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Commentary on the Archaeology of Chinese Railroad Workers in North America: Where Do We Go from Here?
北美地区中国铁路工人的考古学研究：我们该由此走向何方？

ABSTRACT

Archaeologists have spent nearly five decades excavating sites associated with Chinese immigrants to the American West. They have studied hundreds of places and millions of artifacts and compiled enormous amounts of information. It is time for synthesis; it is time for sharing beyond the narrow archaeological community. The material is too rich, too important, to bury in technical reports and obscure jargon. It can connect contemporary American and Chinese communities in a common quest for an understanding of the past in the interests of the future.

考古学家已经对美国西部的中国移民遗址进行了将近五十年的发掘。他们已经了研究了成百上千的地点与数不胜数的文物，并积累了大量信息资料。现在是我们应该进行综合的时候，也是我们应该跨出狭窄的考古学领域，分享成果的时候。这些材料太丰富、太重要，不应该被埋没在技术性的报告与含混的术语之中。它们可以使当代美国和中国社区通过对理解过去和展望未来的共同追求而更紧密地连结在一起。

Assignment from the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project

Barbara Voss formed the Archaeology Network in 2012 as an adjunct to the much larger Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project (CRWNAP), a multiyear venture between American and Chinese scholars to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of large numbers of Chinese to work on the transcontinental railroad. Chinese immigrants participated in the earlier California Gold Rush and subsequent mining booms throughout the American West; they helped create the infrastructure that built the state. For nearly 50 years, archaeologists have studied the cultural landscapes and material remains left by the Chinese and can now enable and enliven an understanding of the lives of the workers themselves.

Stanford University hosted a workshop for the Archaeology Network in October 2013, requesting that participants assess the potential of their evidence to provide material to re-create the lives and lifeways of Chinese immigrants in America. CRWNAP requested that the network explore some very basic questions regarding the daily experiences, social and economic lives, and connectedness of Chinese railroad workers in the West. As the railroad provided but a single station in the larger lives of these individuals, many in the network expanded the discussion to include the wider experiences of Chinese throughout the West, providing geographic and historical perspective. Chinese immigrants to California were linked far more by who they were, to whom they were related, and by their day-to-day experiences than by the locations of their employment. The railroad can be seen as a vector for settlement. Not just Chinese, but immigrants from around the world followed the new railroad and planted their hopes for a future in the budding towns and cities along its route. This thematic issue includes many of the papers developed for that workshop.

Backdrop and Beginnings

Paul Chace set the stage for both the workshop and this special issue with a reenactment of a presentation given by himself and William Evans, Jr., at the 1969 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) conference. This innovative paper covered what was then known about Donner Summit Chinese railroad workers' material culture and proposed that these materials represented an archaeological horizon that could be used as a dating tool by archaeologists who were then discovering Chinese worker sites around the world. The SHA's Overseas Chinese Research Group was formed at that meeting. Chace bravely presented this theoretically dated paper at the network meeting,

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showing both how much and how little progress archaeologists have made in the succeeding decades (Chace and Evans, this issue).

The 1969 SHA meeting was only the second of that newly formed society. At the time, historical archaeology focused primarily on the below-ground remains of historic buildings. Historical reconstruction and the recovery of early collections by the U.S. National Park Service and university archaeologists fueled the awakening discipline. An interest in the mid-19th-century West was novel in itself, and Chace and Evans's multidisciplinary approach foreshadowed great possibilities for broadening both history and archaeology.

U.S. historical archaeology exploded in the mid-1970s with the U.S. bicentennial, new environmental laws, and the redevelopment of urban "blight." Environmental laws requiring archaeological mitigation for the effects of development came into force, and the national bicentennial spawned an interest in the various immigrant groups that make up U.S. national heritage. The civil rights and third-world college movements of the 1960s had a profound influence on the way this patriotic event was celebrated; diversity became respectable. The fledgling discipline of historical archaeology contributed evocative studies of the lives of Chinese in the West and other disenfranchised groups, carving out a role for itself in the historical study of ethnicity and nation formation.

Most of this research was done in the cultural resource management (CRM) context. At the time, few universities had historical archaeology programs. While academics kicked around ideas and developed theoretical perspectives, CRM practitioners did most of the fieldwork. Most cities in the West had 19th-century Chinatowns in areas that by the mid-20th century were considered "blighted." Work in the 1970s and 1980s centered on these urban sites—Napa, Riverside, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Jose, San Luis Obispo, Santa Rosa, Ventura, Walnut Grove, and Woodland, California; Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona; Boise, Idaho; El Paso, Texas; and Lovelock, Nevada. Chinese railroad camps, by definition, are more remote and obscure. Early work centered on Truckee (Chace and Evans, this issue), Texas (Briggs 1974), and the Carson City vicinity (Furnis and Maniery, this issue).

Moving Along

The archaeology of Chinese in America developed in parallel to the discipline of historical archaeology as practiced in the western United States from the 1970s. The articles in this thematic issue can be viewed as representative of the contemporary practice of U.S. historical archaeology.

Archaeologists thrive on fieldwork in all kinds of venues. Fieldwork can be rough, but in return, archaeologists experience the past firsthand, or at least where it took place. Three articles lead tours of the archaeological manifestations of Chinese railroad worker camps as viewed by fieldworkers. R. Scott Baxter and Rebecca Allen revisit Chace and Evans's Donner Summit Camp 40 years later to prepare a damage assessment and National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Tahoe National Forest. They provide many important details of camp layout and construction, linking present features to historic photos. While they note the sheer power of the place, some of its emotional appeal is lost in the obligatory National Register jargon. Lynn Furnis and Mary Maniery take us over the summit to an early 1870s Virginia & Truckee Railroad camp in the Carson Valley. Their straightforward approach teases the maximum information from the small surface collection and provides a picture of the lives of the workers stationed there.

Finally, Michael Polk transports us nearly 600 mi. farther east, across the vast reaches of Nevada, through the desert and the Great Salt Lake, to Promontory Summit, Utah, where the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) met in 1869. This was literally the end of the line for an estimated 25,000 workers who raced to complete the job from both east (UPRR) and west (CPRR). The area is now the Golden Spike National Historic Site, the study of which has been funded over the years by the National Park Service. Archaeologists recorded 19 railroad construction campsites, 4 of which were associated with Chinese workers, showing how this diverse workforce was divided along ethnic lines.

Archaeologists love artifacts and the thrill of the find. Two articles explore artifact types. Marjorie Akin, James Bard, and Gary Weisz

provide important information on Asian coins and discuss coins found at Chinese worker camps in Idaho and Montana. These coins—from China, Japan, and Vietnam—were not used as currency, but were specifically for games (fan-tan), good luck, medicine, and decoration. Using historical documents, museum collections, and archaeological evidence, Sarah Heffner explores the health-care practices of the Chinese workers, including their theoretical underpinnings, socioeconomic setting, ingredients, and material manifestations. A third article, by Timothy Urbaniak and Kelly J. Dixon, explores another trace of the past—the rock-face inscription—that provides evidence of how individuals deliberately transformed the landscape, leaving traces of a multiethnic workforce that persist to the present day.

Bones are frequently used in the study of the past. Ryan Kennedy looks at faunal remains from the spectrum of Chinese sites in the West to reconstruct food practices and how these may have varied by locale. Ryan Harrod and John Crandall study the remains of 13 Chinese men buried in Carlin, Nevada, between 1885 and 1923, to explore questions of diet, health, physical stresses, and life experiences through the techniques of bioarchaeology.

Archaeologists use their material to apply and test social theory. Both John Molenda and Charlotte Sunseri explore the process of ethnic and class resistance in the workplace. Returning to railroad worker camps in the High Sierra, Molenda seeks to explain the apparent absence of evidence of class struggle in the Chinese worker camps. To do this, he contrasts the Western ideology of possessive individualism and the spirit of capitalism, as exemplified by railroad magnate Charles Crocker, with the ideology of relational personhood and filiality of the Chinese laborer. Sunseri also covers resistance among Chinese railroad workers who settled in the Mono Basin after the railroad was completed. She describes alliances between the Chinese workers, capitalist investors, African Americans, and Paiute.

Missing Pieces and the Role of Cultural Resource Management

This issue shows that, although students, academics, and CRM practitioners all write about the archaeology of Chinese in the West, the excavated data are almost exclusively from CRM projects. As each piece of CRM work is funded and reported separately, relying on these reports has hampered progress, as new practitioners retrace the steps of those who came before them. This observation brings up a fundamental question: How should one do synthetic research in a CRM framework?

Chinese sites' exotic appearance and abundance of artifacts made them relatively easy to identify and to justify as worthy of legally mandated investigation—at least initially. And while property developers do not want to pay for more work than is necessary, the law requires that a site's "information potential" be realized for the public benefit before it is destroyed. How can this be achieved?

Urban Chinese sites generate huge quantities of artifacts (Figure 1). Archaeologists love the excitement of the excavation: the thrill of discovery. Some excavate with no guarantee that a report will be forthcoming or that the artifacts and notes will be curated. This is particularly egregious in relation to urban Chinese sites. Archaeologists over-excavate and underreport. For every 10 or so reports on Chinese sites in the West, there may be an orphaned collection waiting in a basement or storage facility.

While others may disagree, we—the authors—feel the responsibility to offer the following stern critique in the hopes of provoking thoughtful change. Blinded by a wealth of exotic artifacts and hampered by the competitive commercial environment of development-driven archaeology, we archaeologists have created an unsatisfactory template for Chinese archaeology: repeat established research questions, add historical context, illustrate nifty artifacts, slap on tried and now-trite conclusions. The abundance of data has somehow weakened the motivation for deeper understanding. Contextual analyses focused on time and place with a racist backdrop abound. Missing are the people, their culture, their family histories, their voices, and the voices of their descendants. The authors know this is true, for we do the same thing. In summary, the field has reached a research plateau.

We historical archaeologists seem to be writing for ourselves and talking to each other. We

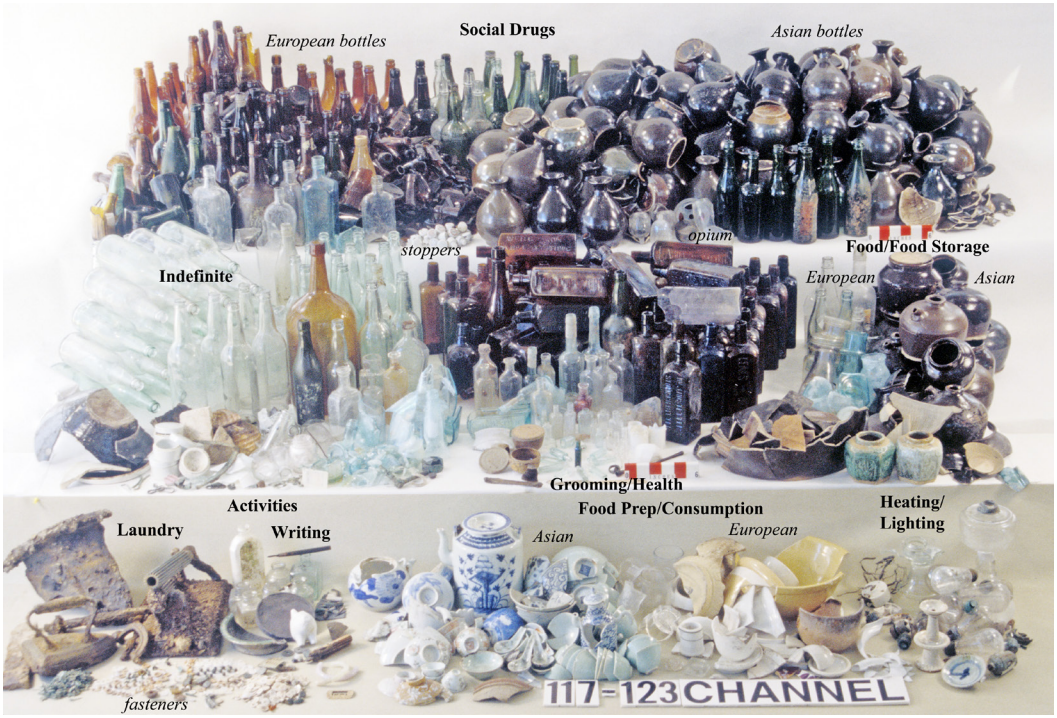


FIGURE 1. Artifacts recovered from a Chinese laundry site in Stockton, California (Waghorn 2004:86). (Courtesy Anthropological Studies Center, Rohnert Park, CA.)

explore esoteric subjects and abstract theories that take the life from the same material novelists exploit to grab the public's imagination. We have gathered a mass of data. We have learned a lot. But to address Gordon Chang's simple charge to assess "what we do know" in relation to basic questions about the lives of Chinese railroad workers has proven difficult. Frankly, it has gone unanswered by more than one of the authors in this issue who has taken the usual paths through the archaeological, the esoteric, and the abstract. This is a harsh charge, and we (the writers) do not exclude ourselves from it.

Putting It Together: What We Know

Working from the articles in this issue and our own work, the authors make a preliminary attempt to piece together answers to the questions posed to the Archaeology Network. We believe that any story of Chinese railroad workers must include the Chinese settlements in cities, towns, and camps throughout the region, and span the generations. It is a story of connectedness that, of course, reaches to China and beyond. Those stories, however, are outside our reach just yet and are an important potential outcome of the larger CRWNAP.

Daily Experience

In the late 19th century, many Chinese immigrants divided their time between isolated job sites—railroad construction, mining, agriculture—and the familiar Chinatown environment. It is worth emphasizing those connections.

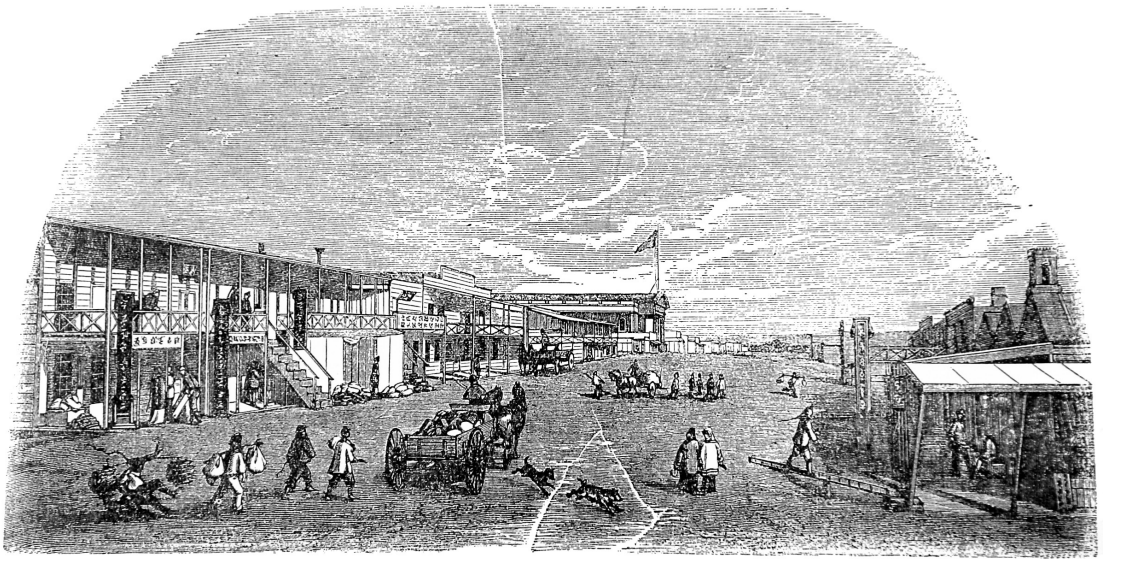
The frighteningly beautiful view from Donner Summit Camp and the deadly, inhospitable environment bore no resemblance to southern China. The workers found nothing familiar in these surroundings, except the presence of their countrymen and the Chinese goods shipped in for their use. Furnis and Maniery (this issue) provide much detail for the layout and operation of the railroad worker camp. Forty to seventy Chinese men may have lived at Lakeview Camp in the Carson Valley in 1872. They

organized into two smaller groups centered on cooking and eating areas and slept nearby. Each group had a cook and received Chinese foodstuffs and supplies from outside. They made the best use of available resources, reusing and recycling mundane objects again and again. Structural lumber was burned for cooking; nails were employed for piercing metal fuel cans for use as strainers and rinsers; sheet metal was repurposed for funnels and patching; kerosene cans were refashioned as carriers for water or, perhaps, tea. The men used both Chinese and European American food, beverages, and tableware, but relied mainly on Chinese goods. They wore American clothing and engaged in Chinese versions of industrial workers' pastimes the world over: gambling, smoking opium, and drinking alcohol.

By the 1860s most sizable communities in California had a Chinese district, often adjacent to a creek or lake, that would have been quite exotic to the European American. Merchants and itinerant peddlers commonly displayed their wares in front of shops, exposing passersby to sights and smells of foods and other goods that would have been strange to the uninitiated. Street vendors carried their wares in baskets suspended on bamboo poles. Buildings sported cloth or paper banners in bright yellow, red, and gold, and signs painted with Chinese characters. Alleyways flanked with flimsy wooden shacks housed the poor. The distinctively Chinese landscape, defined by the built environment and its embellishments, created a social and cultural boundary with clear material indicators (Figure 2).

Archaeology provides prima facie evidence that Chinese immigrants brought with them diseases endemic to Asia and succumbed to new ones in the West. An archaeological site in Sacramento produced the earliest known evidence of the deadly Chinese liver fluke. Parasitologists also identified numerous ova from the human whipworm, a parasite common in warm-temperate, moist climates with poor sanitation. Heavy infections can produce a range of harmful symptoms in the digestive system (Hall 1982:113–120).

Heffner (this issue) summarizes the basic principles of Chinese medicine based on worldviews focused on restoring balance to a system, as opposed to contemporary Western practice that sought out miasmas and trauma. Traditionally, Chinese herbalists prescribed medicines with numerous ingredients specifically tailored to the patient's symptoms. These prescriptions were filled at an herbal shop and generally prepared at home. Chinese medicine bottles and homemade herbal remedies are commonly found on archaeological sites.



I STREET, "CHINADOM."

FIGURE 2. Sacramento's I Street, "Chinadom," in the mid-1850s (Barber and Baker 1855).

Yàojim—liquor, wine, or spirits in which medicinal ingredients have been steeped—is common in traditional Chinese medicine. These preparations were made by combining portions of birds, reptiles, and mammals with specific herbs to create remedies for a variety of ailments; these remedies were readily adapted to the West. Archaeologists found the remains of five American crows and assorted herbs (the flowers and bark of the mimosa tree [*Albizia julibrissin*], notopterygium root [*Notopterygium incisum*], and red sage) packed into a glass carboy at a Chinese site in Stockton, California (Figure 3). Chinese herbalists often also stocked a variety of both Chinese and Western patent medicines (Waghorn 2004:270–275). The familiar small glass vials are common on Chinese archaeological sites. Opium was an ingredient in both Chinese and Western medicines. While pharmacy bottles are common on European American sites, they are relatively rare on Chinese sites. Language, cultural, and economic barriers, as well as simple racism, discouraged Chinese American access to American medical

FIGURE 3. Large glass bottle that contained butchered remains of five crows and three identifiable herbs (Waghorn 2004:80–81). (Courtesy Anthropological Studies Center, Rohnert Park, CA.)

practitioners well into the 20th century (Massey et al. 2013:34), when Chinese American families began to encourage Western medical training for their sons and daughters.

Economics and Consumer Network

Chinese cooking distinctively combines multiple ingredients and flavors, the former cut up and mixed to form numerous dishes that vary in color, taste, texture, and smell. It is a very adaptable template, as ingredients can be added or subtracted depending on their availability. Chinese cooks in the West combined a wide range of fresh, preserved, local, and imported foods. The "kitchen-butchering" pattern of cuts and knife scars identified on pork bones by Sherri Gust (1982:87−112) documents an initial step in the preparation of these dishes that also included imported and locally grown Chinese vegetables (M. Praetzellis and A. Praetzellis 1982:158−159).

Pork was the most desired meat in southern China, and the evidence suggests that this preference traveled to the United States (Gust 1982:89). The IJ56 collection (from the Sacramento city block bounded by streets I, J, 5, and 6), associated with merchant households, was 95% pork measured by meat weight. Beef, however, provided the major meat source measured by weight at an adjacent Chinese boardinghouse on the city block bounded by streets H, I, 5, and 6 (Gust 1997). High- and moderate-priced cuts dominated the IJ56 collection, while moderate- to low-priced cuts dominated HI56. Here, very intensive kitchen butchering is evidenced on bones with low meat content, perhaps to maximize the value of meat purchases. These differences may reflect domestic vs. commercial living arrangements.

Dried fish was a staple part of the diet of poor Chinese in both South China and California. California fisheries caught some species (e.g., suckers and minnows) specifically for the Chinese market. By the mid-1850s, local Chinese fishermen caught and marketed fish to their compatriots. Fish remains from Gold Rush−era Chinese sites in Sacramento contain, almost exclusively, species listed in 19th-century accounts as eaten by the state's Chinese residents or imported dried from China in large brown-glazed stoneware containers. The yellow croaker fish was highly regarded in China when eaten fresh; however, the imported, dried yellow croaker fish-head soup eaten in 1850s Sacramento probably reflects "clay-pot" traditions of poor rural areas (Schulz 1982:83−85).

Consuming dog and cat meat was not uncommon in China. This practice continued to a limited extent in the West with the addition of local elk, deer, bobcat, jackrabbit, and wildfowl. Faunal remains reflect local conditions, as described by Kennedy (this issue). People feasted on traditional cuisine while staying in Chinatown and blended locally available ingredients into their cookery when away. Chinese cuisine's flexible list of ingredients adapted to scarcity and made the best of available resources.

Teardrop-shaped Chinese liquor bottles are ubiquitous on Chinese archaeological sites, sometimes numbering in the hundreds (Figure 4). Western alcohol bottles are also generally present, indicating the competing forces of tradition and innovation in daily life. Opium paraphernalia is generally present. American alcohol-laced bitters were another common element of after-hours relaxation and socializing.

Chinese communities have flourished for centuries throughout the world under the leadership of merchants skilled in creating overlapping business contacts and obligations. Known as *guanxi*, Chinese merchants developed long-lasting webs of reciprocity and trust based initially on kinship, locality, and personal recommendation, and reinforced through gifts, formal events, and favors. These merchants served as labor brokers and suppliers, moving workers and consumer goods where needed. Chinese merchants used American agents to supply those goods they could not obtain from China, from local Chinese suppliers, or from a limited number of non-Chinese businesses. These agents obtained lumber and building hardware; bulk foodstuffs, such as potatoes, onions, and salted fish shipped in barrels from the East Coast; as well as tools, equipment, and wagons (M. Praetzellis and A. Praetzellis 1997:287; Farkas 1998:48−49). The image of the isolated and autonomous Chinatown is a fantasy. These complex business relationships are evident in the spatial arrangement of Western goods at the Carson Valley railroad worker camp (Furnis and Maniery, this issue) and in the relationship

FIGURE 4. Chinese brown-glazed stoneware liquor bottles (whole bottles only—fragments not depicted) found behind a Chinese laundry in Stockton, California. (Photo by Ray Hellmann, 2004; courtesy Anthropological Studies Center, Rohnert Park, CA.)

between the Chinese and Virginia & Truckee Railroad investors (Sunseri, this issue).

Yee Ah Tye was a California Chinese merchant and labor broker whose family connections can be traced from the early Gold Rush to the present. Archaeologists have excavated materials associated with his family-association boardinghouse in Sacramento (M. Praetzellis and A. Praetzellis 1982, 1997) and his mining camp in Plumas County, California (A. Praetzellis and M. Praetzellis 1993). Perhaps his biggest success stems from the lineage that followed him—160 descendants in California through six generations, and counting (Farkas 1998:141; Praetzellis 2004:243).

Social Life

The late-19th-century anti-Chinese movement sparked vandalism and violence. In San Jose, California, arsonists destroyed the entire Chinese district in 1887 at the height of the anti-Chinese mania. The city newspaper proudly proclaimed: "Chinatown is dead. It is dead forever" (Yu 2001:30). The celebration was premature. Local businessman and German immigrant John Heinlen came forward and built a new Chinatown in brick—to avoid the fate of the earlier district—and with a fence around it to protect those on the inside. The new community called Heinlenville was a success and sheltered generations (M. Praetzellis and A. Praetzellis 2011).

Harrod and Crandall's (this issue) study of the remains of Chinese men buried in a railroad town in eastern Nevada also demonstrates the hard work and perhaps harder lives that faced these immigrants to the West. Skeletal remains showed evidence of muscle strain, poor health, and in at least two cases interpersonal violence that may have resulted in death. Archaeologists discovered the remains of an Asian man hidden in about 1900 under a house floor in West Oakland, California (Praetzellis 2004:247). The slim young man had worn Western-style clothes and

carried a silver pocket watch and an expensive black silk handkerchief. The authors surmised that he had met with foul play.

Some Chinese hid their wealth rather than trust American banking institutions. As robbers targeted Chinese laundries, the cash drawers generally contained only small change for the day's use. Archaeologists found only a few small-denomination American and Chinese coins behind laundries in Stockton and Oakland, California. In Lovelock, Nevada, they found 24 small-denomination coins lost into the subfloor of a Chinese laundry, and a snuff jar with a Chinese brown-glazed lid containing $1,865 in gold coins buried in a pit beneath the cottage next door (Hattori 1979).

In the early decades, only wealthy Chinese could afford families in America. Many had wives in China to whom they hoped to return, but supported financially in the meantime. In western Nevada, some Chinese men married Paiute women, who brought with them knowledge of local foods and the use of obsidian tools (Sunseri, this issue).

Evidence of women and children is found in the archaeological record, although it is difficult to uncover in written documents. In Lovelock, archaeologists found two pieces of women's gold jewelry made by San Francisco Chinese goldsmiths (Wey 1979:544). Inexpensive jade-colored bracelets made of Peking glass *(Tao Liao Ping)* are commonly found on archaeological sites throughout the West. Women wore them, in part, to ward off evil spirits. A traditional Chinese belief holds that if a woman fell, the bracelet would break the fall and prevent her spirit from being broken (Hellmann and Yang 1997:201). In Los Angeles, archaeologists unearthed a small golden image of Shou-Xing, the god of longevity, that was once attached to the front of a child's hat (Figure 5) (Costello et al. 1999:236). Chinese characters stamped onto the piece identify the goldsmith as Chuen Chong, a San Francisco jeweler (Chinn 1989:appendix C).

Next Steps: Tracing Connections

Archaeologists resolved questions about the "ethnic markers" of American Chinese material culture years ago: it is well documented that Chinese immigrants brought with them distinctive ceramics and foodways. The important issue is not which goods they used, but how they used, reused, and adapted them, in what quantities, and for what outcomes in particular locations and contexts. How did individual Chinese households function within the wider community in which they settled, and how did this articulate with and contribute to the development of that community?

It is time to put these pieces together—people and places through time and across boundaries—to figure out how Chinese and Chinese American communities functioned. What kept them together, what pulled them apart? How did individuals/organizations/subgroups fit together, intersect/conflict? What elements of Chinese culture have adapted to meet the needs of the present?

Chinese districts disappeared from many towns in the early 20th century and only reappeared many decades later when favorable laws promoted new waves of immigration. It is important to reaffirm and celebrate the role of early Asian immigrants in the development of the West as a message to this group of new arrivals. We archaeologists must show how our results advance community building and a sense of place so that we have something of continuing significance to say.

The lives of Chinese railroad workers cannot be understood without reference to the Chinatowns that supplied them. These men were part of a complex system that provided labor for hire and supplied their needs through entrepreneurs like Yee Ah Tye. The system connected to China and outposts around the world, and functions to this day. The Chinese railroad workers who survived (and most did) went on to do other things. They had other life paths and left other markers.

Many basic questions that can be addressed by descriptive studies have been answered. We reiterate the observation by Voss and Allen (2008) that the future does not lie in creating more of the same. From our perspective, the next phase requires adjusting the scale of analysis to take advantage of archaeology's strengths as a place-based project. Reexamining the gray literature is a place to start. Studying orphaned collections, revisiting the population census to follow railroad workers and the merchants who controlled them, and connecting

FIGURE 5. Hammered gold ornament of the Chinese god of longevity that once adorned a child's hat (Costello et al. 1999:236–237). (Courtesy Anthropological Studies Center, Rohnert Park, California.)

with descendants and their contemporary Chinese relatives are all important. The Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project has made strides in all these directions.

Archaeology outside the academy will not continue to be funded simply to enable archaeologists to pursue their personal quests supported by intellectual mystification and unsteady legal mandates. The descendent community must be involved, must support, and if necessary must demand the work. Without community support we predict that archaeological investigations prior to the development of heritage sites will become increasingly rare. Voss and Allen (2008) suggested that Chinese and Chinese American archaeology should be multistranded, multisited, multilingual, multiscalar, and multidisciplinary, while Paul Mullins (2008) calls for tackling the issues of power and race. We suggest that "imaginative and comprehensible" might be added to both mandates to humanize the process and to increase the involvement of non-academicians. How can that be done while also addressing the strategies suggested above? One approach is to reverse the usual process—by which archaeologists define important research issues and apply them to a data set—and to begin with the descendants. The authors do not suggest simply asking communities at large what they want to know about their history. Asking people to "represent" their community's interest in this way is unreasonable, and the research questions generated tend to be either materialistic (What did they eat?) or overly general (What was their way of life like?).

Instead, we suggest a method that might be called "descendant-generated." This approach involves working with descendants before, during, and after the excavation to develop the themes that are to be addressed in the report. It begins by interviewing individuals to determine the themes and values they believe are represented in the history of their community. These sessions are proposed as family history, in which naïve and generally fruitless questions like: "What would you like to find out about the history of these people?" are never explicitly asked. Instead, the values of families and the experience of communities reveal themselves in anecdotes that turn into the themes to be addressed by the archaeological report. The oral history of the Lum family, for example, shows how the poor treatment of family members by white doctors led to a general distrust of the medical establishment. Hospitals were considered places to die, not to be healed. One oral account also claims that drinking winter-melon soup spared Chinatown from the effects of an influenza epidemic (Massey et al. 2013:83). In this way, historical experience led the family to rely on traditional and proprietary medicine.

These stories are apparently about family—that is certainly how they were told. Yet from them can be extracted research themes of the relationship between tradition, modernity, and self-sufficiency, as well as larger themes of race and power. Artifacts have a direct bearing on these tangled issues, although their meanings crosscut conventional groupings. Medicine bottles are not simply about "health," nor melon seeds about "food." While both are in some ways as political as an election button, they are also stories of families and places.

Archaeology is crucial because it is place-based. The events and processes that we archaeologists read about or are told about by elders happened right there at the places we call archaeological sites. These objects were witnesses to the past. More than just words about the place, they were actually present. And there lies their power to evoke a time and place. We believe that progress will only come from a vigorous application of imagination—both asking more interesting questions at a variety of scales and figuring out more effective ways of extracting meaning and presenting the results of our work. Our understanding of the people of the past can advance by both accumulating information and by coming up with innovative ways of reconsidering what we think we know. The most interesting questions have no definitive answers.

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