economy was virtually nil. The second contingent of Chinese laborers in 1902 were not enumerated but were said to be "a few." The 1914 group, according to the Gold Coast Leader, numbered "30 or so." Thus, the importance

Administration and Transport, ADM 1/467, No. 143, May 29, 1877 in Bevin, Documents, 3–5. For a fuller account, see Rosenblum, "Gold Mining," 149–66; and Adu A. Boahen, Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London, 1975), 93–101. Questions of indenture itself and how much the Chinese were paid are generally absent from the sources.

16See, for example, Gold Coast Independent, August 22, 1896.

17Ibid. For biographical details on Governor Maxwell, see African Times, April 1, 1895; and Gold Coast Independent, January 28, 1898. Both give an account of his birthplace, training as a lawyer, and earlier administrative career. The press criticized Maxwell for having done little to control the impact of the disintegration of the Asante Empire on trade and security in the interior and challenged his policy towards Samori's political incursions in the region north of Asante.

18For the 1902 case, see African Times, May 5, 1902; and Thomas, "Forced Labor," 80 note 6. For the 1914 case, see The Gold Coast Leader (Cape Coast), July 18, 1914; and Gold Coast Leader, July 25, 1914. See also Howard, Colonialism and Underdevelopment, 203–204.

19See, for example, Gonzales, "Chinese Plantation Workers," 390–91, shows that "over" 90,000 and "some" 63,000 Chinese indentured laborers were respectively transported to Peru between 1847 and 1874 and South Africa between 1904 and 1907. In California, the number of Chinese grew from 76,000 in 1849 to 111,000 in 1876. See Richardson, Chinese Mine Labor, 2. Also, Jeeves, Migrant Labor, 256, indicates that in 1904–1906, some 50,000 Chinese were employed in gold mines in South Africa; and Breman, Taming the Coolie Beast, 2, states that "approximately a hundred thousand indentured Coolies worked" in Sumatra's East Coast at the beginning of the twentieth century.

20The Gold Coast Chronicle (Accra), August 14, 1897, and Gold Coast Independent, January 29, 1898; Gold Coast Express (Accra), July 27, 1897; The Gold Coast Methodist Times (Cape Coast), August 31, 1897.

21African Times, May 5, 1902.

22Gold Coast Leader, July 18, 1914.
of the Chinese labor scheme is not about the contributions of the Chinese to the
Gold Coast economy and society. Rather, the dialectic of Chinese labor scheme
and consequent African response offers an insight into labor problems that
plagued the colonial state.

The comparative literature reveals different patterns of local responses to the
use of Chinese labor.\textsuperscript{23} Writing about indentured Chinese labor in the Transvaal,
Peter Richardson shows that the white working class, traders, and farmers
opposed the use of Chinese labor on the grounds that the Chinese would compete
with them for jobs.\textsuperscript{24} Contrary to what obtained in Southern Africa and elsewhere,
the African intelligentsia’s opposition, and indeed, the African laborers’ resis-
tance to colonial wage employment, had nothing to do with job competition.
Rather, the African intelligentsia’s opposition had everything to do with debunk-
ing assertions that African laborers were lazy, consequently drawing attention to
poor working conditions in the Gold Coast. Furthermore, while organized labor in
Britain opposed the employment of Chinese in the Transvaal,\textsuperscript{25} business concerns
in Britain supported the scheme because of the paramountcy of capitalist interests
in the Wasa and Akyem gold fields.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{Historiographical Considerations}

A number of scholars, including David Kimble, Paul Rosenblum, G.T.Z. Chada,
and Jeff Crisp have mentioned the use of Chinese mine labor without analyzing
its potential implications for Gold Coast labor history.\textsuperscript{27} Rhoda Howard writes
that in 1914 “the shortage of labor, especially relatively disciplined, skilled labor
for the mines, was so severe that various attempts were made to recruit foreign-
ers.” As a result, the Abontiakrom Mines employed 26 Chinese, who had spent
between three months and three years in the Gold Coast.\textsuperscript{28} Howard clearly
accepts the official version that the need for foreign labor was due to the lack of
discipline and skill among Gold Coast laborers. I argue here that difficulties in
hiring Gold Coast laborers were due to problems in the colonial wage labor econ-

\textsuperscript{23}See, for example, Jeeves, \textit{Migrant Labor}, 59–84; and Richardson, \textit{Chinese Mine Labor},
27–46.

\textsuperscript{24}Richardson, “Chinese Indentured Labor,” 268.

\textsuperscript{25}See, for example, Richardson, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26}See, for example, a report on the 1896 meeting of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce in
\textit{Gold Coast Independent}, August 15 and August 25, 1896. For information on concessions
regarding the Akyem gold fields, see, for example \textit{Gold Coast Chronicle}, November 11–25, 1899;
and \textit{Gold Coast Express}, November 2–6, 1899. For concessions on the Wasa gold fields, see C.
5620–24, which includes a general account of gold mines in the Central Province, including
Akyem Swedru.

\textsuperscript{27}Kimble, \textit{Political History}, 24; Rosenblum, “Gold Mining,” 295; Chada, “Labor Protest,”

\textsuperscript{28}Howard, \textit{Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Ghana}, 203.
omy and show that the Chinese labor question had attracted popular opposition even before 1914.29

Raymond Dumett’s 1998 study deals with problems of mine labor and the efforts to solve them and is the most comprehensive to date.30 Dumett used Gold Coast newspapers as sources for his study, but failed to mention the Chinese labor scheme and the overwhelming press coverage that underscored African opposition to the proposals to use Chinese mine labor. The use of the Gold Coast newspapers has arguably provided a more meaningful historical platform on which to project the African voice and assess how Africans themselves discerned problems in colonial policies and practice.31 On the whole, scholars who have written about the labor question have relied on colonial sources and have tended to overemphasize the perspective of the colonial state on the labor question.32 Combining both official and non-official sources, including the Gold Coast newspapers, this study addresses that methodological lapse in the literature. The evolution of Gold Coast newspapers and the British West African press as whole,33 as well as their collective protests against objectionable colonial policies are too well known to merit further discussion here. What is worth repeating is that the British West African press, including that of the Gold Coast, became a bastion of opposition to colonial policies on labor, land, taxation, jurisprudence, and the use of African institutions as the axis of colonial rule. In addition, the press became a nationalist, epistemological agency of cultural assertiveness against assumed European superiority and Christian missionary teachings that undermined African worldviews and ontology.34

29See, for example, The Gold Coast Leader, July 18, 1914; and Gold Coast Leader, July 25, 1914.

30Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*. See also Rosenblum, “Gold Mining.”

31Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, 146, 340 notes 53 and 54, uses the comments of Dr. Charles Easmon of the Korlebu Teaching Hospital (Accra,) to underscore his point that malaria had debilitating effects on African workers, which was misconstrued by the Europeans as laziness. Easmon was the grandson of the respected African physician of the 1880s Dr. James Farrel Easmon.” For a fuller account of Dr. James (John) Farrel Easmon, see Adell Paton, “Dr. John Farrel Easmon: Medical Professionalism in the Gold Coast, 1856–1900,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22 (1989), 601–636.


34Before the 1850s, the West African press accommodated the policies of European authorities and representatives. However, from the 1870s, the press abandoned its accommodative stance
Early Proposals for the Use of Chinese Labor

The idea of using Chinese labor in the Gold Coast surfaced in the 1870s. In his account of the Anglo-Asante war of 1873–1874, H. Brackenbury suggested that "Chinese ... would be imported, who would breed in with the natives, and infuse some energy into the Fanti races." He concluded that "trade would soon follow, roads made, and the whole country opened up."35 According to Crisp, Brackenbury’s proposal "fell on deaf years in Accra and London."36 In 1882–1883, Richard F. Burton and V. L. Cameron proposed the use of Chinese labor after surveying the Wassa gold fields.37 In that same year, A. B. Ellis wrote that "If some energetic Governor would only introduce ... Chinese labor, the Gold Coast would soon become very different to what it now is."38 Additionally, H. J. Bell alluded to the use of Chinese labor in his account of the political and economic conditions of the Gold Coast, written in 1893.39 In 1895, Governor Maxwell articulated his views during his sea voyage to assume the governorship of the Gold Coast.40

Governor Maxwell, the architect of the Chinese labor scheme of 1897, succeeded in bringing some sixteen Chinese laborers to the Gold Coast in order to determine the viability of using Chinese labor on a large scale to exploit the colony’s mineral wealth.41 He asserted more broadly that the lack of skilled artisans made it difficult to build proper houses or to furnish them at a reasonable cost, and noted that "bricks could easily be made and timber could easily be sawn, could we depend upon a more enterprising race [Chinese] than the negro.” With Chinese labor, the “making of gardens, the keeping of cattle and a number of petty trades and industries would be introduced,” and “the British resident would then find his dwelling more comfortable, his table better supplied, and the condition of life generally improved.”42 Thus, the Chinese labor scheme would serve as

due to the exigencies of colonial rule. Also by the 1870s, the press had gained a sound footing, becoming fully indigenized under the control of the African intelligentsia. See for example, Omu, "The Dilemma of Press Freedom," 279–81; and McGarry, Reaction and Protest, 1.

36Crisp, Ghanian Miners' Struggles, 21–22.
37Burton and Cameron, To the Gold Coast for Gold, 227–28 and 336–37. See also Gold Coast Express, July 26, 1897. In fact, Curtin had broached the subject earlier; see African Times, July 1, 1882; and Gold Coast Express, July 26, 1897.
39H.J. Bell, The History, Trade, Resources, and Present Condition of the Gold Coast Settlement (Liverpool, 1893). He also mentioned the issue of Chinese labor in an address delivered at Liverpool. See Gold Coast Express, September 11, 1899.
41See, for example, Gold Coast Express, August 13, 1897; Gold Coast Express, August 17, 1897; Gold Coast Express, August 19, 1897; Gold Coast Chronicle, August 14, 1897; Gold Coast Independent, August 14, 1897; and Gold Coast Chronicle, April 12, 1901.
42Gold Coast Express, August 13, 1897.
a pilot project to promote the capitalist development of gold-mining,\footnote{Proposal to Import Chinese Gold Prospectus, ADM 1/496, No. 8, January 7, 1897, in Bevin, Documents, 125–126; and Gold Coast Express, August 13, 1897.} harness imperial rule, and provide a comfortable living environment for colonial officials.

Proposals to use Chinese labor were driven by late nineteenth-century European racist ideologies as well as economic factors.\footnote{See, for example, Theo David Goldberg, Racist Culture: Philosophy and Politics of Meaning (Cambridge, 1993).} In sum, Chinese laborers were perceived as racially superior, hardworking, and productive. Africans were seen as racially inferior to the Chinese: unskilled, indolent, and unproductive.\footnote{Gold Coast Methodist Times, August 16, 1897.} In an address to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, Governor Maxwell had proclaimed that “Were it within the easy reach of an industrious and energetic Asiatic population, the export of gold will be very large, both reef and alluvial, in many parts of the colony.”\footnote{Gold Coast Independent, August 25, 1896.} Due to the inferiority of the local labor supply, “we cast about for a remedy and most obvious suggestion is the importation of Chinese labor or Indian Coolies, or East Africans.”\footnote{Ibid.} This indicates that the need for a superior labor force was felt to be so crucial that the colonial government was willing to explore options as well. Maxwell concluded that the presence of Chinese laborers would force “Africans to learn and … work harder under the spur of competition.”\footnote{Gold Coast Independent, September 5, 1896. See also Gold Coast Independent, November 21, 1896; Proposal to Import Chinese Gold Prospectors, January 7 1897, No. 8, ADM 1/496 in Bevin, Documents, 125–126; and Burton and Cameron, To the Gold Coast for Gold, 337.} The Colonial Office magisterially affirmed such views, and the colonial government set about the task of experimenting with the perceived superior Chinese labor.\footnote{C. 5620–21; Gold Coast Independent, August 22, 1896; Gold Coast Independent, September 5, 1896; Gold Coast Independent, November 21, 1896; and Proposal to Import Chinese Gold Prospectors, January 7 1897, No. 8, ADM 1/496 in Bevin, Documents, 125–26.}

Despite Governor Maxwell’s apparent enthusiasm for the scheme, he identified two potential problems: the vagaries of the climate and the lack of available land for the eventual settlement of Chinese laborers. In fact, Maxwell wanted a Chinese labor force based on a model Chinese-settler community in the Gold Coast, not a labor force dependent on the periodic import of Chinese labor. He postulated that if the Chinese lived longer in the Gold Coast, they would acclimatize better.\footnote{Gold Coast Express, November 27, 1899.}
comers.\textsuperscript{51} To resolve the land problem, the rights of indigenous rulers—the custodians of land—would have to be redefined through colonial legislation confirming the colonial government’s rights “to grant licenses for occupation of small areas of waste land for mining, agriculture, or residence.”\textsuperscript{52} In addition, Maxwell argued that all dealings regarding payments for land grants should be undertaken through the indigenous rulers in consultation with the colonial government.\textsuperscript{53}

**The Opposition of the African Intelligentsia, 1874–1914**

The Gold Coast press, patronized by the African intelligentsia, opposed efforts to use Chinese labor. As early as 1882, the *Gold Coast Times* had attacked Burton and Cameron on the subject.\textsuperscript{54} In the 1890s, when the idea was implemented, the Gold Coast press responded angrily. By 1914, the position of the Gold Coast press had changed considerably: it did not exhibit the same tenacity of opposition when the Abontiakrom Mines Company employed Chinese laborers in 1914. The *Gold Coast Leader* concluded that the Gold Coast could accept the Chinese in limited numbers, though it still maintained that African labor was as good as Chinese labor.\textsuperscript{55} Overall, in their campaigns of protest, the African intelligentsia deployed an arsenal of local anti-Chinese labor sentiments and also capitalized on British public opinion (expressed in British newspapers) to oppose the scheme.\textsuperscript{56} At times, in their anti-Chinese labor arguments, the Gold Coast press seemed to accept the racist connection between race and productivity, an issue their criticism of colonial policy sought to debunk.

Through the Gold Coast press, the African intelligentsia disputed the assumed superiority of Chinese labor. The *Gold Coast Express* argued that “the story of their [Chinese] superiority is so grossly an exaggeration as to be scarcely indistinguishable from a real falsehood.”\textsuperscript{57} Furthermore, the *Express* proclaimed that it was ridiculous for anyone to assert that the Chinese could teach the people of the Gold Coast “how to look for gold and plant tea and potatoes.” It declared that “if we are to have people to teach us ... surely better instructors can be obtained,” arguing that the people of the Gold Coast had engaged in mining for years and could “promote their own industries.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{51} *Gold Coast Independent*, August 22, 1896. See also *The Gold Coast Times*, (Cape Coast), January 6, 1883; and *Gold Coast Chronicle*, June 16, 1896.

\textsuperscript{52} *Gold Coast Independent*, September 5, 1896. See counter argument by John Mensah Sarbah in a speech against the Lands Bill of 1897 in the *Gold Coast Chronicle*, September 20, 1897 issue to March 15, 1898.

\textsuperscript{53} *Gold Coast Independent*, September 5, 1896.

\textsuperscript{54} *Gold Coast Times*, September 30, 1882. See also *Gold Coast Chronicle*, June 19, 1895; and *Gold Coast Express*, July 26, 1897.

\textsuperscript{55} *Gold Coast Leader*, July 18, 1914; and *Gold Coast Leader*, July 25, 1914.

\textsuperscript{56} See, for example, *Gold Coast Times*, January 6, 1883.

\textsuperscript{57} *Gold Coast Express*, August 21, 1897.

\textsuperscript{58} *Gold Coast Express*, July 26, 1897.
One element of the imputation of inferiority to Gold Coast labor was the assumption that local labor lacked proficiency in using European-made machines and could only engage in unskilled work. The *Gold Coast Express* countered that "the natives were just as good and possibly better," concluding that "considering the materials at our disposal, we doubt whether Chinese could obtain more gold from the ground in the absence of machinery and scientific appliances than our people have managed to secure." Thus the *Express* drew attention to indigenous mining tools available in the Gold Coast and how they affected gold output—an important factor the colonial advocates for Chinese labor failed to mention. The same newspaper revealed that European-made machinery for gold mining was not available to African miners or laborers. It was therefore untenable to claim that Gold Coast laborers could not use European-made machines. In fact, the report submitted by Henry Eyre on Gold Coast gold mines in 1889 clearly suggests that only Europeans used the available European-made machines.

Overall, the Gold Coast press pointed out that Gold Coast laborers did not lack the capacity to use machines or undertake innovative technological ventures. The *Independent* noted that in 1882, for example, Gold Coast masons "imitated" the construction of the new Public Works Yard and "have endeavored to produce work which undoubtedly is an improvement upon the old style." It explained that the improvement had also led to technical innovations among carpenters and blacksmiths, adding that Gold Coast laborers' technological know-how accounted for the booming oil-palm industry along the West African coast. The *Independent* also stressed the contributions of Gold Coast carpenters, copper-smiths, and bricklayers to developments elsewhere in Africa. It is clear that technological expertise was available, and as the newspaper argued, with proper remuneration and humane treatment, the Gold Coast labor force would be proficient in using the existing European-made machines.

Colonial perceptions of Africans as indolent have been discussed by Dumett, who asserts that malnutrition and malaria had deleterious effects on the productivity of Africans, and that Europeans misconstrued as laziness the low work out-

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59 See, for example, *Gold Coast Independent*, August 22, 1896; *Gold Coast Independent*, September 5, 1896; *Gold Coast Chronicle*, August 14, 1897; and *Gold Coast Express*, August 13, 1897.

60 *Gold Coast Express*, August 13, 1897. In fact, Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, 12–13 and 133–34, points out that tools available for mine laborers working on the Wasss gold-fields were obsolete.

61 *Gold Coast Express*, August 21, 1897.

62 See C. 5620–24.

63 See, for example, Thomas J. Hutchinson, *Ten Years Wandering Among the Ethiopians* (London, 1861), 140; and *Gold Coast Leader*, July 25, 1914.

64 *Gold Coast Independent*, September 18, 1897.
put induced by such health-related problems. Dumett’s conclusion is an attractive proposition but prompts additional queries. First, despite the health problems he Dumett cites, Gold Coast laborers emigrated and worked successfully in other colonial enclaves that undoubtedly would have shared the same health and medical problems. In an example cited by the *Independent*, Governor Maxwell himself had revealed that the “native of the Gold Coast will leave his country to seek work in the Niger Coast Protectorate and at the Congo, but in the vicinity of his own home, he is of a little use as a laborer.” Similarly, an editorial in the *Gold Coast Chronicle* reported that “Almost every steamer carries down a great number of [Gold Coast] men to the Bights, the Congo, and the south coast.” The men worked for two or three years and returned home. The editorial pointedly emphasized that the work ethic of Gold Coast laborers was as good as that of laborers anywhere, including Europe.

Second, we need to query why the colonial state itself recruited Gold coast laborers to work in other colonial enclaves if their productivity were in fact such a problem. The *Gold Coast Express* made this point. For example, in 1897 when mechanics in Lagos “refused to work on the altered time fixed by the Government,” colonial officials there had intended “to import workmen from the Gold Coast.” Commenting on the “Labor Question” in 1899, the editorial of the *Gold Coast Express* asserted that “The employment of men in this Colony for the Nigerian Government is to commence about the middle of next month…. workmen on the Gold Coast are after all not so bad as they are so frequently represented to be otherwise there would be little or no demand for their services in other places.” The same newspaper declared that a mining company at Tarkwa employed “native laborers or workmen and it is able with their assistance to ship some thou-

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65 Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, 146. See also Thomas, “Forced Labor,” 83, 100; writing about the period 1906–1927, Thomas identifies pulmonary diseases stemming from mine labor as one reason for that sector’s continued shortage of labor. While Thomas’s conclusion is directly associated with underground gold mining, Dumett’s focus is on broader issues related to African health.


67 *Gold Coast Independent*, August 26, 1896. See also *Gold Coast Chronicle*, June 25 1895; and *Gold Coast Chronicle*, September 10, 1896.


69 *Gold Coast Chronicle*, September 10, 1896.

70 Howard, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 204, shows that in 1897–98, the colonial state permitted Gold Coast skilled laborers to work elsewhere: 22 boatmen to the Ivory Coast, 30 laborers for the Congo Railway, 300 laborers for the Sierra Leone government, and five bricklayers for the Basel Mission in Southwest Africa.

71 *Gold Coast Express*, August 17, 1897. This information was culled from the *Lagos Standard* (no date was provided).
sands ... of pounds worth of gold dust every year." It then questioned the "fuss about the superiority of the Chinese as miners."72

Thus malaria and malnutrition may have affected work output, but it is a spurious explanatory model for the broader labor problem in the Gold Coast. The evidence shows that wherever Gold Coast laborers were treated with respect, they were productive. Other factors clearly accounted for their disinclination to engage in wage labor in the Gold Coast, including low wages and poor working conditions.73 An editorial in the Independent highlighted the "difference in wages and the conditions associated with work" in the Gold Coast and elsewhere, stressing that "there are social elements which are conducive to the desire on the part of the Native to leave his country for a while in order to accumulate money for the innumerable social demands upon him [sic]."74 Thus laborers were willing to work elsewhere to meet urgent family financial needs, but not in the Gold Coast because of the poor wages. As late as 1914, the Gold Coast Leader complained "that on some of the mines their wages were not paid regularly."75 The Gold Coast press argued that if wage labor in the Gold Coast were properly organized, and the administrative lapses and abuse ended, it would be embraced.

It has been suggested that dangers inherent in mine labor specifically made it less attractive to Gold Coast laborers.76 But those engaged in non-mine labor were also exposed to danger. The Express plaintively reported that

when the carriers are in the bush, they are generally made "to go in front" of the troops. Now this seems hardly credible, for being unarmed how is it likely that a man with a load on his head and nothing in his hands can be made "to go in front" while soldiers fully armed to the teeth and properly equipped are behind him?... We should have thought that the soldiers would be kept in the front and not in the rear of an expedition, when marching through an enemy's country.77

The use of government-hired carriers as human shields for troops was a common practice.78 Thus dangers and abuse were prevalent in other sectors as well. The Gold Coast press emphasized the abuse and brutalization of laborers as a major reason for the disinclination of Gold Coast laborers to engage in non-agricultural wage employment, and this was occasionally reported by the London-based African Times.79 As early as 1882, the Gold Coast Times insisted that the people of

72Gold Coast Express, November 27, 1899.
73Crisp, Ghanaian Miners' Struggles, 14–19; and Crisp, "The Labor Question," 20–21.
74Gold Coast Independent, November 21, 1896.
75Gold Coast Leader, October 8, 1914.
76See, for example, Dunett, El Dorado in West Africa, 60–62, 144–46.
77Gold Coast Express, July 16, 1897.
78See, for example, Major W.F. Butler, Akim-Foo [Akyems] The History of Failure (London, 1875), 196; Gold Coast Express, September 29, 1897; and Gold Coast Aborigines, April 2, 1898.
79See, for example, African Times, December 6, 1899.
the Gold Coast were "ready for employment whenever their services are required, provided they have the guarantee ... that they will not be ill-treated."\textsuperscript{80} Such abuses included "cruelties at the hands of masters [employers and supervisors]," "knocks, kicks, bruises," and colonial officials' blatant refusal to hear reported cases of cruelty suffered by hired laborers.\textsuperscript{81} In 1902, the Gold Coast Leader raised similar concerns: "And let those who would pooh-pooh these observations do so in the light of such monstrosities as the Compulsory Labor Ordinance, the kicking and flogging that had been going on."\textsuperscript{82} Again, in 1904, an editorial in the Leader commented on the governor's visit to the mining district of Tarkwa:

His Excellency had been able to find it for himself—which is nothing but the truth—that, the people were willing to work and glad to work so long as they were well-treated ... that the fines imposed on the men were often severe without adequate cause, and that in some cases they were roughly handled: kicks and floggings were as free as the air.... how can people do all this, and expect to have no difficulty with labor supply, since the laborers ... "are not wood but men."\textsuperscript{83}

Indeed, flogging was the leitmotif in complaints against the supervisors of expatriate companies and colonial public works.\textsuperscript{84}

As noted above, the Gold Coast press culled materials from British newspapers to support its anti-Chinese labor stance. The Gold Coast Times utilized the comments of a Mr. Smallman, described as "an experienced miner" and "a person who has travelled much."\textsuperscript{85} Mr. Smallman had pointed out in 1882 that Chinese labor would be ruinous to the Gold Coast. He had contended that Chinese laborers would not benefit the Gold Coast, "having the practice of remitting all their daily earnings home."\textsuperscript{86} Furthermore, the Gold Coast Independent utilized an article in the African Review by J. Shelly, a British mineral engineer, who had attacked Governor Maxwell's determined effort to use Chinese labor. Shelly wrote that he and "many others would be glad to see members of [the British] Parliament exhibit greater interest in colonial affairs" to overrule "the appointment of a governor [Maxwell] who ... has only one pair of eyes" and "enjoyed the distinction of being named 'one-man government.'"\textsuperscript{87} Without doubt, Shelly's conclusion supported the position of the African intelligentsia: the whole Chinese labor scheme was lopsided, based on the whims of Governor Maxwell. Based on experiences

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{80}{Gold Coast Times, September 30, 1882.}
\footnotetext{81}{Ibid. See also Crisp, Ghanaian Miners' Struggles, 18.}
\footnotetext{82}{Gold Coast Leader, September 20, 1902.}
\footnotetext{83}{"The Labor Question," Gold Coast Leader, October 8, 1914.}
\footnotetext{84}{See, for example, Gold Coast Express, September 29, 1897; Gold Coast Leader, June 13, 1908; Gold Coast Leader, July 25, 1908; and Gold Coast Nation (Cape Coast), May 30, 1912.}
\footnotetext{85}{Gold Coast Times, January 6, 1883.}
\footnotetext{86}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{87}{Gold Coast Independent, August 14, 1897.}
\end{footnotes}
with Chinese labor in "Australia, America, and South Africa," Shelly argued that if the people of the Gold Coast could be induced to work, they would be "found every bit as good as a Chinaman." Furthermore, he asserted that Gold Coast laborers "make excellent workers and are far superior to the native miners in the Transvaal." The Independent stressed that, given the choice, Shelly would prefer Indian to Chinese labor, because Indian laborers would be more amenable to the climate and would also benefit the Gold Coast more than the Chinese would do. It added that the people of the Gold Coast were more likely to accept Indians than Chinese. Shelly had cautioned, however, that "Indian [labor] in a British colony is not an unmixed blessing, as has been found in Natal."\(^8^8\) In sum, the Express proclaimed that British engineers who had worked with Chinese laborers were "generally loud in condemnation of them."\(^8^9\)

Furthermore, the Gold Coast press called attention to the fact that Chinese laborers had been rejected in other colonies. The Gold Coast Chronicle, reported that "many objections" had been raised against Chinese labor "in other colonies," therefore they were not needed in the Gold Coast.\(^9^0\) Similarly, the Gold Coast Express stated that an effort to import Chinese laborers into Natal failed because the people of Natal resisted it. The newspaper argued that if the people of Natal had had laws put in place to prevent the use of Chinese labor there, it saw no reason why Chinese laborers should be allowed to work in the Gold Coast.\(^9^1\)

Extraneous factors were also adduced to discredit the scheme. The Express claimed that the Chinese presence would herald a dawn of chaos, and that Africans and Chinese laborers could not co-exist. In fact, it threatened that possible endemic animosity between Africans and Chinese could translate into political instability.\(^9^2\) Its editorial of July 27, 1897, warned that the people of the Gold Coast and Chinese laborers could not live together, arguing that there would be perpetual friction. In overall terms, the position of the African intelligentsia was that the proposed Chinese labor scheme would not benefit the Gold Coast. The Express concluded that peace in the Gold Coast would be "scarcely worth a penny" if Chinese laborers were allowed to settle.\(^9^3\) It further argued that the presence of Chinese laborers would result in religious intolerance as Chinese were the followers of Confucius.\(^9^4\)

Information is scanty on the actual employment of Chinese mine laborers by the Abontiakrom Mines Company in 1914 and African response to it. Writing about the post-1900 period, Crisp notes that "missionaries and educated Africans were strongly opposed to such a scheme [importation of Chinese laborers]."

\(^{88}\)Ibid.

\(^{89}\)Gold Coast Express, October 20, 1897.

\(^{90}\)Gold Coast Chronicle, August 14, 1897.

\(^{91}\)Gold Coast Express, July 27, 1897.

\(^{92}\)Ibid.

\(^{93}\)Ibid. See also Gold Coast Express, October 20, 1897.

\(^{94}\)Gold Coast Express, August 13, 1897.
because of the disastrous scheme of 1897. This suggests that the African intelligentsia maintained their unflinching opposition to the use of Chinese labor. Indeed, it is not clear whether Crisp’s analysis covers 1914. At any rate, the Gold Coast Leader had this to say in 1914:

The importation of these Chinese for work in the Colony may be the beginning of new labor conditions in the Colony. The mines must develop and natives of the Colony show no disposition to work continuously as ordinary mine laborers, and labor recruited among Wangaras and other African natives is unsatisfactory or insufficient. All things considered, we are not opposed to the importation of Chinese laborers within a certain limit.

A week later, the same newspaper wrote that the importation of Chinese workers “may stimulate natives to do more work as laborers than they are inclined to do at present.” This shows a major shift in the position of the Gold Coast press. Nevertheless, it warned unreservedly that “if there is unlimited importation of Chinese laborers into the Colony, economic conditions of the country in so far as native interests are concerned will be materially affected.” The reason for this apparent shift cannot at present be elucidated due to paucity of sources.

The Chinese in the Gold Coast

A number of historical puzzles surround the arrival of the Chinese in the Gold Coast in 1897, 1902, and 1914. With regard to the 1897 scheme, the Gold Coast newspapers that had championed protests against the scheme surprisingly had little to say about the eventual arrival of the Chinese. Data on the interaction between the Africans and the Chinese laborers is unfortunately scanty. There is also very little in the records about the Chinese departure from the Gold Coast.

After much publicity, having even appeared in a Singaporean newspaper, the Chinese miners arrived in July 1897 at the port of Winneba from the Straits Settlements via Liverpool. The Chinese were placed under the auspices of George Maxwell, a civil engineer and the governor’s son, and Dr. De Groot, the assistant colonial surgeon, who was in charge of their medical needs. It is not clear how Maxwell’s son was appointed as “civil engineer in charge,” but accounts in the Gold Coast press suggest that Governor Maxwell took the whole Chinese labor

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95Crisp, African Miners’ Struggles, 21–22.
96Gold Coast Leader, July 18, 1914.
97Gold Coast Leader, July 25, 1914.
98Ibid.
99Gold Coast Independent, August 14, 1897. The article was culled from the African Review (no date given). In his correspondence to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Governor Maxwell recommended this itinerary for the Chinese: Singapore to Gibraltar, then to Grand Canary, where they would be picked up by any West African–bound British ship to Axim in the Gold Coast. See Proposal to Import Chinese Gold Prospectors, No. 8, January 7, 1897, ADM 1/496 in Bevin, Documents, 125–26.
issue as a personal enterprise. Once the scheme failed, George Maxwell disappeared from the records. At any rate, the two officials were required to inform the colonial government and the Colonial Office about the viability of the scheme.\textsuperscript{100} The Chinese contingent also included capitalist entrepreneurs and representative of well-known miners.\textsuperscript{101} The \textit{Gold Coast Methodist Times} asked Governor Maxwell whether the Gold Coast Legislature had granted the Chinese permission to enter the Gold Coast. It also wanted him to explain why the “local government” should bear the expenditure for the Chinese presence in the Gold Coast. In addition, it queried whether the Chinese “were .... examined at all by Dr. Gage [probably a medical officer who determined the health of new immigrants] prior to their [dis]embarkation?”\textsuperscript{102} Finally, it asserted that the governor had acted injudiciously since the “Lands Bill is yet the subject of a sharp controversy between the Government and the people of the Protectorate,” and that the Chinese presence would further expand the area of conflict.\textsuperscript{103}

The paucity of data on the Chinese presence in the Gold Coast in 1902 makes it difficult to reconstruct their arrival and other activities. A report in the \textit{African Times} states that “they have all died under rather suspicious circumstances.”\textsuperscript{104} The anonymous author of the report claimed that “presumably, they were poisoned by the natives”—undoubtedly an exaggeration, but it points to the Africans’ dislike for the Chinese presence. The report concluded that “Chinese labor might do very well, but it would be necessary to import them in large numbers.”\textsuperscript{105} The 1914 Chinese labor contingent “landed at Seccondee [Sekondi] from a German mail steamer and left the next day for the Abontiakrom mines.”\textsuperscript{106} This shows that, unlike the 1897 case which was the colonial government’s experimental scheme, the Chinese mine laborers who arrived in 1914 were employees of the Abontiakrom Mines Company. The colonial government had little to do with the

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\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Gold Coast Chronicle}, August 14, 1897.

\textsuperscript{101} Proposal to Import Chinese Gold Prospectors, January 7, 1897, No. 8, ADM 1/496 in Bevin, \textit{Documents}, 125–26. The names of entrepreneurs were not given.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Gold Coast Methodist Times}, August 31, 1897. Richardson, “Chinese Indentured Labor,” 273–274, shows that the Chinese who arrived in the Transvaal were put through rigorous examination to ascertain their suitability for work. There is no doubt that the African intelligentsia were interested in preventing an outbreak of any disease but not the Chinese suitability as workers.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Gold Coast Chronicle}, August 31, 1897. For the opposition of the local press to the Lands Bill, see, for example, \textit{Gold Coast Chronicle}, March 25, 1895; \textit{Gold Coast Methodist Times}, September 30, 1897; and \textit{Gold Coast Express}, September 7, 1897. The 1897 Lands Bill would have led to a “declaration of all land as the sole property of the Queen, which has not been under cultivation for a period of thirty years.” See \textit{Gold Coast Chronicle}, March 25, 1897. The African intelligentsia formed a proto-nationalist movement, the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, in 1898 to oppose the Lands Bill. See \textit{Gold Coast Chronicle}, March 29, 1897 through to July 27, 1897. See also Kimble, \textit{Political History}, 330–57.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{African Times}, May 5, 1902.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Gold Coast Leader}, July 18, 1914.
1914 group, though as the Gold Coast Leader explained, the Abontiakrom Mines had obtained their permission to bring the Chinese to the Gold Coast.107

With regard to the 1897 contingent, within weeks of their arrival the Chinese laborers were stationed at Akyem Swedru,108 where "they had the work of mining operations committed to their charge, the concessions on which they are working having previously been arranged for."109 There is a lack of evidence on the decision to settle them in Akyem Swedru, which was not one of the principal mining regions of the period. However, three factors explain the choice of the Akyem Swedru gold-bearing region. First, Akyem Swedru had not been affected by the prevailing concessionary disputes and land litigation in the gold-bearing regions of Akyem Abuakwa and Wassa. The Gold Coast Express wrote in 1897 that all the lawyers at Cape Coast were still at Axim (that is, in Wassa auriferous district), dealing with "some very big concession cases." It continued that in the "future we shall have to look to Akim for cases of that description at this rate," suggesting the potential of Akyem Swedru as a gold-mining district.110 Second, while resistance to colonial rule had been demonstrated in Akyem Abuakwa and Wassa in the 1870s and 1880s, overt anticlastic activities did not exist in Akyem Swedru, so the probability of organized opposition to the scheme was negligible.111 Finally, by the beginning of the 1890s, mining was mainly controlled by private European mining companies, especially in Wassa,112 therefore, the colonial government considered it appropriate to conduct the Chinese mine labor experiment in the secluded, relatively unexplored Akyem Swedru region.

There is a dearth of data on the work performed by the Chinese laborers in 1897, 1902, and 1914, although the 1897 evidence offers some information.113 In November 1899, the editorial of the Gold Coast Express critically questioned the efficiency and capability of the Chinese laborers, concluding that "they did very little work and this is certain," noting however, that they had worked side by side

107 Gold Coast Leader, July 25, 1914.

108 Although Akyem Swedru is not known in the literature as a mining town, the mining survey undertaken by Henry Eyre for the Colonial Office in 1889 identified Akyem Swedru and its environs as a potential gold mining region. See his report in C. 5620–24.

109 Gold Coast Chronicle, August 14, 1897. For litigation over concessions, see, for example, Dudley to Assistant Colonial Secretary, October 13, 1883, Encl. 4 in No. 14 in Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of the Gold Coast, Parliamentary Papers, 1885, C. 4477 (hereafter C. 4477); Gold Coast Chronicle, August 24, 1894; Gold Coast Chronicle, March 25, 1895; and Gold Coast Chronicle, May 21, 1895.

110 Gold Coast Express, October 1, 1897. For the concessions of the Akyem Abuakwa goldfields, see Gold Coast Express, November 2, 1899; and Gold Coast Express, November 6, 1899.


112 See, for example, C. 5620–24. For a detailed account, see Rosenblum, "Gold Mining," 149–259.

113 Macdonald, Gold Coast, 89.
with African laborers. In his study of the Gold Coast, George Macdonald indicated that the Chinese laborers had visited the Wassa and Akyem Abuakwa mining regions. Perhaps the contribution of the Chinese laborers was their suggestion that better "travelling facilities" would increase the prospects of gold mining in the Gold Coast. In addition, they assessed the potential of the Wassa and Akyem Abuakwa auriferous regions, confirming that both regions were amply endowed with huge alluvial gold deposits.

By all accounts, Governor Maxwell's experiment with Chinese labor in 1897 did not prove viable. The Chinese laborers suffered from the vagaries of the tropical weather. The Express wrote that the Chinese "were seldom or never off the sick list from the day of their arrival to that of their departure." The Independent also noted that "the climate was unsuitable for Chinese, though none of the party had died." Macdonald's account confirms the conclusions of the Gold Coast press that "the climate was in no way suitable to their health. None had died but most of them had been at times very ill." Subsequent reports indicate that the Chinese stayed "at the Hausa Hospital, Victoriaborg [-Accra]" and "created quite a stir among the people while passing through the town."

Only a week after the Gold Coast press reported the Chinese arrival at Akyem Swedru, the Express stated that the Chinese "wish to return home and that they are sorry they came to the Gold Coast." In October 1897—one month after the arrival of the Chinese laborers—the same newspaper reiterated its story that the Chinese were eager to leave. Four days later, the same newspaper reported that "Some of the Chinese [mine laborers] who came out to the Akim Gold Fields are at present in this town [Accra], but for what purpose we do not know." In September 1897, Governor Maxwell had embarked on a voyage home to convalesce. His subsequent death heralded the end of the scheme he had so much defended. By October 21, 1897, Dr. De Groot, the medical officer in charge of the scheme, had left the Akyem Swedru goldfields. The Express wrote that: "We are not personally acquainted with them [Chinese laborers], nor do we know their names; but we hope that it will soon be made worth their while

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114 Gold Coast Express, November 27, 1899; and Gold Coast Chronicle, April 12, 1901.
115 Macdonald, Gold Coast, 89.
116Ibid.
117 Gold Coast Express, November 27, 1899.
118 Gold Coast Independent, August 14, 1897.
119 Macdonald, Gold Coast, 89.
120 Gold Coast Express, October 21, 1897.
121Ibid.
122 Gold Coast Express, October 16, 1897.
123 Gold Coast Express, October 20, 1897.
124 Gold Coast Express, September 3, 1897.
125 Gold Coast Express, October 21, 1897.
to return to their own country. The policy of bringing the Chinese out here has been condemned everywhere; it has been spoken against wherever it has been heard.\textsuperscript{126}

Indeed, by the end of October, 1897, the Chinese mine labor experiment was headed toward a certain demise. The whole scheme was given a death blow when Frederick Hodgson assumed the governorship in late 1897. His policy statements, his annulment of the Compulsory Labor Ordinance of 1895, and his restructuring of the preexisting wage labor system were indicative of a new colonial policy\textsuperscript{127} quite different from the unpopular labor policies of Governor Maxwell.\textsuperscript{128}

The Chinese laborers left the Gold Coast in December 1897.\textsuperscript{129} In the end, the \textit{Gold Coast Express} could only mock Governor Maxwell posthumously: “The late Governor Maxwell was induced to try the [Chinese]… The result of the experiment, as everyone in the Colony knows, was a total failure, for the Chinese seemed to be absolutely unable to hold their own with the natives.”\textsuperscript{130} It is clear that despite Governor Maxwell’s untimely death, the Gold Coast press did not exculpate him. But the blame hurled at Maxwell did not stifle the quest to employ Chinese laborers. As we have shown, in 1902 and 1914, Chinese mine laborers were again employed in the Gold Coast. The Chinese labor question was finally put to rest in the post-First World period when gold-mining companies obtained their labor needs.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Compared with other regions, the number of Chinese who were imported into the Gold Coast was infinitesimal, nor were their economic activities comparatively significant. Nevertheless, more than any other particular phenomenon, the dialectic of Chinese labor question, spanning 1874 to 1914, sheds light on the factors that accounted for Gold Coast workers’ unwillingness to engage in colonial wage labor. The possibility of using Chinese laborers preoccupied the attention of colonial officials, imperial ideologues, and mining companies from the 1870s. Eventually, an experimental Chinese labor scheme was implemented in 1897 by the colonial government, and in 1902 and 1914 by mining companies. Africans opposed Chinese labor for the rebuke it offered to African abilities, although with

\textsuperscript{126}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{127}See, for example, \textit{Gold Coast Aborigines}, April 2, 1898. For a fuller account of the Compulsory Labor Ordinance and colonial politics of carrier labor recruitment and African resistance, see, for example, Kwapena O. Akurang-Parry, “‘With a Load on his Head and Nothing in His Hands’: The Opposition of the Gold Coast (Ghana) Press to the Compulsory Labor Ordinance, 1895–ca. 1899,” \textit{Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana}, forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Gold Coast Express}, November 27, 1899; January 17, 1900; and March 8, 1900.

\textsuperscript{129}Macdonald, \textit{Gold Coast}, 89. It should be pointed out that the evidence does not state that they were en route to the Strait Settlements.

\textsuperscript{130}\textit{Gold Coast Express}, November 27, 1899.

\textsuperscript{131}See, for example, Cardinal, \textit{The Gold Coast}, 1931, 243–245; and Annual Invasion of Laborers, Case No. 6/1931, NAGA, ADM 11/1/1076.
a more accommodating stance towards the 1914 labor scheme. Indeed, in 1914 the Gold Coast press was willing to tolerate a limited number of Chinese laborers, though it continued to insist that systemic problems accounted for the unwillingness of Gold Coast laborers to engage in wage labor.

The African intelligentsia championed the opposition to Chinese labor. The colonial government abandoned its 1897 experiment due to African opposition, uncongenial climatic factors, and the death of Governor Maxwell, the scheme’s most avid advocate. In its protest against the Chinese labor scheme, the Gold Coast press marshaled an arsenal of objections. The press challenged the racialization of labor and enunciated the underlying economic and social reasons for the disinclination of Gold Coast laborers to participate fully in the colonial wage labor economy. Paradoxically, despite popular assertions by Europeans that Gold Coast laborers were lazy, successive colonial administrations recruited Gold Coast laborers to work in other colonial enclaves. The comprehensive use of local newspapers as source materials has added a new dimension to previous studies on African responses to wage labor in the Gold Coast. The newspapers allow us to assess the subject from the African perspective: the “native labor question” had nothing to do with ideologically crafted notions of African laziness, but had everything to do with problems of abuse and brutal treatment in colonial employment.