Coolies, James Yen, and Rebellious Advocacy

Bill Ong Hing

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/aalj

Recommended Citation
Bill Ong Hing, Coolies, James Yen, and Rebellious Advocacy, 14 Asian Am. L.J. 1 (2007).

Link to publisher version (DOI)
https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38TC6Z

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals and Related Materials at Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Asian American Law Journal by an authorized administrator of Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact jcera@law.berkeley.edu.
Coolies, James Yen, and Rebellious Advocacy

Bill Ong Hingt

Go to the people
Live among them
Learn from them
Love them
Serve them
Plan with them
Start with what they know
Build on what they have

—Y.C. James Yen

INTRODUCTION

Those of us who engage in progressive legal work need to be constantly reminded that we do not know everything—that we are not knights in shining armor swooping in to save subordinated communities. We should be collaborators: working with rather than simply on behalf of clients and allies from whom we have much to learn. Though lawyering for social change is arduous work, there is much to gain in these battles against subordination, not simply from the potential outcome but from the collaborative process itself: as our clients gain strength and confidence, we too are renewed. Thus invigorated by the talent, spirit, and innovation that our clients and allies bring to the table, we aspire to bring that same sense of renewal to those with whom we work.

As a former legal services attorney, a law school clinical instructor, and a volunteer with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC), I am constantly amazed by the talented clients and non-lawyer allies I have encountered. From my contact with such allies I have drawn the

† Professor of Law and Asian American Studies, University of California, Davis. Many thanks to the editors of the Asian American Law Journal for their helpful suggestions. I received very good research assistance from Katrina Gonzales, Rebekah Young, Naomi Walker, and Ruthann Chou. Thanks also for the many resources on the life of James Yen from his daughter, Alice, and his grandson, James Diao.

1. I started my legal services work in the 1970s, became a law professor in 1979, and have been involved with the ILRC, a national immigrant rights support center, for over 25 years. In most of my
invaluable lesson that the fight against discrimination—in essence, the fight against subordination—is one that community lawyers wage most effectively with allies and clients. In their work, these allies demonstrate that the struggle requires skills, techniques, and approaches that, unfortunately, conventional law school classrooms neglect in their curriculum.

If we seek to become more effective collaborative lawyers, then we should keep our eyes open for individuals from whom we can learn. Long before I became a lawyer, I met such a person named Y.C. James Yen. Though perhaps little known among contemporary community lawyers, Yen’s work has merited accolades all over the world, as well as broadened and enriched my own perspective of progressive lawyering.

Indeed, Yen’s approach fits well within the theoretical lawyering framework advanced by Jerry López, Lucie White, and Ascanio Pomelli. These scholars, who are grounded in ongoing community work, have challenged us to re-imagine our roles as community lawyers. They advocate a collaborative approach that respects clients’ decision-making
capacities, seeks allies in the pursuit of social justice, and is open to
learning from clients and community partners.  

In this article, I first provide some background on Yen and describe
his incredible work in Europe, China, and the Philippines. I then revisit the
scholarship of López, White, and Piomelli as their theories and experiences
pertain to community lawyering in the rebellious or collaborative style, and
I relate Yen's historic work to the philosophy and concepts they advance.
My hope is thus to remind contemporary rebellious advocates of
collaborative possibilities.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Yen was born to a family whose forefathers had been educators for
generations in Bazhong Xian, in the Sichuan province of China. As the
youngest son of a scholar, Yen learned the Chinese classics from his father
at an early age. He was also exposed to Western training as a student in
the School of Western Learning, which was located ninety miles from his
home. The journey to school took five days, so Yen and his brother would
stay at inns by night. At these inns, Yen encountered “coolies”—workers
who hauled heavy loads of salt and finished goods—for the first time.
These encounters left on Yen a lasting impression that would later shape
his work.

Four years later, Yen graduated with honors and received a
scholarship to the American High School in Chengdu, 200 miles from
home. He later traveled to Hong Kong to attend college. Yen’s academic
excellence qualified him for a coveted scholarship to Hong Kong
University; however, he worked and paid his own way because accepting
the scholarship would have required him to renounce his Chinese


4. See Lopez, supra note 2; Piomelli, infra note 177; White, infra note 184 and text
accompanying these notes.
5. Robert M. Bartlett, Yang-Chu James Yen, in YEN AND HIS MOVEMENT, supra note 3, at 1;
Fumihiko Kamata, A Brief Summary of Yen Yangchu’s Work and Its Significance, in Y.C. JAMES YEN’S
THOUGHT ON MASS EDUCATION AND RURAL RECONSTRUCTION: CHINA AND BEYOND 3, 3 (Martha
McKee Keehn ed. 1993) (selected papers from an international conference on Yen’s work held in
Shijiazuan, China, May 27-June 1, 1990) [hereinafter YEN CONFERENCE]; Hersey, supra note 3, at 141
(spelling James Yen’s name as Yen Yang-chu).
7. Id. (referring to the school as “the China Inland Mission School in Paoning”); Hersey, supra
note 3, at 141-42 (referring to the school as the School of Western Learning in Baoning). At this time,
China had come into contact with the West, and it had become fashionable to educate sons not only in
ancient Chinese learning but also in Western learning. PEARL S. BUCK, TELL THE PEOPLE—TALKS
WITH JAMES YEN ABOUT THE MASS EDUCATION MOVEMENT 5 (1945).
8. Hersey, supra note 3, at 142.
9. Id. The term “coolie” corresponds to the Chinese words ku and li, meaning “bitter strength.”
Ping-sheng Chin, Filipino Peasants Win New Hope, in YEN AND HIS MOVEMENT, supra note 3, at 147.
Coolie can also denote a man who works hard by the strength of his hands and body under poor
conditions. Kiang, Starting Work with Coolies, in YEN AND HIS MOVEMENT, supra note 3, at 37.
10. Hersey, supra note 3, at 142.
citizenship—which he refused to do. Yen and his Chinese friends, ostracized as "chinks" by their British classmates, left the University after two short years to continue their schooling in the United States.

Yen attended Yale during World War I. He had to work hard his first year to keep up with his studies and pay tuition, but he won a full scholarship in his second year. When Yen graduated in 1918, he began work for the War Work Council of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). For his first assignment, Yen was to provide services for 5,000 Chinese laborers—coories—who were working in France for the Allied forces during the war. Yen's challenging experiences in France would change the course of his life.

LITERACY FOR CHINESE LABORERS IN FRANCE

During World War I, the British and U.S. governments recruited 200,000 Chinese laborers to work behind the front lines in France, namely to repair roads, transport food, and dig trenches. The British had enlisted most of these laborers from northern China with the permission of the Chinese government. The men were predominantly poor peasants who had been induced to enlist by the promise of daily food and wages of one franc (then worth twenty cents), though most did not even know what a franc was. Upon enlistment, all recruits were subjected to what the British termed the "sausage machine," where each man's queue—his long ponytail, which was his badge of being Chinese—was chopped off. Each man's clothes were removed and burned, and each was bathed, deloused and fingerprinted. A metal band with a number was strapped around every recruit's wrist, henceforth to replace his name for employment purposes.

Soon after Yen arrived in France—where he was initially in charge of selling cigarettes and candy, as well as organizing games and entertainment for the laborers—Yen began to learn important lessons from these men. The men were desperately homesick but unable to write letters to their families in China because they were illiterate. Yen discovered that the men had never had educational opportunities because they belonged to the

11. Id.; see also Bartlett, supra note 5, at 2.
12. Hersey, supra note 3, at 144.
13. Id.
15. Id.
16. Id.
17. Kamata, supra note 5, at 3.
18. Hersey, supra note 3, at 145.
19. Id.
20. Id. at 233.
21. Id.
22. Id. at 235.
23. Teltsch, supra note 3.
laborer class in China.  

Several of the men approached Yen one night, asking him to write home for them, and Yen gladly complied. The next night, over a dozen men came to Yen’s hut with similar requests. As the number of such requests steadily increased, Yen gained respect for the bitter strength of these men. In transcribing the men’s messages to their families, Yen perceived that though the men were illiterate, they were not ignorant. They thought shrewdly and profoundly; they understood, in practical commonsense terms, the things they saw around them. Yen began to teach them and found them intelligent and eager. The plight of these men—unable to understand the languages spoken around them, unable to read books or newspapers—opened Yen’s eyes to the greatest need of the Chinese people: the need to be literate and informed. The more Yen taught them, the more convinced he became that their illiteracy was a deep injustice. Yen realized that what he wanted to do, above all else, was educate the common people of China.

Yen’s contact with coolies in France helped mold his belief that a principal reason for the turmoil, tyranny, and corruption in China was that most of the people were docile due to illiteracy and lack of information. He felt that if the foundation of a country was weak, the nation could never become strong. Yen, who cared deeply for China, now concluded that “saving the nation must start from saving the countryside and saving the countryside must start from saving the people” by teaching peasants to read.

Yen refused to write any more letters for the Chinese laborers in France and determined that, instead, he would teach them to read and write.

24. Kiang, supra note 9, at 37-38.
25. Hersey, supra note 3, at 236.
26. Id.
27. Grace Overmyer, Jimmy Yen: His School Has Five Million Students and a Hundred Thousand Teachers, in Yen and His Movement, supra note 3, at 55, 58.
28. BUCK, supra note 7, at 7.
29. Wei Chengtung, Creative Transformation and Self-Realization in Yen Yangchu’s Thinking and Personality, in Yen Conference, supra note 5, at 44, 45 (citing WU XIANG-XIANG, YAN YANGCHU ZHUAN [A BIOGRAPHY OF YEN YANG-CHU] (1981)).
30. Id. Yen explained:
   Our ancients said, ‘People are the foundation of the nation. If the foundation is firm, then the nation will enjoy tranquility.’ I apply that to the world. People are the foundation of the world. If the foundation is firm then the world will enjoy tranquility. But three-fourths of the world’s people today are underhoused, underclothed, underfed, illiterate. In other words, three-fourths of the world’s foundation is rotten. Now as long as this continues to be true we have a very poor foundation upon which to build the world.
   BUCK, supra note 7, at 11-12. “Two-thirds of the people of the world are in the coolie class,” Yen once said. “No nation can rise higher than its masses, and until these masses, the world’s richest undeveloped resource, are developed through education—until the people are taught to participate themselves in their own reconstruction—world leaders can cry ‘Peace! Peace!’ but there will be no peace.” J.P. McEvoy, Jimmy Yen: China’s Teacher Extraordinary, in Yen and His Movement, supra note 3, at 91, 99.
31. Wei, supra note 29, at 45.
for themselves. For 4,000 years the craft of writing Chinese characters had been reserved for scholars. The peasants, long accustomed to the idea that they were incapable of being educated, could only laugh at Yen’s intentions.

Yet Yen proceeded to recruit volunteers, and the work of undoing centuries of subordination began. That first day, forty of the 5,000 men agreed to receive lessons in reading and writing. Yen’s primary obstacle in tutoring the men was locating appropriate teaching materials. Available Chinese literature was written in wen yan or literary Chinese, an ancient language that completely differs from modern vernacular Chinese, known as bai hua or plain talk. To avoid subjecting his students to the long grueling process of mastering ancient Chinese, Yen composed simple lessons from about a thousand of the most commonly used characters. These pre-selected characters formed the basis for the One Thousand Chinese Character textbook that would later become the basic instrument in Chinese mass education.

Success came quickly. After four months, thirty-five of the forty men completed the training program and passed Yen’s literacy test, which consisted of writing a short letter home and reading a simple news sheet. Yen conducted a graduation ceremony before a large audience that included the commanding generals, several British officers, and the entire camp of 5,000 men. Each student received a red diploma inscribed with scholar’s calligraphy, which certified him as a literate citizen of the Republic of China. The success of this first group was consequential: the day after the graduation, more than 2,000 men applied for the second term of Yen’s literacy classes.

Yen recognized early on that he could not personally teach every student, but he knew he could give his students the tools with which to teach each other. Thus, by making each pupil a teacher as well, Yen was...
able to extend the literacy training to countless others.47

Once armistice was reached in November of 1918, Yen extended the literacy movement into other camps of Chinese laborers throughout France.48 As more and more laborers gained literacy, Yen’s project came to encompass more than just imparting reading abilities.49 When a shortage of Chinese reading materials developed, Yen decided to write, publish, and circulate a newspaper in vernacular Chinese.50 Yen’s paper, The Chinese Laborer’s Weekly, not only provided reading material but served a political purpose as well, through its coverage of current events and inclusion of editorials.51 For example, when word got out that the Allies had secretly promised Japan virtual control over China’s Shandong Province if Japan ended the war, Yen used the paper to denounce the imperialist carving up of China.52

While Yen was writing publicly against injustice, he received a letter from a peasant that influenced him forever.53 The letter read:

Great Teacher Yen: Ever since the publishing of your paper I began to know everything under the heavens. But your paper is so cheap and costs only one centime a copy, you may have to close down your paper soon. Here please find enclosed 365 francs which I have saved during my three years labor in France.54

This letter and its accompanying donation touched Yen so deeply, Yen later said, that he decided “to give my life to the enlightenment of millions of common Chinese who had been denied an opportunity of schooling.”55 Realizing that the laborers were educable when no one before had suspected it, Yen said, “Now I knew I must dedicate my life to teaching my people, for only education would make their lot less bitter, their latent power more strong.”56

YE N’S RETURN TO CHINA

Within two years, Yen was in China trying to spread literacy across the entire nation. After obtaining a master’s degree at Princeton, he returned to China in 1920 to associate with the Chinese YMCA and establish the Department of Mass Education.57 Yen chose Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, as the location of his first literacy project in

47. Id.
48. Hersey, supra note 3, at 239.
49. Id.
50. Id. at 240.
51. Id.
52. Id.
53. Id.
54. Id. at 242.
55. Kiang, supra note 9, at 40.
56. McEvoy, supra note 30, at 93.
57. Kiang, supra note 9, at 40.
His volunteers canvassed the streets, walking from house to house and waving banners that read: “An illiterate nation is a weak nation” and “Can you endure to see three-quarters of China go blind?” Within three days, the volunteers had enlisted 1,400 men and boys, including laborers and apprentices, adult rickshaw pullers, cobblers, tailors, and firecracker makers. Many teachers from government schools, private academies, and missionary institutions also signed up to teach for half an hour every evening without pay.

Yen launched the literacy campaign by setting up sixty mass education schools in Changsha, using as a textbook the *Thousand Character Primer* he had written while in France. After four months of study, 967 of the 1370 matriculated students passed final exams and received certificates as “Literate Citizens of the Republic of China.” Yen traveled to various sites over the next two years, talking with participants and teachers, observing local neighborhoods, and studying the effects of the literacy campaign he had launched. In his next two projects, Yen demonstrated how fearless he was by incorporating different notions of revolution. By the fall of 1922, after the first group of students had graduated from the Changsha schools, Yen was ready to institute the second Changsha campaign, this time taking on a new challenge. Mao Tse-tung, the future Communist leader of China, and his comrades participated in this campaign, commissioning their own *Thousand Character Primer*. In Yantai, the next city targeted for Yen’s literacy campaign, Yen took the movement one step further. This time Yen enrolled 1466 boys and men to participate in the schooling and 633 girls. For most Chinese, the idea that females could be educated was a revolutionary notion. For thousands of years, education was an honor reserved strictly for men. Historically, Chinese women had been treated as chattel with their feet being bound and when they married they became the property of their husband’s family. Now, however, Yen’s campaign

58. Hersey, *supra* note 3, at 244.
60. *Id.;* Hersey, *supra* note 3, at 244.
61. Hersey, *supra* note 3, at 244.
62. Kamata, *supra* note 5, at 3-4; see also Hersey, *supra* note 3, at 244 (referring to the book as the *People’s Thousand-Character Reader*).
64. Kamata, *supra* note 5, at 3.
66. *Id.* (Hayford does not explain in detail how Mao Tse-tung and his comrades participated).
68. *Id.*
69. *Id.*
70. *Id.*
71. *Id.*
was instrumental in the liberation of these women. Strategic as ever, Yen asked a woman, Madame Xiong Xiling (a.k.a. Madam Hsiung), wife of a former premier of the republic, to preside at the Yantai graduation and give the commencement address.

Madame Hsiung became a major ally to the program. At the graduation, she saw what had been accomplished and was sold: "[T]his is the real education for a free and equal people. This is the only way to realize a people's government. This is education and democracy. This is education for democracy." From that day forward, August 1, 1923, she was fully committed and became the leading force in the literacy campaign. At her suggestion, the Chinese National Association of Mass Education Movement was established. She lobbied intellectuals in Beijing and Shanghai. She got donations, including from warlords. She became chair of the board of trustees, which included prominent men from education, business, and industry. Through the efforts of Yen and thousands of recruited volunteers, China's mass education movement flourished, enrolling approximately 5 million students, ranging in age from 10 to 60, in mass education schools by 1929.

THE VILLAGE OF DINGXIAN

Although the literacy movement made progress in cities throughout China, Yen was concerned that the movement was not reaching the rural areas that needed education most. The results of a survey documenting the need for literacy schools in rural villages were not surprising: "We have found that most of the illiterates in China reside not in the cities but in the villages. China is an agricultural country, and the great majority of its people are peasants. Over 85 percent of the Chinese people live in villages. If we want to promote mass education, we must go to the villages." Based on survey results, Yen proposed to use the xian (county), the basic


73. Hersey, supra note 3, at 246.

74. BUCK, supra note 7, at 23.

75. Kamata, supra note 5, at 4; BUCK, supra note 7, at 24.

76. Kamata, supra note 5.

77. BUCK, supra note 7, 24-26.

78. Young China Goes to School, LIVING AGE, Apr. 1936, reprinted in YEN AND HIS MOVEMENT, supra note 3, at 81, 82. Indeed, Henry Ford gave Yen $10,000 to fund the movement, saying: "I like your idea. You go about the mass education of people the way I go about the mass production of cars." Id.; McEvoy, supra note 30, at 94. Yen recalled this statement when facing critics who said it would take thousands of years before the movement would have an effect. "It took Henry Ford a long time to perfect his first model," Yen replied, "but when he got the model right, he turned them out by the million." Id. at 95.

79. Kamata, supra note 5, at 4.

80. Id.
governmental unit in China, as a laboratory for experimental research.\textsuperscript{81} China was divided into 1,900 \textit{xian} in which about eighty-five percent of China's population of 400 million people lived.\textsuperscript{82} Yen recognized that each \textit{xian} served not only as a political and administrative unit but also as a rural social unit that struggled with essentially the same harsh conditions as other counties.\textsuperscript{83} By selecting one \textit{xian} for experimental research, he believed that the results would be applicable to other \textit{xian} as well.\textsuperscript{84}

The Mass Education Movement (MEM) selected Dingxian (a.k.a. Tinghsien) as the \textit{xian} where research on rural education would be conducted.\textsuperscript{85} In the fall of 1926, the MEM established its center and began preparatory work.\textsuperscript{86}

Yen strove to modernize not only the rural community through education but also China's approach to education itself. Yen believed that mimicking foreign systems was an approach inferior to developing an independent formula based upon China's needs and realities.\textsuperscript{87} Yen determined that the most effective way to use the \textit{xian} for educational research purposes was to know the \textit{xian}. His strategy entailed mobilizing intellectuals to live and work with the peasants.\textsuperscript{88} In the fall of 1929, Yen moved his entire family from Beijing to Dingxian.\textsuperscript{89} Under Yen's influence and example, many intellectuals, including university professors and presidents, as well as individuals with specialized training in foreign affairs and policy, gave up their comfortable lives in the cities and moved to the villages.\textsuperscript{90} He insisted that the intellectuals first learn from the peasants to change their perspective before they did any teaching.\textsuperscript{91} For Yen, only after the intellectuals learned how to see things from the peasants' perspective could they begin to analyze and solve the problems endemic to the villages.\textsuperscript{92}

The Dingxian experiment was probably the first time in China's history that scholars and modern scientists actually went to the people instead of simply romanticizing about them.\textsuperscript{93} Prior to the experiment, scholars had written about the "toil and struggle of the common people." Poets had glorified the simplicity and the beauty of the Chinese farmer's
life without really knowing what the farmer’s life was like. European intellectuals were caught up in this image as well, extolling the “tranquility of the farmer” after merely experiencing meal and wine and being carried around in a sedan chair by coolies. To Yen, however, these “tributes” did nothing to ease the farmer’s burden.94

In Dingxian, Yen’s team did not go and build a separate “little Beijing” to live in. Instead, they actually approached farmers and asked to live in spare rooms. All of the teachers were housed through the farmers’ generosity and hospitality. However, many found it difficult to live with the farmers because they found the living conditions to be dirty and unsanitary. Indeed, about a third of the staff gave up and returned to Beijing because they simply could not adapt.95

After Yen persuaded intellectuals and university students to leave their ivory towers and join him in the village, he soon realized that teaching coolies how to read and write was simple compared to the challenge of re-educating Ph.D.’s.96 Village projects had to be developed with little funds and complete simplicity.97 Thus, an agricultural expert from Cornell University struggled for weeks to perfect a chicken brooder that could be replicated by the villagers.98 Doctors from Johns Hopkins had to be re-educated in practical “public health” methods by peasants who had never even heard of the term.99 Health workers were taught how to maintain sanitary wells, build latrines, and administer vaccinations.100 Eventually, volunteers from the farming villages were trained as health workers and proudly staffed free clinics.101

While Yen and his staff organized literacy efforts, residents followed through with implementing the campaign. Yen’s team conducted weeks of “social calls” and group meetings with various residents to explain the goals of the literacy campaign. At a large town meeting, the residents elected a council to take charge. Schools were drawn in and students volunteered to serve on recruiting teams. A mass meeting was followed by an exciting parade around town. Recruiting teams went from house to house, until they had signed up every person between the ages of twelve and twenty-five who could not read.102

The enrollment was so high that more volunteers were needed.103 Yen sent out an urgent call to professors and students at colleges, middle

94. BUCK, supra note 7, at 37.
95. BUCK, supra note 7, at 37-38.
96. McEvoy, supra note 30, at 95.
97. Id. at 7.
98. Id.; Bartlett, supra note 5, at 7; Hersey, supra note 3, at 253.
100. Bartlett, supra note 5, at 7.
101. BUCK, supra note 7, at 58-59.
102. Id. at 17-18.
103. Id.
schools, and primary schools. More than 1,200 appeared at a special meeting where Yen spoke for two hours on the importance of why the educated class should assume the responsibility of educating the uneducated. At the end of his impassioned speech, he appealed to the audience: “Those of you who are willing to volunteer to teach one hour a day without pay, please stand up.” Everyone in attendance stood.104

As the process repeated itself from village to village, Yen’s team would set up three or four demonstration schools in centrally located villages. Teachers and other literate members of those communities were invited to organizational meetings, and once they saw the practicality and simplicity of the MEM teaching materials, they would start classes of their own for the illiterate in their communities. These schools, taught and supported by the people themselves, were referred to as the “People’s Schools.” Yen’s team had the responsibility of staffing and financing both the experimental and demonstration schools, but the responsibility of staffing the People’s Schools belonged to the local villagers. In Dingxian, while Yen’s team conducted two experimental schools and six demonstration schools for the whole district, the people of Dingxian operated 472 People’s Schools—one for every village.105 These schools were financed and staffed by the locals themselves. They decided on their own not to charge fees, but to raise money through other ways, such as donations or philanthropic support.106 Encouraged by the progress in Dingxian, Yen’s team subsequently established a second project at Hengshan, in central China’s Hunan province, and a third project in Xindu xian in western China’s Sichuan province.107

In many ways, Yen’s experimental program in Dingxian was successful. The Dingxian Farmer’s Institute innovations in plowing, farming, and irrigation led to an exponential increase in cotton crop revenue—from $120,000 in 1932 to $1.8 million in 1937.108 By working together with doctors trained at the best medical schools in Beijing and the United States, impressive medical advances were also made. Before Yen’s program was implemented, diseases were widespread because the villagers drank water from wells contaminated with fecal matter, and midwives used mud to plaster infants’ umbilical cords. However, with guidance from health care workers and with the availability of medical kits and other necessary supplies, village volunteers learned how to maintain sanitary water supplies, sterilize cuts and umbilical cords, and inoculate against smallpox and cholera. Within a few months, diseases like trachoma and

---

104. Id.
105. Id. at 22.
106. Id. at 52.
107. Id. at 64.
smallpox had been eliminated completely.\textsuperscript{109}

Through his many projects, Yen and his team demystified the process of education and raised the farmers' consciousness of their power over subordination. Overcoming centuries of traditional isolation, farmers were finally able to call themselves scholars. Self-respect, confidence and dignity were developed, not just in the men but in the community as a whole. To Yen, a potent basis for the remaking of the whole community (and perhaps the entire nation) was established.\textsuperscript{110} Learning how to read kindled an awareness of the larger community and a desire to become more informed and involved. Increased literacy led to the creation of \textit{The Farmer}, the first daily newspaper published for Chinese farmers. A radio station was installed for daily broadcasts of useful information about farming techniques, home improvements, child care, cooperatives, and health.\textsuperscript{111} Communities developed self-help cooperatives as an alternative to getting loans from local “bankers” who charged high interest rates.\textsuperscript{112} Given “fatter pigs, better seeds, [pollution] control, more eggs per hen, cooperatives for credit, marketing and purchasing,” the income of Dingxian farmers skyrocketed.\textsuperscript{113}

Another goal of the project was to help develop community leaders. Students who demonstrated special abilities became teaching assistants and developed into “guiding students.” These “guiding students” taught their families at home, as well as classes in the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{114} Identifying and developing innovation was important to the progress and growth of the community. For example, an ordinary farmer named Wu Yu-tien, a member of the Fellow-Scholar Association, with the support and encouragement of his community, spent three years developing a strain of wheat that ended up increasing the community’s yield by forty-five percent.

\textbf{THE PATH TO A CORRELATED, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH}

Based on their experiences from living among the peasants, Yen and his team revised their intellectual, book-based theories about rural reform.\textsuperscript{115} Yen realized that illiteracy was only one piece of the puzzle; “once a man starts to read, his mind begins to grow and he wants to learn how to live. When he has won the fight against illiteracy, he wants to carry on the battle against his other foes—poverty, disease, and

\textsuperscript{109} See id. at 7; McEvoy, supra note 30, at 96-97.
\textsuperscript{110} BUCK, supra note 7, at 41.
\textsuperscript{111} Id. at 46.
\textsuperscript{112} Id. at 50.
\textsuperscript{113} Id.
\textsuperscript{114} Id. at 43.
\textsuperscript{115} Hersey, supra, note 3, at 249.
Thus, the mass education movement was premised on four new principles: education to combat illiteracy; livelihood to combat poverty; health to combat disease; and self-government to combat civic inertia. Yen explained his holistic approach and the importance of correlation in social reconstruction:

Life is an organic whole. It should not be 'compartmentalized.' When you think of the 'four root evils' we have been discussing, you cannot help seeing their inter-locking character. Poverty, for example, is a cause of disease; disease and ill-health are economically wasteful and so a cause of poverty. Poverty and disease are in turn both largely a result of ignorance. And unless there is an effective political system in which the people are capable of participating, very little of permanent value can be accomplished along cultural, economic and health lines. So, when we talk about the ‘four fundamentals’ of social reconstruction, they are not pigeon-holes to divorce aspects of life that are related. They are merely a convenient way of organizing a very complex program. That is why we emphasize a correlated program rather than an isolated approach. Education, economic improvement, public health, and self-government are so inter-related and mutually dependent that the success of one depends upon the success of another.

Yen proposed solutions that focused on these four educational aspects. The literacy program aimed to develop a complete system of characters, text, and teaching methods specifically targeted to the rural setting. The livelihood program sought to provide lessons on agricultural production and other rural industries. Health education was directed at curing the “weakness[es] of the body” by emphasizing public health measures, supporting scientific medical facilities, and developing a rural health system. Lastly, citizenship education, which Yen considered the most important component, cultivated a sense of morality and public spirit by stressing nationalism, community relationships, and the importance of cooperation.

When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, the pilot project in Dingxian was forced to shut down and Yen had to look elsewhere to set up his programs. Nonetheless, Yen was able to carry on the mission in other

---

116. Bartlett, supra note 5, at 5.
117. See id. at 6. According to Yen, the overall structure of any program seeking to help those in poverty is as follows: First, the program must “center its efforts among the peasants.” Second, it must be a grass roots movement, “indigenously led and indigenously accomplished.” Third, it must not work piecemeal, but simultaneously, on illiteracy, poverty, disease, and civic inertia. Carter Davidson, Self-Help: Jimmy Yen's Proven Aid for Developing Nations, in YEN AND HIS MOVEMENT, supra note 3, at 137, 138.
118. Buck, supra note 7, at 69.
119. Jin, supra note 81, at 20. Yen referred to these as the Four Kinds of Education and the Three Types of Approach.
120. Id.
121. Id.
122. Bartlett, supra note 5, at 8.
areas of China. What Yen established in Dingxian continued to have an incredible impact. In spite of the Japanese occupation, the schools remained open, public health work and agricultural improvements continued, and even the local government remained operational. The Chinese resistance to Japanese occupation through guerrilla tactics was especially ferocious in Dingxian. Yen’s students not only ran guerilla warfare and local reconstruction efforts in their own district, but also led the resistance in all the neighboring counties. Of the 472 villages in Dingxian, the Japanese only occupied twenty one.

After the Japanese surrendered following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, Yen was able to renew his efforts in China. Through the China Aid Act of 1948 (in a section known as the “Jimmy Yen Provision”), he received a $27.5 million grant to fund rural reconstruction from the United States government. Unfortunately, Yen’s new program was only able to spend about $4 million of the grant in its sixteen months of operation before the Communists took over Mainland China. Yet, over the brief life of the program, it reached nearly sixty million Chinese peasants.

THE DINGXIAN MODEL IN THE PHILIPPINES

Yen’s work in Dingxian and other parts of China became a model for rural reconstruction movements throughout the world. The Philippines, Thailand, India, Ghana, Guatemala, and Columbia adopted the Dingxian model of reconstruction to reform rural societies and bring literacy to undeveloped nations. In the 1940s, Yen was invited to Mexico and Cuba to talk about his idea of education through reconstruction. At the end of his life, in the late 1980s, 62% of the world’s population was engaged in agriculture, and three-fourths of the people in developing countries lived in

123. BUCK, supra note 7, at 16.
124. Id. at 76.
126. Buck, supra note 125, at 132.
127. Id.
129. Id.
130. BUCK, supra note 7, at 13. When Yen arrived in Cuba, he was asked to speak about some of the fundamental problems China was facing—illiteracy, poverty, disease, misgovernment—and how these problems were being tackled through a coordinated system of people’s education, people’s livelihood, people’s health and people’s government. Yen recalled, “My Cuban friends came to me afterwards and said: ‘Mr. Yen, you were not talking about the problems of China—you were talking about the problems of Cuba. Here we have illiteracy, here we have poverty, here we have disease, here we have mis-government.’” Id. at 14-15.
rural areas. In the least developed countries, 80% to 90% of the population was rural. Moreover, 98% of illiterate people in the world lived in developing countries, with the total number continually increasing.

After the Communist takeover in 1949, Yen wanted to make sure that the experiences gained and the lessons learned in China were not lost. His search for new headquarters eventually led to the Philippines, where he started a rural reconstruction program in 150 pilot villages. Within eighteen months, San Luis, one of the poorest areas in the country, had lifted the average annual income from $300 to $960, decreased the percentage of people in debt from 95% to 20%, and wiped out illiteracy.

News of success spread reconstruction throughout the Philippines and in 1960, President Carlos Garcia singled out Yen’s movement for a Presidential Award of Merit. That same year, Yen established the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) in the Philippines, with the goal of helping countries around the world implement similar programs and train rural workers.

The IIRR adopted Yen’s credos: “The village is important but the villagers are more important” and “Start with what the people know. Build on what the people have.” Yen’s aspirations in the Philippines mirrored his goal in Dingxian: to educate people and achieve peace in the world by reforming the life of the peasant population.

The Farmer Scholar Program was implemented in the Philippines between 1972 and 1975. The program used Yen’s students-become-teachers strategy, utilizing paraprofessionals to bring modern agricultural technology to rural farmers. Selecting from within their own ranks, the farmers chose paraprofessionals trained by the IIRR’s specialists both in the use and instruction of technology. Recent trainees were asked to train at least five other farmers in the discipline that they had just learned. Second-level trainees, in turn, were asked to train at least five more

131. Song, supra note 128, at 120.
132. Id.
133. Id.
135. Id.
136. Id. at 15; Clarence W. Hall, For the World’s Forgotten a Long-Proven Down-to-Earth Program, in Yen and His Movement, supra note 3, at 157, 159.
138. Song, supra note 128, at 120.
139. Id. at 119.
141. Id.
142. Id. at 141.
As a result, the incomes of trained farmers increased substantially. They shared their skills with other farmers, teaching each other livestock production and providing free services such as livestock vaccinations.\textsuperscript{144}

In 1975, the Farmer Scholar Program was superseded by the People’s School System which instituted an improved and expanded version of the old methodology.\textsuperscript{145} In addition to providing training to farmers, the People’s School System trained women and youth leaders in a variety of disciplines.\textsuperscript{146} The training focused on the “Four-Fold Program,” consisting of education, livelihood, health, and self-government—the model developed by Yen in Dingxian.\textsuperscript{147} The curriculum also stressed Yen’s philosophy of “teach[ing] by showing” and “learn[ing] by doing,” with emphasis on demonstrations and experiments rather than on lectures and reading.\textsuperscript{148}

The People’s Schools adapted to the needs of local communities and were quite successful in bringing about improvements in literacy and healthcare. The results in agricultural livelihood training, however, were mixed.\textsuperscript{149} One study demonstrated that the poverty-stricken, landless or near-landless individuals hardly benefited from the People’s School at all.\textsuperscript{150} The People’s Schools discovered that because the needs of landless farmers were not considered in the curriculum, landless farmers could not effectively participate in the consultations and training being offered. Consequently, the neediest sector of the population was receiving no relief.\textsuperscript{151} Given this shortcoming, the IIRR switched its focus to concentrate on a community organization strategy encapsulated in the People’s Organization Program.\textsuperscript{152}

The People’s Organization Program strived to alleviate rural poverty by organizing disadvantaged sectors of the population.\textsuperscript{153} Target groups included the landless or near-landless, marginal tenant farmers, subsistence fishermen, women, unemployed or underemployed, and out-of-school youth.\textsuperscript{154} The program’s strategy was to allow participants to take part in decision-making areas that directly affected their well-being.\textsuperscript{155} This included identifying and implementing activities for themselves as well as

\textsuperscript{143} Id.
\textsuperscript{144} Id.
\textsuperscript{145} Id. at 142.
\textsuperscript{146} Id.
\textsuperscript{147} Id.
\textsuperscript{148} Id.
\textsuperscript{149} Id. at 143.
\textsuperscript{150} Id.
\textsuperscript{151} Id.
\textsuperscript{152} Id.
\textsuperscript{153} Id. at 144.
\textsuperscript{154} Id.
\textsuperscript{155} Id.
working with local governments and non-governmental organization (NGOs) to implement effective projects for the welfare of the community. Initially, participants were organized into groups of individuals that shared similar interests or needs. For example, landless agricultural workers were grouped together because they wanted better wages, while small farmers were grouped together because they needed credit at more reasonable interest rates for purchasing farming necessities. Pressing needs related to livelihood were addressed within the groups; then different sectors came together, forming community-wide associations that tackled more communal problems such as the lack of potable water, land tenure, and diseases affecting children.

Yen’s work in Dingxian created a model for rural reform that has been adapted to alleviate problems facing rural communities throughout the world. The IIRR’s work and success in the Philippines is a tribute to the strength of Yen’s model and the effectiveness of his foundations. By advocating dramatic reforms in education, government, healthcare and agriculture, the IIRR has maintained Yen’s goals of reforming the third world by reaching out and educating the rural community.

Today at the IIRR, Yen’s overarching principles remain the driving force. The IIRR continues to develop strategies that release the powers of the rural poor to transform their lives. The Institute works with the people, rather than for them. IIRR’s strategy recognizes that the poor face multiple problems: lack of education, inadequate income opportunities, poor health, a degraded environment, and political oppression. The IIRR uses bottom-up, participatory, integrated strategies to address the complex nature of rural poverty. The current Web site of the IIRR reports on its partnerships with programs in Thailand, Canada, Kenya, Ecuador, Colombia, as well as the Philippines and China.
THE RELEVANCE OF YEN'S WORK TO COLLABORATIVE AND REBELLIOUS LAWYERING SCHOLARSHIP

In reflecting on the accomplishments of Y.C. James Yen in helping peasants, laborers, and farmers in Europe, China, and the Philippines, the similarities to the theoretical lawyering framework advanced by Jerry López, Lucie White, and, most recently, Ascanio Piomelli, become clear. Yen’s efforts advance their framework by providing an important example of working for social change on the ground. At the same time, their framework helps us understand the importance of Yen’s work to community lawyers.

A number of interrelated elements or principles drawn from López, White, and Piomelli are relevant:

- Educating clients and communities to support resistance;
- Opening ourselves to being educated by clients, communities, and allies;
- Recognizing that there is no need to romanticize the client’s knowledge or vision;
- Highlighting the importance of collaboration;
- Respecting clients instead of repeating a subordinating experience;
- Taking on the extremely challenging battles that collaborative advocacy leads to, despite the odds;
- Integrating and navigating many worlds.

In the following sections, I introduce these principles and share my reflections on how Yen’s work falls within their schemes.

Educate clients and communities to support resistance

Community legal services offices commonly engage in community education. For example, the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco touts community education and organizing as a key strategy in effectively providing much-needed services.166 Similarly, the Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid engages in community legal education as part of the extensive direct and phone-based civil support it provides.167 In López’s view, rebellious lawyers are also educators because in seeking to demystify the law, “[t]hey must understand how to educate those with whom they work, particularly about law and professional lawyering.”168 But to López, the goal of community education is more than transmitting information about legal

---


rights or benefit eligibility rules. Wherever groups of lower-income people meet or can be brought together, López sees opportunities for rebellious advocates to nurture and further their resistance to social, political, and economic subordination by “train[ing] groups of subordinated people to represent themselves and others.”

The notions of teaching self-help and to further resistance appeared central to Yen’s approach in the battle against subordination of peasants and laborers. In the coolie camps of France and the villages of China and the Philippines, Yen’s approach to teaching provided students with the tools they needed to teach themselves. The Farmer Scholar Program and the People’s School System were ultimate iterations of the self-help programs. Lay volunteers were trained to be health workers and later became the proud foundation of the community health system in villages. The teaching materials that he used and developed with the students—especially their own newspapers and radio reports—provided not only reading practice materials, but content that served a political purpose.

Similarly, resistance and combating subordination were the topics of Yen’s four-pronged educational components (literacy, livelihood, health, and citizenship) that were implemented in schools, home, and community. As Yen recognized,

What good is it to fatten a man’s purse, teach him to read and write, and help him towards better health, if he remains dependent on government and others? He must be taught the responsibility of citizenship in a democratic society, shown how to band with neighbors to run community affairs. Education in citizenship is at the very core of rural reconstruction.

Self-government is not a gift from above; it is an achievement by the people.

Be open to being educated by clients, communities, and allies

Partly from a sense of humility, López and White remind us that we must be open to being educated by those with whom we work. Rebellious lawyers “must open themselves up to being educated by all those with whom they come into contact, particularly about the traditions and experiences of life on the bottom and at the margins.”

170. BUCK, supra note 7, at 58-59.
171. Bartlett, supra note 5, at 16-17. In fact, anticipating the debate over welfare reform by decades, Yen adamantly stated, “I am against every kind of handout and give-away program.” Id. at 21. “Our motto has proved valid a million times: Not relief but release.” Id. According to Yen, human—not rural—reconstruction was the ultimate goal. Gardner Tewksbury, My Friend Jimmy Yen: A Glimpse Into the Personal Life of One of the World’s Most Remarkable Christians, in YEN AND HIS MOVEMENT, supra note 3, at 181, 183 (“Our purpose is to remake villages, not just rebuild villages.”).
172. LÓPEZ, supra note 168, at 37; see also Ascanio Piomelli, Appreciating Collaborative Lawyering, 6 CLINICAL L. REV. 427, 473 (2000) (citing White).
A key element of López's vision is that subordinated groups usually have expert knowledge about forces of repression and have developed skills for handling them. López urges lawyers to respect and tap into such knowledge and skills, as well as to endeavor to develop their own analogous "feel" for how things work in communities and institutions. One need only think of the survival skills that racially-excluded and interned Japanese Americans had to develop in order to understand their problem-solving talents. In the face of their detention, they helped to maintain education programs for the children and a social life for everyone. Some even survived by demonstrating their loyalty to the U.S. through military service. Learning from our subordinated clients is critical and "remarkably complex and enigmatic work—with multiple and even elusive dimensions, presenting massive conceptual and empirical challenges, and cultural and interpersonal dynamics more daunting and even more self-defining than we are accustomed to handling."

With regards to being open to and humble about learning, Yen was clearly in sync with López and White. His insistence on living with farmers in their homes in Dingxian and his demand that other intellectuals do the same are perhaps the best examples. To Yen, it was not simply an exercise in convenience or friendship; he believed that for the intellectuals to become effective teachers, they first had to learn to change their orientation and perspective. He was skeptical of a Chinese educational system that simply mimicked foreign systems. It was from living with farmers that he recognized the xian (county) was not simply an administrative unit but also a rural social unit that could be used for teaching. For Yen, going to and learning from the people was "[t]he most wonderful part of it all... the discovery of our own people... We were so stirred, so inspired, by the splendid qualities of our own common people." His credo of starting "with what the people know" could only be determined by learning from them.

Eliminate needless romanticization of clients

In López's view, as described by Piomelli, subordinated people's knowledge and stories are not necessarily better than those of lawyers—both groups are essential to the struggle "to fundamentally transform the world." To make such change, López explains, subordinated groups and their attorneys do not want simply to add to each other's knowledge—a bit of this and a bit of that coexisting easily. Instead, they desire to challenge
what each knows—how each gained it, what each believes about it, how each shares and uses it." As an alternative to emphasizing lower-income clients' fragility or placing them on a pedestal, López urges lawyers to engage their clients as true equals, worthy not only of respect but also of caring confrontation.

Over time, the skilled rebellious lawyer and her clients develop respect for each other’s views; in the process, the lawyer becomes mature enough to be open-minded to those other views and to challenging questions. I believe that Yen would agree with this vision; while he had the utmost respect and admiration for the peasants with whom he worked and from whom he learned, he also challenged their views, as they challenged his. Ultimately, the work of Yen’s team and the Dingxian villagers’ approaches became interdependent in the struggle to fight subordination. For example, when Yen went to live and work with the farmers of Dingxian, he anticipated objections on the farmers’ part to modern ideals and standards of public health. But by gradually developing a respectful relationship with them, Yen successfully challenged the farmers’ understanding of public health, and they adapted modern public health solutions as a part of their overall approach to resisting subordination. The mutual confidence took years to build, but eventually, “they were a part of us and we of them.”

Similarly, when Yen first announced his plans to teach the coolies how to read and write, his plans were met with laughter and skepticism from his prospective students. Yet Yen challenged the coolies’ assumptions about themselves because he respected their abilities, and the coolies’ respect for Yen led to their successful partnership in learning.

Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate

The concept of collaboration, as advanced by López, White, and Piomelli, is premised on other elements such as lawyers respecting their clients’ abilities and knowledge, learning from clients and clients’ communities, and reconceptualizing their role as community lawyers. López urges community lawyers to remain open to collaborating with lower-income individuals, groups, and institutions and to exploring social and political problem-solving approaches, rather than assuming that lawyers are always best suited to “represent” clients and that legal arenas are always the most appropriate forums for solving problems. He calls for an alliance of “co-eminent” practitioners—lawyers, clients, and other potential problem-solvers such as community activists, organizers, media, administrators, policy-makers, researchers, and funders, working with their

178. López, supra note 168, at 53.
179. Id. at 55.
180. Buck, supra note 7, at 48.
clients as true equals. In López’s vision, careful investigation of lower-income and subordinated communities reveals that many individuals and organizations are working to challenge subordination.

In what White labels the “third dimension” of lawyering for social change, lawyering is no longer a “unidirectional professional service.” It should become a collaborative and communicative practice, demanding strategic innovation, and requiring critical reflection on the forces conditioning the subordination of the poor, as well as the ways the poor might resist and redirect those forces to achieve justice. Through such action and reflection, the poor and their lawyer-allies voice aspirations, identify concrete action strategies, and discover grounds for political unity.

Piomelli characterizes collaboration as a joint problem-solving partnership with clients, in which clients are involved in actually implementing remedial strategies. He argues that the central elements of rebellious practice include a commitment to engage in group problem-solving efforts as well as “collective attempts to challenge elements of the status quo,” and to do so in a manner that does not go over their clients’ heads. With this approach, clients not only get to decide what their lawyer will do; they also participate in carrying out those decisions, often by speaking out on their own behalf and/or working with community groups that best serve their needs. According to Piomelli, “[f]or all the importance of their immediate relationships, clients and lawyers work inescapably within a network of problem-solving practitioners. . . . Moving the world in the desired direction often depends on the identification and

181. López, supra note 168, at 37; Piomelli, supra note 172, at 480.
182. Piomelli, supra note 172, at 480.
184. Id. White identifies three dimensions on which lawyering might be a catalyst for progressive social change. One dimension is “advocacy” which seeks to make the positive law more responsive to the social welfare needs of socially disempowered groups. This encompasses three familiar forms of public interest lawyering: litigation (to expand welfare entitlements or improve administration), lobbying (to increase resources or improve programs), and monitoring administrative agencies to enhance procedural fairness. A second dimension is advocacy which seeks to transform values in dominant cultures so as to encourage greater sensitivity to the injustices poor people face, greater respect for their life projects, and a clearer will to mobilize public resources on their behalf. The third dimension is advocacy that is focused on poor people’s own political consciousness, to enable them to see themselves and their social situation in ways that enhance their world-changing powers. This dimension also seeks to change the attitudes and self-concepts of lawyers themselves—our own political identities, relationships and commitments, enabling us to work more effectively with historically subordinated groups to achieve social justice. Id. at 157-58.
185. Piomelli, supra note 172, at 483.
Collaborative lawyers thus commit to confronting and eroding the elitism that values the work of some individuals and groups but not that of others. They search for allies engaged in “domination-fighting,” a strategy that strives “to expand the circle of potential collaborators” and is premised on the understanding that “isolated individuals make far easier prey for societal wolves than does a united flock guarding each other’s backs.”

A new gloss that Piomelli adds is the concept that collaborative lawyering operates as a vision of true participatory democracy, exemplifying an effort to promote and deepen a democratic participation that allows communities to flourish and engage in joint public action. In this framework, collaborative lawyers “strive to bring democracy to life by recognizing and building connections and capacities that can lead to effective collective action to combat societal subordination.” Rather than asking their clients “What would you like me to do for you?” collaborative lawyers reframe the question as “What shall we do together?” and “Who shall we become as a result?”

Piomelli recognizes that part of both the challenge and allure of collaborative lawyering is that such a democratic approach cannot be faked and takes intense work to sustain. Even though the collaborative lawyering approach runs counter to the traditional model of the lawyer as pre-eminent problem-solver who primarily works alone (or with fellow lawyers) and uses her expert legal knowledge, collaborative lawyers seek to integrate democratic values into their everyday practice because they believe that collaboration allows them to unleash their own full energies and potential.

Instead of describing their objective simply as lawyering for social change or lawyering in the public interest, Piomelli argues, collaborative lawyering theorists take as their goal “lawyering against subordination”—making clearer their commitment to joining with others to eradicate relationships based on domination and subservience. Collaborative lawyers view individuals with any pretensions to superiority—be they employers, landlords, politicians, or businessmen—as significant threats to the clients and communities with whom they work. Although they aim to enhance clients’ and communities’ economic well-being and increase their own resources, they view such material gains as merely a collateral benefit of the broader struggle to challenge and root out subordination. Their vision

---

187. Piomelli, supra note 172, at 483.
188. Piomelli, supra note 186, at 603.
189. Id. at 547-48.
190. Id. at 600-601.
191. Id. at 601.
192. Id.
193. Id. at 602-03.
"follows in the footsteps of the democratic tradition linking ancient Athens, Thomas Jefferson, John Dewey, Ella Baker, and countless social-change activists. This democratic tradition, not postmodernist social theory, most fully articulates and illuminates collaborative lawyers’ core values."  

This "people’s movement" for which Yen’s approach was responsible is a perfect example of Piomelli’s true participatory democracy that can result from meaningful collaboration.

Yen personified the ideal of the collaborative advocate as he lived and worked alongside peasants and coolies. Together, Yen and his students planned and developed curricula, reading materials, radio programs, and transmitter stations; they revised teaching texts based on the needs of the people as well as on their feedback and criticism. More significantly, Yen trained his students to become teachers themselves—not simply for efficiency’s sake but also because he knew that they would be more effective teachers of their own communities than any outsiders could be. In fact, even in France in the early days of his career, Yen fostered collaboration, insisting that with his guidance, the coolies could learn to write their own letters. He constantly recruited teachers and scholars to help, often encouraging them to re-imagine themselves as collaborators. Yen acknowledged that a quarter of his time with these intellectuals was spent on gentle coaching through the constant process of discussing the benefits of collaboration because many had never before experienced teamwork. He used graduation ceremonies in France and China, where he invited generals and influential leaders, to create a network of allies who joined forces in promoting education. He promoted town meetings where village residents were elected to become educational campaign leaders. Making sure not to assume center stage, he stood with his peasant students, not simply in resisting subordination but in proactively fighting to better their lives.

Respect clients

Rebellious lawyers, in their collaborative efforts to avoid subordination, must avoid subordinating their own clients. López, White, and Piomelli share the belief that prevailing lawyering practices disserve lower-income clients. All too often, the community lawyer fails “to appreciate clients’ goals of preserving dignity and maintaining some control [and the client’s own ability] to act against their own oppression.” As Piomelli describes it, White, as an advocate of “empowerment,” urges lawyers who serve lower-income individuals to

194. Id. at 614.
195. BUCK, supra note 7, at 39.
196. Id. at 72.
focus on creating, nurturing, and protecting settings where clients can safely and comfortably speak their minds, such as legal clinics in which participants can publicly discuss problems and potential solutions, public speak-outs or demonstrations, Head Start programs, and public theater works. Such initiatives are aimed at preventing lawyers and clients from falling into the inadvertent subordination that Piomelli cautions against:

When solutions are implemented without the involvement of clients and lay organizations, attorneys assume center stage as the primary problem-solvers. Even if, as client-centered lawyers, we enable our clients to be the primary decision-makers, we commonly limit our clients’ choices to what we should do for them. As the primary implementers of the decisions we help our clients make, we most commonly follow two approaches: we litigate and/or we enter into negotiations (or some more formal type of alternative dispute resolution), often with other attorneys. Our training and role conceptions seem to predispose us that a “case” that cannot be resolved with advice and counseling necessarily requires us to litigate or settle it. With the adjudicatory forum and our legal training casting their “legalizing” influence, the range of issues, tactics, and solutions often narrows dramatically.

Piomelli recognizes that the “problem [for underprivileged clients] is not being represented, but always being represented—never being actively involved in speaking or acting directly on one’s behalf or with others.” Collaborative lawyers ought to be striving to implement a “collective, cooperative approach to problem-solving [that] treats clients and communities as fully human partners.”

Avoiding subordination in the attorney-client relationship equates to lawyers truly valuing their clients’ informed judgment and skills, and recognizing the necessity of active roles for clients in the collaborative process. In the rebellious lawyering model, social change is accomplished by this partnership with and empowerment of clients and communities; the goal of collaboration becomes more than a simple “win.”

Yen’s refusal to subordinate his students was demonstrated time and again through his actions, from the first time he informed his first group of students in France that they would have to write their own letters, to his encouragement of subsequent generations of farmer-scholars and the transformation of countless numbers of peasants from students to teachers. Emboldened by Yen’s approach, residents in towns and villages organized group meetings. Teachers recruited from new communities taught their own classes using Yen’s curriculum after seeing its practicality and usefulness. Leadership development, an offshoot of respect for students,
was itself an integral part of the strategy; the result was that both teachers and students emerged with elevated spirit and an increased sense of worth.

*Take on the battles that collaborative advocacy leads to, even if the odds seem insurmountable*

White, in particular, warns the rebellious lawyer that in collaborating with others and in reconceptualizing her role, the battles may become extremely challenging. Why engage in these impossible battles? What sense do they make if they result in an administrative or judicial loss or if the efforts are frustrated by law or politics? First of all, a “loss” is only a “loss” depending on who is defining its parameters. Much can still be gained from the effort. The gain may come from the unity of the effort, from the camaraderie, and from the sense of worth or even pride in fighting the battle. A sense of empowerment can be derived from the process as well as from being heard, or even from the freedom of expression. Secondly, who knows? You may actually accomplish the impossible! Think only of reparations and an apology for Japanese Americans who were interned. Forty years after the infamous internment during World War II; through years of hearings, letter-writing campaigns, lobbying efforts, and personal testimony, the injustice in internment was recognized: Congress provided small compensation to survivors, and a formal apology by Attorney General Richard Thornburgh. White provides an example from Ghana where allies still come up with action strategies in spite of the impossible challenge of influencing the World Bank or IMF.

Yen took on these seemingly insurmountable odds, and perhaps this is his most important lesson for rebellious advocates. It should not be surprising that collaborative work can lead to difficult challenges. After all, this is about listening and learning from the community. This is a fight against subordination, against traditions, against the toughest borders. Yen was willing to fight for the education of 180,000 coolies in Europe, 400,000 peasants in Dingxian, and hundreds of villages, in addition to combating the effects of poverty and illiteracy on health, economics, and citizenship. Even before he moved to Dingxian in 1929, five million people were receiving instruction in the mass education programs he had championed. He was not afraid of these “impossible” battles. He addressed the foundation of the country, aspiring to help China become strong, attempting to undo centuries of subordination. He advanced the revolutionary notion of opening schools to women. He also recognized that this was not simply about China:

I am afraid the moment the war is over and the pressure and tension are removed, [nations] will fall back again into their old grooves and think the

---

same way and do everything the same way, each for himself and his own nation only, and in another twenty years we will commit again the same crime against humanity. Yet we must not think of nations as units—we must think really internationally of peoples. The world is the unit—any other planning is futile. Educating one people is so useless unless all are educated for a better life. . . . [T]here must be cooperation and collaboration throughout the world if the three-fourths of the world's people are to be brought up to their proper level . . . so that all peoples are marching along together.206

Yen's example also reminds us that collaborative advocacy is hard work. Besides his work in the classrooms, he was in homes and neighborhoods recruiting students and supporters, in universities and schools recruiting teachers, in various institutions recruiting allies, and in communities learning from the residents. He monitored the effectiveness of programs, conducted surveys to document the need for literacy in rural villages, and became a proficient, famed fundraiser.205 Yen's recruits sacrificed financially, working for one-third of what they had been making even though some had large families to support; as such, Yen spent much of his time keeping their spirits up as well.206 Yen lived this work so long that it became his life.207

Integrate and navigate many worlds

In López's vision, lawyers must be skilled legal technicians and engaged public citizens and activists. They must expertly navigate and integrate many worlds: the legal, the interpersonal, the social, and the political.208 White also notes the importance for "political lawyers to leave the shelter of their offices and give up the false sense of control that goes with one-to-one client representation."

Much of Yen's success was due to his well-honed ability to navigate and integrate many different worlds. He was at home with peasants, school teachers, intellectuals, college presidents, public officials, political leaders, entrepreneurs, and the wealthy. He created new curricula by working with farmers and by integrating these disparate parties. He convinced them to learn from each other. They worked together and developed mutual respect. He convinced Henry Ford and the Rockefeller family to fund his efforts.210

204. BUCK, supra note 7, at 14.
205. See id. at 17-19.
206. See id. at 72-73.
207. Id. at 54.
208. See Piomelli, supra note 172, at 483-84; see also LÓPEZ, supra note 168, at 55.
210. See discussion supra note 78 (Yen and Henry Ford); Kathleen Teltsch, Worker for Poor Will Be Honored, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 16, 1983, at 43 ("Several generations of Rockefeller family members have supported Dr. Yen's work"). In 1928, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. offered a personal gift of $100,000 if other donors would contribute. In all $500,000 was raised. Id.
He traveled to Hawaii and convinced teams to organize fundraising efforts to pay for educational programs; he solicited old friends and acquaintances from prestigious institutions.\textsuperscript{211} He impressed Supreme Court Justice William Douglas and author Pearl S. Buck.\textsuperscript{212} Indeed, Yen became a master in many different worlds as he combated subordination.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Yen’s lifelong commitment to the poor and the illiterate was not motivated by recognition or fortune;\textsuperscript{213} he partnered with countless individuals who were touched by his vision and advocacy in the struggle against subordination. As Pearl Buck noted,

One does not often, in this day or any day, find a man whose whole life has been completely selfless. James Yen is not so much better than other men, not so much more intelligent or able, that this can be explained only through his natural gifts. He has great natural gifts, but others have had as great who have done much less.\textsuperscript{214}

Shortly before he died, Yen was invited back to his country of birth to great fanfare. In 1985, the National People’s Congress in China invited Yen to return to his homeland as an honored guest.\textsuperscript{215} The ninety-two year old Yen was welcomed as a hero.\textsuperscript{216} His old house had been renovated and turned into a museum in his honor, with photographs of him and his colleagues and original copies of the primers his team had used in the literacy campaigns.\textsuperscript{217} Elderly villagers thanked Yen for the classes they had attended as children and described the great improvements in village life Yen’s team helped to bring about.\textsuperscript{218} These thanks, such as the 365 francs and letter he received from the grateful coolie back in France, were all the reward Yen lived for. His work not only affected reconstruction and education movements around the world; it also transcended ideologies and bore fruit in places where the needs were greatest.\textsuperscript{219}

As rebellious, collaborative lawyers carrying on Yen’s legacy today, we must reflect conscientiously on what it means to be community

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{211. BUCK, supra note 7, at 27-30.}
\footnote{212. See generally, BUCK, supra note 7. Justice Douglas called Yen’s work “the most important single job in the world,” describing him as “a Christ-like person whose face reflects faith in mankind and dedication to a cause much bigger than himself.” Justice William O. Douglas, \textit{James Yen, A Christ-Like Person}, TODAY'S HEALTH, 1973, at 189-193.}
\footnote{213. During one of Yen’s early projects in China, a warlord offered Yen an estimated $8 million endowment on the condition that he leave peasant education efforts to go into politics. Yen declined, thinking to himself: “What does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” BUCK, supra note 7, at 31-32.}
\footnote{214. Id. at 10.}
\footnote{215. Hersey, supra note 3, at 262.}
\footnote{216. Id.}
\footnote{217. Id.}
\footnote{218. Id. at 262.}
\footnote{219. Hersey, supra note 3, at 262.}
\end{footnotes}
lawyers—on whether our work is effective, on whether we ought to
consider other collaborative strategies, on what events around us affect our
clients and our work. Our work certainly involves the daily representation
of clients, impact litigation, social mobilization, economic development,
and community education; but it also entails stepping back and looking at
the bigger picture. It is about recognizing the roots of subordination and
finding creative ways to address it. It is about relating our local struggles to
broader movements beyond our neighborhoods. At whichever level we
engage—local, national, or international—we must maintain our belief that
our day-in, day-out efforts can have lasting impacts.

Yen’s example is one for the ages of rebellious, collaborative
advocates. His example was a model of dedication and hard work,
humility, collaboration, respect for laborers and peasants and appreciation
of their work, broadening of support networks, strategic innovation and
flexibility, and courage in the face of immense challenges. His example
inspires us to get back to the streets, roll up our sleeves, be creative, and
fully engage in our community work.