

**HIDDEN HERITAGE:
Historical Archaeology
of the Overseas Chinese**

***Compiled and Edited by
Priscilla Wegars***

**Baywood Monographs in Archaeology Series
*Series Editor: Robert L. Schuyler***

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Introduction

The Chinese have been venturing forth from China for many hundreds of years. During the 19th century in particular, adverse conditions there combined with opportunities for work elsewhere, and thousands of Chinese, chiefly men, left their homes and families to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Most hoped to accumulate enough money to return, eventually, to their homeland, giving rise to the pervasive stereotype that the Chinese were merely "sojourners," a term that is seldom applied to other ethnic groups for whom it was also true, such as Greeks and Italians.

Not all the Chinese could or did return to China; many died in foreign lands. Those who wished to remain abroad were often victimized by anti-Chinese exclusion laws that, in general, also forbade the immigration of most wives and families.

While the history and experiences of the Chinese outside of China during the late 19th and early 20th centuries have been examined by scholars for some time, it is only in recent years that the field of Asian American Studies has become established. Within this discipline, writers of both Asian and non-Asian descent are producing comprehensive, well-researched works that attack and demolish traditional anti-Chinese attitudes and stereotypes. These are either general, comparative, publications (e.g., Daniels, 1988; Takaki, 1989) or treat more specific topics, such as Chinese exclusion (Chan, 1991), Chinese women (Yung, 1986, 1990), or Chinese in particular regions, occupations, or towns (e.g., Lydon, 1985; Chan, 1986; Minnick, 1988).

Concurrent with this research has been the study of expatriate Chinese from an historical archaeological standpoint. Locations where Chinese people once lived and worked abroad are, today, archaeological sites that can yield structural information, artifacts, food remains, and other details enhancing knowledge and interpretation of the Chinese experience outside of China and supplementing the historical record as found in such primary sources as census records, maps, city and county archives, early newspapers, and other documents.

Reports and conference papers on Chinese historical archaeology began to appear in the mid- to late 1960s. In 1980 Baywood Publishing Company issued *Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History*, edited by Robert L. Schuyler (Schuyler, 1980), as the first volume in its *Baywood Monographs in Archaeology* series. Four of the articles in that book dealt with Chinese topics, and an Asian American archaeological bibliography contained thirty-seven entries.

The ensuing decade has seen a tremendous increase in overseas Chinese archaeological studies. By "overseas Chinese" we mean people from mainland China who emigrated to other places such as the United States, Canada, Peru, Mexico, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia. Many, perhaps hundreds, of Chinese sites have been recorded during cultural resource management studies by private firms and government agencies. These sites include, for example, urban "Chinatowns" and rural mining claims, work camps for railroad and other construction activities, terraced fruit and vegetable gardens, salmon canneries and shrimp camps, laundries, stores, cook shacks, cemeteries, and temples.

Because of planned development in a particular area it has been necessary to conduct archaeological excavations of some Chinese sites before they are destroyed by construction; others have been the focus of research excavations, particularly field schools. This work has produced much new information, resulting in numerous published and unpublished reports, theses, and dissertations. An annotated bibliography of overseas Chinese history and archaeology appeared in 1984 (Ehrenreich et al., 1984) and another is in preparation (*Asian Comparative Collection Newsletter*, 1991:2); reviews of the archaeological literature have also appeared (e.g., LaLande, 1981:63-70; Tordoff and Seldner, 1986:I, 1-4-1-6; Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 1990:9-12, 15; Stapp, 1990:7-9). The bibliographies in the present volume, while extensive, represent only a fraction of the work that has been done in the field of overseas Chinese archaeology.

Many of the newer materials have progressed well beyond the simple descriptive levels of earlier reports. More recent work has focused both on the development and testing of theories, against which the data can be evaluated, and on refinement of artifact analyses, including trade networks, standardization of terminology, and typological studies of Chinese artifacts.

In spite of all this effort, until now no single publication existed that brought together the research being done by a number of people on a variety of different archaeological sites in various locations. While reports on individual sites are published from time to time, they are, of course, limited in scope to the particular type of site discussed. They tend to be even more limited in their distribution, since often the contracting agency does not produce copies for sale; when copies can be purchased, they are frequently very expensive.

The need for the present volume was first addressed at the Society for Historical Archaeology's 16th Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado, in January 1983. While

papers on overseas Chinese archaeology had been included at previous SHA conferences, the Denver meeting was the first to have enough papers for a half-day symposium. Entitled "Chinese Historical Archaeology: Studies in Adaptation and Cultural Stability," it contained twelve reports emphasizing various aspects of overseas Chinese sites, artifacts, and mining techniques. Although the participants discussed publishing the papers from that symposium, no publication then resulted. However, several of the presentations given then have been rewritten and updated for inclusion here.

The Overseas Chinese Research Group, formed under the auspices of the Society for Historical Archaeology, began about the same time to formulate a research design and pose research questions relevant to the study of the overseas Chinese in this country and elsewhere. A comparative collection of Chinese artifacts, together with slides and bibliographical references, was established in the Alfred W. Bowers Laboratory of Anthropology at the University of Idaho several years ago. Now known as the Asian American Comparative Collection (AACC), in tribute to its broadened emphasis, this repository assists researchers with site and artifact identification. Because the AACC has no secure source of funding, the contributors to the present volume have generously agreed to donate their royalties towards its support.

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PART ONE

Rural Contexts

Significant numbers of Chinese began arriving in the United States in the early 1850s in response to gold discoveries in California. As work opportunities opened up elsewhere, the Chinese gradually migrated to other locations in the western United States and Canada. Idaho is a particularly fruitful location for examining overseas Chinese in rural contexts, because many such areas there, to which the Chinese ventured, are still very remote and often remain undisturbed. The results of archaeological and historical investigations in that state thus provide a standard to which work on rural sites elsewhere can be compared.

Because the Chinese worked in remote areas one might think that there would be no documentary records of them, in contrast to what might be expected from urban locations. A long-term archaeological and historical research project focusing on the Idaho mining camp of Pierce City has, however, recovered a wealth and variety of information in archival sources regarding the Chinese there. Darby C. Stapp discusses how he has used the Pierce Mining District records, county records, federal census data, contemporary newspapers, and oral-historical information to produce an historic ethnography of the Pierce City inhabitants. Pierce City's population characteristics, economic systems, household composition, and wealth distribution are examples of the kinds of information the documentary sources have yielded, which eventually, together with the archaeological evidence, will provide a full and complete picture of the Pierce City Chinese inhabitants over time.

Historic Chinese mining activity also took place along the Lower Salmon River in central Idaho. Because this wild and scenic part of the state is at present almost inaccessible except to river rafters, a number of stone structures and rockshelters built by Chinese miners have survived virtually intact. David M. Sisson compares general building characteristics in China with the archaeological evidence for Chinese sites both on the Lower Salmon River and elsewhere, such as New Zealand, Australia, Texas, Nevada, Oregon, and California. The types and purposes of the Lower Salmon River structures, as well as the similarities and differences in their observed architecture, are particularly important because of the rarity of such well-preserved sites elsewhere in the West.