



CHINESE OAKLANDERS: OVERCOMING THE ODDS

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Archaeological data from the Cypress Project provides an opportunity to examine from a new perspective the lives of the Overseas Chinese on the California frontier and their role in the development of the West. This work joins others in questioning long-standing assumptions about the nature of Chinese immigration and the relationships among the Overseas Chinese in America.

Since the 1970s, historical archaeologists have worked with Asian American historians trained in the “Third World Colleges” movement, which was itself spawned by the call for civil rights and a more inclusive view of the role of minorities in the past. Archaeology provides a positive counterpoint to the often-racist musings contained in newspaper accounts and the careless chronicling of Chinese individuals by bureaucrats in the past, which has contributed to their anonymity in historical records. Historical archaeology in the Cultural Resources Management context works as a spotlight, shining on the individuals who lived in the particular place being studied. In this case, our light focuses on people already known to Chinese American historians but not to the general public: the Ah-Tye family and Lew Hing. We have also brought to light a group of anonymous Chinese laundry workers, as well as a young Asian male who disappeared under suspicious circumstances.

OVERSEAS CHINESE IN 19TH-CENTURY NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AND THE SOJOURNER CONCEPT

Modern revisionist historians have recently reinterpreted the assimilationist model of Chinese emigration, which portrayed 19th-century Chinese immigrants as illiterate peasants fleeing desperate conditions in southeastern China. According to Barth (1964), a leading assimilationist scholar, overpopulation, war, natural disaster, and generally unstable living conditions in southeastern China prompted the migration of large numbers of Chinese men to foreign lands during the 19th century. Many of these men originated from rural areas, where this turmoil had strengthened the traditional values of social obligation to family and clan among the resident peasant groups. As conditions made it increasingly difficult to support their families, men were forced to immigrate to more favorable environs. As sojourners, they planned to work hard, send their earnings home, and await eventual homecomings as wealthy, respected individuals.

The revisionist perspective views Chinese immigration and culture as more complex: not all emigrants were from the lowest social classes, not all were illiterate, not all were men, and not all were sojourners; furthermore, Chinese culture is neither static nor backward (Liu 2002).

Some historical archaeologists have been proposing the same model of complexity for many years based upon the results of archaeological investigations across the West (e.g., Farkas and Praetzellis 2000; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1982, 1997; Praetzellis 1999). As constructed from the archaeological record, the culture of the Overseas Chinese is varied, adaptive, sophisticated, multifaceted, and layered in meaning.

Almost on their arrival in California, Chinese immigrants were accused of decreasing the wealth of the country by sending most of their money home, while harboring the desire to return to their native land rather than settle in the New World (Miller 1969; Takaki 1989:10). In their critique, European Americans forgot that sizable numbers of their own ancestors had established similar patterns of return (e.g., Berthoff 1953). Sojourning is an export of people from a region and an import of remittances to family members remaining (Omohundru 1978:113). The Chinese have a long tradition of sojourning in southeast Asia and the Pacific, including California, New Zealand, and Australia. Yet, most Chinese immigrants to California in the mid-19th century were little different from their European counterparts. They came seeking economic opportunity and upward social mobility, eager to compete, willing to work, and hoping to succeed in making a better life for themselves and their families. In the face of unyielding racial discrimination, it is remarkable that so many Chinese decided to stay.

THE RISE OF CHINESE DISTRICTS

Frontier California, with its lure of gold and demand for laborers, attracted a large proportion of Chinese immigrants in the 1850s. Most worked as river miners in remote portions of the Sierra Nevada. They lived in mining camps that usually contained between 10 and 30 men. With the decline of river mining in the 1860s, the predominant structure of the Chinese labor force shifted, from these relatively small groups of independent miners connected with Chinese district companies, to large gangs of contract laborers on mining, railroad, irrigation, and road-construction projects. Through their research, archaeologists have fleshed out the lives of these miners and contract laborers (Table 8.1).

The economic dominance of gold mining through the early 1860s led to a two-tiered social hierarchy in the Chinese community; here, large numbers of Chinese miners depended on a small group of Chinese entrepreneurs and providers of services for their subsistence and personal needs. At this time, only a relatively small group of cooks, servants, and laundrymen relied on the Euroamerican community for their earnings. The Overseas Chinese community as a whole was a fairly self-sufficient population. Later, the demand for cheap labor in agriculture, light-manufacturing, and heavy construction broke down this structure and changed the composition of "Chinatown." Chinese districts no longer merely supplied goods and services to a population dominated by transient miners; they now housed a relatively permanent population of cheap manual laborers for use in construction, "cottage industries," and seasonal agriculture. The decline in independent Chinese entrepreneurs and miners and the rise in manual laborers in both the town and countryside reflected the change in the economic orientation of both the Chinese community and the state as a whole (Chan 1981).

By the 1860s most sizeable communities in northern California had a Chinese district within their city limits, usually adjacent to a creek or lake. These Chinatowns provided lodging, supplies, services, and entertainment to the itinerant Chinese labor force. In larger cities these districts could be quite exotic. Merchants and itinerant peddlers commonly displayed their

Table 8.1. Archaeological Projects on Overseas Chinese Sites

Reference	Location
<i>Urban, general:</i>	
Thomas and Thomas 1975; Hampson and Greenwood 1988	Napa, CA
Praetzellis 1976	Sonoma, CA
Olsen 1978; Lister and Lister 1989	Tucson, AZ
Helvey and Felton 1979	Yreka, CA
Jones, Davis, and Ling 1979; Jones 1980	Boise, ID
Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1982	Sacramento, CA
Pastron, Pritchett, and Ziebarth 1981; Garaventa and Pastron 1983	San Francisco, CA
Staski 1985	El Paso, TX
Jordan, Praetzellis, and Praetzellis 1987	Santa Rosa, CA
Maniery and Costello 1986; Costello and Maniery 1988	Walnut Grove, CA
Great Basin Foundation 1987	Riverside, CA
Roop 1988	San Jose, CA
McIlroy 1988	Cossack, W. Australia
Rogge 1992	Phoenix, AZ
Maniery 1992	Folsom, CA
Greenwood 1993, 1996	Los Angeles, CA
Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1997	Sacramento, CA (boardinghouses)
Costello et al. 1998; Costello 1999	Los Angeles, CA (vegetable sellers)
Lydon 1999	Sydney, Australia
Wegars 2001	Centerville, ID
Allen et al. 2002	San Jose, CA
<i>Urban, laundry:</i>	
Greenwood 1975, 1976, 1980; Benté 1976	Ventura, CA
Hattori, Rusco, and Touhy 1979	Lovelock, NV
Felton, Lortie, and Schulz 1984	Woodland, CA
Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1990a	Sacramento, CA
Greenwood 1997, 1999	Santa Barbara, CA
Yang 1999; Praetzellis and Stewart 2001	Oakland, CA
Anthropological Studies Center, in progress	Stockton, CA
<i>Rural, mining town:</i>	
Felton, Porter, and Hines 1979	N. Bloomfield, CA
Langenwalter 1980	Madera Co., CA
Brott 1982	Weaverville, CA
Hardesty 1982	Cortez, NV
Ritchie 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986	Arrowtown, New Zealand
O'Conner, Speer, and Dondero 1986; Tordoff 1987	Drytown, CA
Costello 1988	Fiddletown, CA
Earls and Robert 1993	Lemhi Co., ID
<i>Rural, mining:</i>	
Teague and Schenk 1977	Death Valley, CA
LaLande 1981, 1982	Oregon
Benté and Smith 1983; Johnson and Theodoratus 1984; Tordoff with Seldner 1987	NW California
Steevens 1984; Wegars 1995	NE Oregon
Tordoff and Maniery 1986, 1989	Butte Co., CA

(continued on next page)

Table 8.1: Archaeological Projects on Overseas Chinese Sites (continued)

Reference	Location
<i>Rural, mining (continued)</i>	
Strapp, Longenecker, and Ehrenreich 1984	Idaho
Ritter 1986	Shasta Co., CA
Markley 1992; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1993	Sierra Co., CA
Maniery 1992; Maniery and Brown 1994	Sacramento Co., CA
Sundahl and Ritter 1997	Shasta Co., CA
Maniery and Maniery 1998	NE California
<i>Rural, other:</i>	
Whitlow 1981	Aptos, CA (farming)
Schulz 1981, 1984a, 1984b	Marin Co., CA (fishing)
Elston, Hardesty, and Zeier 1982	Truckee, CA (charcoal camp)
Thiel 1997	Tucson, AZ (gardening)
<i>Labor camp:</i>	
Chace and Evans 1969; Evans 1980	Truckee, CA
Briggs 1974	Texas (railroad)
Miller 1981, 1983	San Leandro, CA
Rogers 1997	Carson City, NV (railroad)



Figure 8.1. A Street in Chinatown, San Francisco. Chinese merchants accentuated the exotic qualities of their neighborhood to attract shoppers, such as these two Victorian ladies on a stroll. (Source: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 15 August 1891)

wares in front of shops, exposing passersby to sights and smells of foods and other goods that would have been strange to the uninitiated (Figure 8.1). 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 resulted in the creation of a social and cultural boundary with clear material indicators. At a time when the Chinese were considered fair game for assault and even murder, the borders of Chinatown represented a zone of comparative safety (Chen 1982; Heizer and Almquist 1971). Chinese merchants controlled these districts and benefited economically from the exclusivity. Historical archaeology in Sacramento's historic Chinese district has shown the dynamic use of material culture in this setting to establish connections and alliances while maintaining separateness and control (Figure 8.2; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1997).

Although Chinese labor played an essential role in the creation of Oakland's railroads, shipyards, and infrastructure, and in developing mills, factories,



Figure 8.2. I Street "Chinadom," Sacramento. In the mid-1850s, Sacramento's Chinese district centered on I Street between 5th and 6th streets. ASC Archaeologists have conducted excavations on both sides of this street, recovering material associated with various Chinese merchants (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1982, 1997). (Source: *Sacramento Illustrated*, Barber and Baker 1855)

farms, and fisheries, the Chinese themselves were driven from neighborhood to neighborhood. By 1900 Oakland's Chinese community had shrunk to around 1,000 individuals and their district was confined to Eighth and Webster streets. The Chinese communities on San Pablo at 19th and 22nd streets, at Telegraph Avenue and 17th Street, at First Street, and the shrimp camp along the estuary had disappeared. Oakland's present-day Chinatown developed shortly after the 1906 earthquake, as many displaced San Franciscans decided to rebuild in the city across the bay (Chen 1982:255; Ma with Ma 1982).

ANTI-CHINESE MOVEMENT AND THE EXCLUSION ACT

Since 1852, when the influx of Chinese immigrants to the gold mines coincided with the peak and subsequent downward productivity of surface mining, small groups on the Pacific Coast had been pushing for restrictions on Chinese immigration. In this context, movements against the Chinese arose in times and places when they threatened, or were believed to threaten, the economic well-being of their Euroamerican neighbors. By the 1870s, economic depression had set in and sentiments in favor of Chinese exclusion appear to have been nearly universal. Californians voted overwhelmingly against Chinese immigration in 1879, with 150,000 against and less than 900 in favor (Sandmeyer 1939:62; Saxton 1971:139).

During the Gold Rush, labor had been scarce and very well paid. With increased immigration and the applications of labor-saving technology, the cost of labor declined. Chinese laborers worked for less than did their Euroamerican counterparts and filled the demand in agriculture, light manufacturing, and construction. With the completion of the railroads and the resulting increased competition from eastern goods, vast numbers of people were unemployed, particularly in San Francisco. These unemployed men saw the Chinese as the reason for lowered wages and the poor job market. As more Chinese arrived, and former Chinese railroad workers turned to

other sectors of the economy, a new wave of anti-Chinese sentiment flared (Saxton 1971:113-131).

Residents of the Pacific Coast tried various methods to restrict, exclude, and evict their Chinese populations. Not infrequently, violence and the threat of violence were used to force the Chinese to move on. Many Chinatowns were razed by arson; others were surely destroyed by riot. Town meetings often served as the birthplaces of anti-Chinese organizations. From here sprang many "anti-coolie clubs," which organized consumer boycotts of the Chinese, their products and services, and those of their employers. Petitions, pledges, speeches, meetings, and parades served to show the strength, determination, and number of these forces (Jordan, Praetzellis, and Praetzellis 1987:26-34).

To discourage those Chinese already living in California and those who might have been contemplating it, Californians lobbied for discriminatory legislation on local, state, and national levels. By the late 1870s, many politicians were riding the anti-Chinese wave to victory. The issue was non-partisan; in fact, a third faction, the Workingman's Party, gained support with a violent "anti-coolie" program, citing the lack of effective restrictive legislation by either of the established political parties (Saxton 1971:113-117).

In 1878 Californians elected representatives to rewrite the State constitution. At the constitutional convention, a large number of Workingman's Party delegates passed the strongest anti-Chinese legislation to date. They declared it illegal to give direct or indirect employment to any "Chinese or Mongolian," except as punishment for a crime. Chinese Americans were denied the vote and, by "indirect statement," the right to own or inherit land. Furthermore, the constitution promised to aid in the removal of the Chinese and to legislate against further Chinese immigration (Sandmeyer 1939:72; Saxton 1971:128).

The Workingmen's Party had briefly gained control of the Oakland area in 1877, when they won the State senate. Speakers at an anti-Chinese rally at city hall that year threatened to burn down the Eighth and Webster street Chinatown and to kill its residents; a mob reportedly numbering some 12,000 marched to the Central Pacific Railroad headquarters and demanded the dismissal of all Chinese employees. By 1882 Oakland's mayor and four of seven city councilmen belonged to the Workingmen's Party. Continuing anti-Chinese sentiment reduced the number of occupations available in Oakland; eventually, only the dangerous explosives industry continued to hire Chinese. Laundry work or domestic service became among the few remaining employment opportunities (Ma with Ma 1982:18-23).

As must have been expected by many legislators, the section of the state constitution dealing with the employment of Chinese was quickly declared unconstitutional by the United States Circuit Court (Sandmeyer 1939:72). The higher courts also struck down local restrictive ordinances. The "Chinese Question" reached into the Federal arena, and it was there that the residents of the Pacific Coast pressed for relief. Finally, after much lobbying, demonstrations, and threats of violence, President Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. This bill suspended, with only a few exceptions, the immigration of Chinese, and denied the option of naturalization to all. The anti-Chinese movement waned with the passage of the Exclusion Act, only to gain new strength a few years later when it was found that the "wall of exclusion" had many holes, and Chinese immigrants still found numerous opportunities to enter the country, both legally and illegally.

The expulsion of the Chinese continued to be presented as a panacea for California's problems. In 1885 anti-Chinese leagues formed again in a renewed effort to successfully boycott

YEE AH-TYE FAMILY: SIX GENERATIONS AND COUNTING

Yee Ah Tye is an excellent example of a Chinese pioneer who remained in America and contributed to the settling of the West. According to family history, Yee Ah Tye arrived in San Francisco—then Yerba Buena—a few years before the Gold Rush, making him among the first Chinese to reach the Bay Area. His original name was Yee Dy, which became Ah Tye to the ears of the non-Chinese in America. His descendants have varied the spelling of their last name to Ahtye, Ah Tye, or Ah-Tye (Ah-Tye 1999). Originally from Kwangtung Province, Ah Tye served as an agent for the Sze Yup District Association, first in San Francisco, then in Sacramento, and later in La Porte in the high Sierras. Ah Tye had learned English as a boy in Canton—he was one of the middlemen merchants who represented the Overseas Chinese community in business and legal transactions. A progressive businessman, he



The only photograph of Yee Ah Tye was taken after he died in April 1896. Upon reporting his death, the local paper wrote: “Ah Tye had been a prominent figure in the La Porte country for a quarter of a century or more. Many years ago, he was engaged in business at Oroville. At La Porte, he conducted a store and operated numerous mines, at times having probably 100 men in his employ. He was a Chinese of unusual intelligence and business capacity, and a courteous gentleman. He leaves quite a family, all of the children being good English scholars, and the girls accomplished musicians” (*Plumas National Bulletin* 23 April 1896). (Photo courtesy of Lani Ah Tye Farkas)



Howard Ah-Tye, Oakland historian and journalist, was one of six sons of Dilly and Rose Ah-Tye to serve in the military in World War II. He passed the test to be a radar yeoman, but when the recruiters discovered that he had worked in the grocery business, they made him a cook, despite his protests. It was either cook or spend the war in the brig! (Farkas 1998:116). (Photo courtesy of Lani Ah Tye Farkas)

was one of the first Chinese to engage in hydraulic mining, where he made considerable money, and he educated his daughters as well as his sons. Before Ah Tye died in 1896, rather than have his bones returned to China as was the tradition, he asked that his “body be buried here and my bones lie undisturbed for all times in the land where I have lived” (Farkas 1998). Archaeologists have followed Ah Tye from Sacramento (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1982, 1997) to La Porte (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1993), excavating materials associated with his boardinghouse in the city and a gold-mining campsite in Plumas County. Their evidence showed that Ah Tye had mastered the grammar of American material culture as well as that of the English language. His contributions were many, but perhaps his biggest success stems from the lineage that followed him. The marriage of Yee Ah Tye and Chan Shee has produced more than 160 descendants through six generations, and counting. The surname can be found throughout northern California (Farkas 1998:141).

Ah Tye’s son Dilly married Rose Wong in a traditional Chinese wedding in 1908 in Oakland, where the family lived from 1912 to 1917, after which they moved to Stockton. The couple had 15 children, including two sets of twins. All six sons served in the armed forces during World War II (Farkas 1998). Howard Ah-Tye, their second son, lived in Oakland for most of his life and served as Treasurer for the Oakland Chinese History Research Committee in the 1970s. The committee collected oral and written information on the history of the Chinese community in Oakland and funded the publication of a book on the subject (Ma with Ma 1982). A journalist and free-lance writer, Howard Ah-Tye published a book titled *Resourceful Chinese* in 1999, “in defense of all the Chinese who contributed to the growth and development of Oakland.”

Chinese businesses and employers who used Chinese labor. The anti-Chinese movement reached its height in late January 1886, when sensational press coverage of the alleged murder of a couple by their Chinese cook fired public opinion strongly against the Chinese. Communities across California held anti-Chinese meetings, gathering crowds in the thousands, where they collected boycott pledges and issued ultimatums to the area's Chinese to leave immediately. Many Chinatowns were abandoned at this time, never to be reoccupied. Although some of the Chinese residents may have returned to China, as was desired by the organizers, many just moved elsewhere within the state. The initial outrage over the murdered couple subsided, and within a few months, the boycott was largely forgotten.

Gradually, the legal and extralegal means reduced the Chinese labor force and, thus, the pool of cheap labor. Those Chinese who remained, or who managed to achieve entrance, now had relatively little trouble securing work. More recent immigrant groups, such as Japanese and Italians, gradually replaced the Chinese as seasonal agricultural laborers. Since the smaller Chinatowns had few women and families, these districts disappeared as the elderly Chinese men died. By 1940 Chinese districts remained only in the larger cities of the Pacific Coast, having disappeared from scores of smaller communities.

CHINESE LAUNDRIES

Chinese immigrants exploited a lucrative niche by providing meals and clean laundry to the primarily male population of the California Gold Rush (Figure 8.3). Wah Lee is given credit for setting up the first large Chinese hand laundry in San Francisco in 1851; by 1870 there were some 2,000 Chinese laundries in that city alone (Chen 1982:58). Chinese men, pushed out of work in the mines, factories, and fields, increasingly found work in laundries. In China, as in



Figure 8.3. Laundry workers during the Gold Rush. During the California Gold Rush, few women had made the journey and fewer still were willing to take on the arduous task of washing clothes, linen, and so on. Chinese men took over the role and quietly put aside their earnings. (From the Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library)

America, laundry was women's work (Takaki 1989:92). The aversion to this work on the part of others, small capital outlay, and minimal required skills drew generation after generation of Chinese men and their families into this occupation. Chinese laundries were inexpensive and labor-intensive, while their proprietors were efficient and thrifty, making a profit through practicality and hard work. Continued specialization in "whites" that required washing, whitening, and ironing but no other special care provided a successful adaptation even in light of increased competition from mechanized steam laundries and dry cleaners after 1900. Light-colored washable linens, shirts, blouses, and underwear, particularly from bachelors, provided Chinese laundries with their stock in trade. Some 30 percent of Chinese in America were employed in laundries in 1920 (Chen 1982:198). In the 19th century, women's formal attire was not generally washable; it was aired and perfumed, or taken to a more expensive and sophisticated "French" laundry—the forerunner of dry cleaners.

Due to their dispersed locations scattered throughout the urban and suburban landscape, Chinese laundries often bore the brunt of anti-Chinese agitation. In February 1886, an "anti-coolie" band of 40 to 50 men visited all of the Chinese laundries in Santa Rosa, California, and told the occupants to leave town, for within a month they would have no patrons (Jordan, Praetzellis, and Praetzellis 1987:32). Residents of Milwaukee took matters even further in the spring of 1889. Whipped into a riotous frenzy by salacious newspaper articles alleging sexual assaults on local children by Chinese laundrymen, mobs raided the city's Chinese laundries destroying property and terrorizing the occupants (Jew 2002). Between 1850 and 1908, 153 instances of anti-Chinese violence were recorded in the U.S., claiming 143 lives, and displacing 10,525 individuals from their homes and businesses (Jew 2002:78).

As elsewhere in northern California, there were probably Chinese laundries in Oakland from the town's beginning. These businesses served their local neighborhoods and did not advertise in newspapers or city directories. The documentary record is confined to notations on Sanborn Insurance maps, as boiling water and hot irons were viewed as fire hazards; anti-Chinese newspaper articles and editorials decrying sanitary conditions and other political issues associated with Chinese laundries; and to municipal legislation posing solutions to the laundry issue. By the mid-1870s, 35 Chinese laundries operated in Oakland; 10 years later, there were more than 60 (Ma with Ma 1982:13).

A laundrymen's guild, the Tongxingtang (Tung Hing Tong), was formed in San Francisco by the late 1860s and also operated in Oakland. The guild set uniform prices, divided up neighborhoods, and collected funds to hire attorneys to fight anti-Chinese laundry ordinances (Chan 1991:67). In Oakland a laundry could be no closer than 10 doors to a neighboring laundry, and Chinese proprietors could not go into business with a Euroamerican partner (Ma with Ma 1982:13). San Francisco began passing anti-Chinese laundry ordinances in the 1870s. One in 1873 raised the quarterly schedule of fees on horse-drawn laundry vehicles so that the highest fees were levied on those laundries that employed no horse drawn-vehicles at all. The laundry guild fought this and won, the judge ruling that the law was clearly written to illegally discriminate against Chinese laundries. Other test cases followed (McClain 1994:51-54). In 1880 San Francisco passed a city ordinance making it unlawful for anyone to "establish, maintain or carry on a laundry" within the city limits without the consent of the Board of Supervisors unless the laundry was located in a building constructed of brick or stone. Violators were subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 and prison for up to six months. This law was clearly designed to affect the small, neighborhood Chinese operations conducted in wood-frame buildings. The Tung Hing Tong

attorneys fought this one all the way to the Supreme Court, where they won in May 1886 (McClain 1994:101-126).

Like most cities on the Pacific Coast, the Oakland City Council took on the Chinese question again in January 1886, when they sought to level "lower Chinatown" at Grove and First streets through nuisance abatement and to remove Chinese laundries through restrictive legislation. Oakland based its laundry ordinance on San Francisco's—it required brick buildings or approval of the City Council, forbade scaffolding on roofs to outlaw drying racks, and came up with a fine not to exceed \$100 or imprisonment at the rate of one day per \$2 (*Oakland Tribune* 18 January 1886, 1:1). Both ordinances sparked lively debate at the council meeting. Dr. Buck of the Health Department had already declared lower Chinatown to be a nuisance and ordered the residents to leave, which they did not. The ordinance's proponent, Mr. Hackett, declared the Health Department to be a "fraud from the dead jump. It is the biggest nuisance in the city. This old Dr. Buck don't know anything about his business." Police Captain Thomas interjected that "lower Chinatown is one of the most stinking nuisances on the face of the earth"; he was declared just the man to get the job done with full backing of the council, and the resolution passed unanimously.

The laundry ordinance provoked even more discussion. Mr. Barker objected that the phrasing might prevent an individual from erecting scaffolding to replace a chimney, and wanted the matter reviewed by the City Attorney, Mr. Johns. The City Attorney agreed with Mr. Hackett's plea that the exercise of common sense in the administration of the ordinance would suffice. The matter was postponed for review and Mr. Hackett apologized for implying that the City Attorney lacked common sense (*Oakland Tribune* 19 January 1886, 1:1-2).

The Alameda County Anti-Chinese League set February 17 as the beginning of a new boycott, requesting specifically that no one use Chinese laundries or purchase vegetables from Chinese peddlers. Meanwhile, the Chinese Laundry Association met at their rooms on Seventh Street near Franklin and assessed themselves for a sufficient sum to hire an attorney to fight the Hackett laundry ordinance (*Oakland Tribune* 20 January 1886, 3:2). The City Council passed the laundry ordinance at its next meeting, despite the City Attorney's advice that the scaffolding section was very doubtful. In his speech, Mr. Hackett made mention of the Chinese hiring an attorney to fight the ordinance: "They fight every ordinance and every law that does not suit them. They are not law-abiding citizens" (*Oakland Tribune* 22 January 1886, 3:2-3).

By mid-February the laundry ordinance had yet to be enforced, as Captain Thomas saw no enacting clause within it, had no room in the prisons—with two men already sharing a cell—and lacked manpower. Captain Thomas stated that he would willingly enforce the ordinance with "a clean sweep of the laundries" as soon as 25 policeman could do the work. As to where the laundrymen would be detained, there was no provision for "herding them in a corral. He might put them under the shed in the stone yard" (*Oakland Tribune* 12 February 1886, 3:2). On 21 February, Captain Thomas began his arrests; meanwhile, the Wan Kee Associates raised \$1,000 to hire legal representation (*Oakland Tribune* 22 February 1886, 3:3-4). Within a month, more than 100 arrests were made; Henry Vrooman represented the Chinese laundrymen who generally pleaded not guilty and had their cases continued (*Oakland Tribune* 24 March 1886, 3:2). The Chinese developed a communication system to keep informed on the issue. An employee of a store on Washington near Eighth translated any anti-Chinese news from the morning papers; this synopsis was copied, posted, and sent to the nearest Chinese business, where it was again copied, posted, and sent forward (McClain 1994:331, 161).

A MYSTERY ON BLOCK 6

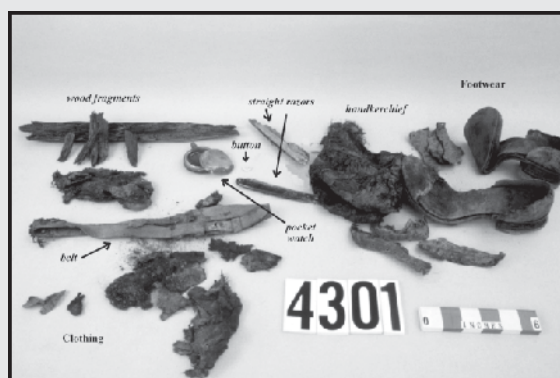
Archaeologists excavated the remains of a well-dressed, young Asian man in the former backyard of 815 Filbert Street. The burial cut two earlier privies and two pits and was itself cut by two later pits, providing a tight stratigraphic sequence. The burial had been excavated into the two privies and backfilled with soil from the privies. Lime may have been used in these privies, accounting for the poor preservation of the remains. Bone preservation appeared best in areas covered by clothing, which perhaps protected the bone from corrosive elements in the soil. Interestingly, there was only one shirt button and no jacket buttons.

Although many of the bones were absent or fragmentary, it was determined that the individual was a 17- to 21-year-old of Asian heritage, 5'4" to 5'6" in height, who had suffered from malnutrition as a young child. The sex of the individual could not be determined because the pelvis bone was missing, but clothing in the burial included men's size 7 boots with rubber heels, a 29-in. leather belt with a copper buckle embossed with the letter "B," Union-suit type undergarments, and wool flannel trousers. He (as inferred from the clothing) carried a coin-silver pocket watch and an expensive black silk handkerchief. The hinge of the pocket watch appears to be gold; the interior cover is copper and was likely silver-plated. This was probably a low-to medium-priced watch with a relatively plain case, of the type sold by Sears Roebuck & Co. in 1897. The silk handkerchief was the most expensive sold by Sears Roebuck, "such handkerchiefs have never before been sold for less than \$1.00." At their price of \$0.47, it was still twice the cost of a white silk or linen one, and eight times the cost of their least-expensive plain cotton ones (Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1897:226). Two men's straight razors were also found within the burial. One of the razors had a finely polished bone handle; it was of a type available from Weinstock, Lubin & Co. in 1891. From the clothing and from dates on other artifacts found in the privy below, the burial was roughly dated to between 1895 and 1910, when a cottage covered the area.

Although the property owners, James and Sarah Corbett, lived at 815 Filbert at the front of the lot until their deaths in the 1890s, their rental cottage in the back saw frequent changes in tenants. In the early 1900s, spinster sisters Mary and Katie Corbett lived at 815, and the Krieger family rented the backyard cottage. Members of

the Krieger family lived in the cottage from 1899 through 1904. In 1900 Jacob Krieger, an unemployed cigar maker, lived there with two sons, who worked as bakers, and two sons still in school. As the burial cannot be precisely dated and the tenants changed so frequently, it will probably never be possible to identify the occupant at the time of the burial. Jacob Krieger did, however, work in an occupation dominated by Overseas Chinese. Chinese supplied the majority of the labor force in both White- and Chinese-owned cigar factories, although recent Irish and German immigrants competed with them for employment in East Coast factories. Chinese labor continued to dominate the industry on the West Coast until increased competition from the less-expensive cigarette led to a general decline. In 1892 the cigar industry in California employed a workforce of 1,200, of whom 700 were Chinese; as late as 1905 there were still five cigar factories in San Francisco employing 140 workers, with 80 of them Chinese (Chen 1982:110). Could there be a connection between Jacob Krieger's occupation as a cigar maker and the burial of a young Asian man beneath his residence?

Of course we cannot say for certain. What we do know is that sometime around 1900 a young, well-dressed Asian man, about 5 feet 5 inches tall with a slim build, was buried under a cottage at the back of 815 Filbert Street. In the 1950s the cottage was torn down and Caltrans built the Cypress freeway, which sealed the burial and kept it secret. Finally, after nearly 100 years, archaeological investigations in advance of the reconstruction of the Cypress freeway discovered the burial and brought this incident to light.



This small collection of artifacts was excavated from the burial at the back of 815 Filbert Street. The type of clothing suggests the interned individual was a man, and the location of the burial pit beneath a cottage led investigators to surmise that the man may have met with foul play.

Things did not go well for the City; at the end of March, the City Attorney ordered new complaints be made against all of the Chinese violators of the City ordinance: "Why this is necessary is a mystery... but it is probable that there is some technicality stalking abroad in the prosecution and threatening its overthrow or perhaps it is an informality that flaws the complaints like a crack in a China teacup. Some of these Chinaman have already been arrested three times on the same charge" (*Oakland Tribune* 29 March 1886, 3:3). In mid-February, the Supreme Court had ruled that the City of Stockton's laundry ordinance was unconstitutional; by May of that year, Oakland dropped charges against its Chinese arrested under a similar piece of legislation (*Oakland Tribune* 17 May 1886, 3:2).

1813 SEVENTH STREET LAUNDRY

The 1889 Sanborn Map shows an iron-clad Chinese laundry building at 1813 Seventh Street (Figure 8.4). Jeannie Yang, in her Master's thesis on the site, has provided a detailed analysis of the site and its cultural context (Yang 1999). A butchershop had formerly operated at this address into the 1880s, and the sheet-metal cladding was probably a remodeling attempt to circumvent anti-Chinese ordinances by presenting a more fire-resistant façade. The one-story building had a back porch and stable in the rear yard. By 1902 the stable was gone, and by 1912 the building was vacant. The laundry workers were not listed on the 1900 or 1910 censuses and may have lived elsewhere, although they may have spent many nights sleeping in the building, putting in long days to keep up with demand. They rented the building from the heirs of the original owner, Edward Murphy, a butcher. Some of Murphy's heirs lived just a few blocks away, at 881 Cedar Street.

The Chinese provided an easy target for the local gangs of youths who roamed the streets of West Oakland. Attacking Chinese laundries, or teasing and abusing the Chinese themselves, was part of their widespread hoodlum activity. In an imagined historic walking tour of the neighborhood, Dr. Ed Anthony recalled this laundry:

We are now coming to an old oak tree projecting out over the street, right by that Chinese laundry.

"Why is the front of that Chinese laundry so battered and the doors and windows barricaded?"

A favorite after school diversion of the boys is to board the steam train at Pine Street, that is if the baggage car is the last car, otherwise they go to the forward car, previously providing themselves with a supply of stones. When the train passes this laundry they let fly a barrage of rocks at the front of the Chinese laundry, throwing the stones through the baggage car.

When the train passes Campbell Street they jump from the train while it is still in motion [*West of Market Boys' Journal* November 1939].

Another former resident remembered that Father McNally would spank a Protestant or Jewish kid, as well as those of his own flock, for throwing rocks at Chinese laundry wagons and as a result was much loved by West Oakland parents (George Dow, in *West of Market Boys' Journal*, February 1937). As a boy, Jack London lived just around the corner from this laundry, and his boyhood friend wrote a remembrance probably relating to it: The two shot a pair of mudhens while hunting out by the bay and sold them as ducks on the way home to a Chinese laundryman for fifty cents (Atherton n.d.: 65-66).

According to another West of Market Boy,

Another little game the boys would play was to get on the Seventh Street local train and sit behind some Chinaman and tie his queue to the seat, grab the Chinaman's stiff brim hat and jump off, leaving the Chinaman screaming for his lost property. In 1895 John L. Davie became the Mayor of Oakland; he forced the railroad company to put gates on the local trains. This spoiled the boys' fun... and made it safer for the Chinaman to travel [W. L. Gallagher, in *West of Market Boys' Journal*, January 1939].

Thus, from the documentary record we know that the Chinese laundry operated from around the mid-1880s until shortly after the beginning of the 20th century. Located along Seventh Street's commercial row with stores, saloons, bakeries, restaurants, boardinghouses and hotels, their walk-in trade would have come from the single working men residing in the commercial lodgings on Seventh or from families living on the smaller side streets. The nearest Chinese laundry was located 11 doors away at 1769 Seventh (Yang 1999:30). We know that these Chinese laundry workers were discriminated against by City ordinances and harassed by local youths. What can the archaeological record from four laundry sites in the West, in combination with dissertation research on Chinese laundry workers in Chicago conducted in the late 1930s (Siu 1987) and the recollections of Maxine Hong Kingston (1976), add to the history of these nameless workers?

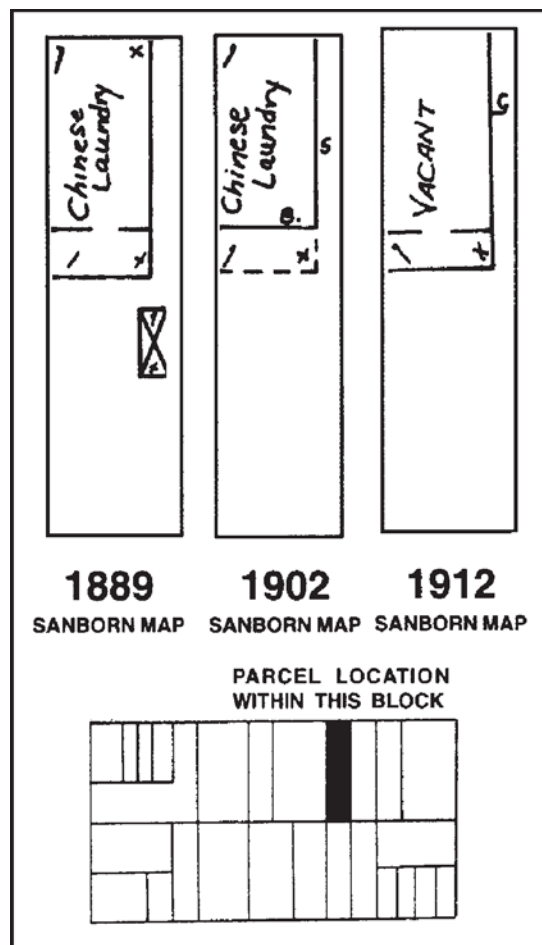


Figure 8.4. Mapping the Chinese Laundry. Field agents of the Sanborn Map Company meticulously noted Chinese laundries, as the boilers and hot irons used there were designated fire hazards. The building behind the laundry covered with an "X" was a stable; it disappeared by 1902, and by 1912 the main building was vacant.

LIFE OF THE CHINESE LAUNDRY WORKER

In addition to our laundry in West Oakland (Praetzellis and Stewart 2001:55-84), three other laundries of similar dates will be used to flesh out the way of life of the ubiquitous, but virtually invisible, turn-of-the-century Chinese laundryman (Figure 8.5). In 1977 archaeologists from the Nevada State Museum excavated a site in Lovelock associated with the Hop Lee laundry dating from ca. 1904 to the 1930s. Although the artifact quantities are difficult to extract from the report, the site is remarkable for a cache of materials discovered in the laundry's loft ("bldg 2"), including paper and personal objects not usually found below ground (Hattori, Rusco, and Touhy 1979). Archaeologists from the ASC excavated deposits at the San Fong Chong laundry site in Sacramento in 1988, a Chinese laundry operated here from 1895 through 1954 (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1990a). The rear yard of the Sing Lee laundry in Stockton was excavated in 2000, also by ASC archaeologists (report in progress); a laundry operated in this location from 1900 through 1936, and possibly from as early as 1886.



Figure 8.5. Excavation a drying-rack trench. In the fall of 1995, archaeologists excavated a trench containing the charred remains of a drying rack from the backyard of the Chinese laundry at 1813 Seventh Street in Oakland.

The laundry building at 1813 Seventh Street, with its wood frame sheathed in sheet metal, was of moderately sturdy construction. The San Fong Chong laundry at 814 I Street in Sacramento was the most well-built—a simple, brick, one-story, vernacular commercial building with Italianate influences—that survived from 1895 until it was demolished for new construction in the 1980s. An earlier wood-frame laundry had reportedly operated next door from the 1850s. A 30 x 45 foot “drying platform,” with a stable beneath, faced directly onto I Street and connected with the main building. One of the rallying cries against Chinese laundries had always been their fire danger. The brick building was an auspicious one for a Chinese laundry—new and

clean and attached to the sewer line—assuring its success into the future (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1990a:17). The Sing Lee laundry at 123 E. Channel Street in Stockton was housed in a commercial building adapted to its purpose. The laundrymen constructed a planked yard at the rear as a drying rack with a boiler, thus heating the water outside of the building. A flue-related fire at the Sam Lee laundry around the corner had killed five laundry workers who were unable to escape the building in 1904 (*Stockton Daily Independent* 25 February 1904, 5:3). The Sing Lee archaeological deposit included the brick boiler platform, clinker, and household debris discarded over the years beneath the wooden platform. The Hop Lee laundry in Lovelock, Nevada, was located in a small, simple shack, with dirt floors in some of the rooms. Water was obtained from a well and heated in a small brick fireplace (Rusco 1979).

Chinese laundries often persisted for decades in the same location, staffed by the chain migration of family and fellow villagers from China over the years. The proprietor of the San Fong Chong laundry claimed to have been born in California in 1850 on his 1910 census listing. The earthquake and fire of 1906 had destroyed San Francisco’s Chinatown and Hall of Records, destroying records and providing many aliens with an opportunity to claim citizenship. Mr. Chong used his citizenship to sponsor the immigration of his two sons in 1908. The family lived and worked in the laundry, both sons spoke English; one worked as an ironer, while the other drove the laundry wagon. Sing Lee’s Stockton laundry also appears to have been staffed by middle-aged men and their teenaged sons, who spoke English and attended school during the year. Most wives remained in China, as the Exclusion Act of 1882 in various incarnations prohibited the immigration of the wives of Chinese laborers; the act was repealed in 1943. Nevertheless, it is clear from the archaeological record that women and children were a part of these laundry ventures. An assortment of toys, infant’s feeding bottles, bottles from patent

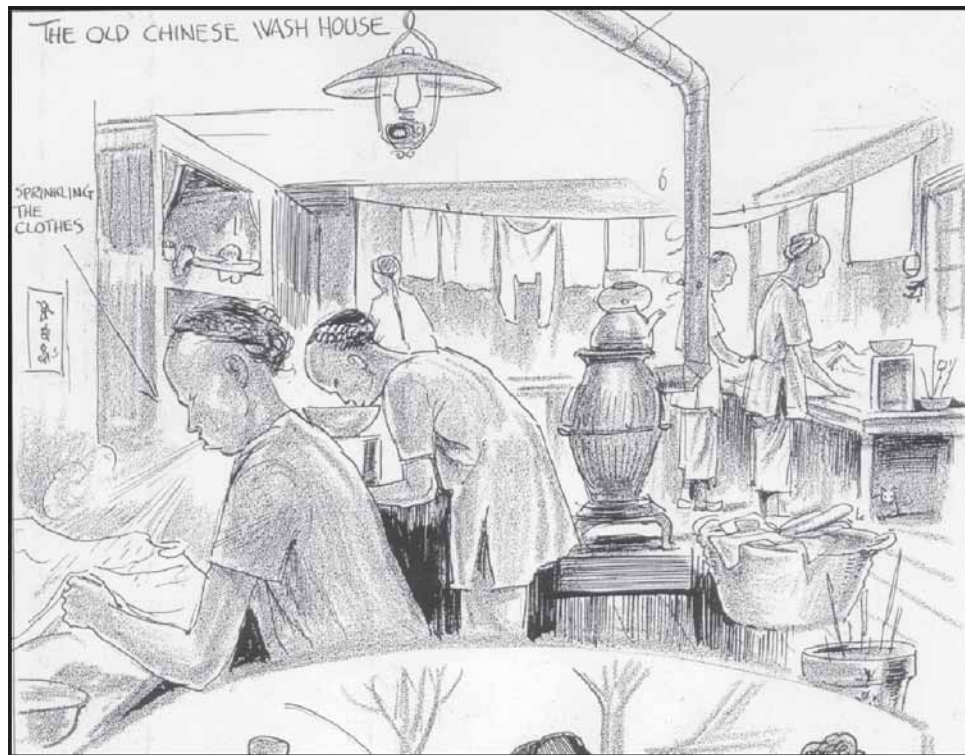


Figure 8.6. Men at work in a 19th-century Chinese laundry, Stockton. This rendering of a laundry around the corner from Sing Lee's was drawn from memory in the 1930s. (Ralph Yardley drawing, courtesy Haggin Museum, Stockton, California; #LB67-7406-46)

medicines targeted to childhood illnesses, and women's jewelry and clothing fasteners were recovered from the Lovelock excavation, while imported cosmetics and women's health-care items were found in a decorative Chinese hairdressing stand in the laundry's loft (Rusco 1979:649). The archaeological evidence from Stockton is less compelling, but a piggy bank, infant food bottle, marbles, and women's jewelry (including a Chinese jade bracelet) suggest their presence here as well. A porcelain doll and two clay marbles are the only suggestions that children might have been present at the Seventh Street laundry in West Oakland.

After the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, laundrymen preferred to live with their families in the neighborhood of their shops rather than in Chinatown. If they could afford it, a house next door or a floor in the same building was preferred; otherwise a room at the rear of the shop might serve as their residence. Wives often worked in the laundries (Siu 1987:207), as did children when they were old enough (Kingston 1976).

Laundry work was considered menial labor in China, undertaken by women but not men. The laundry workers had often pursued different careers in their former lives in China, not necessarily as laborers. Many were educated; Maxine Hong Kingston's father had been a teacher; her mother was trained as a midwife. Most of the employees at Stockton's Sing Lee laundry in 1910 could read and write; many also spoke English (Figure 8.6). A total of 27 writing-related artifacts was recovered from their backyard, including two inkstones, pencils, pens, and inkbottles. The loft of the Hop Lee laundry in Lovelock contained Chinese and English language newspapers, including copies of the *San Francisco Examiner*, along with a business ledger with Chinese and English entries, receipts, and correspondence in Chinese. Two Chinese paperback books titled

"Guide to Letter Writing" gave advice on letter styles, along with maxims and funeral directions (Brown 1979:575). Writing implements included an inkstone encased in a carved rosewood case, calligraphy brush, ink (both Chinese and American made), brass inkpad, blotter, and sealing wax (Brown and Rusco 1979:621). Pencils, tablets, and an inkbottle were also recovered from the San Fong Chong laundry in Sacramento.

Workers at the laundry at 1813 Seventh Street in West Oakland used a slate Chinese inkstone for writing and tallied up their sales on an abacus (Figure 8.7). While Euroamerican businesses used manual adding machines, the use of an abacus was standard practice as late as the 1940s in Chinese laundries: "A laundry without an abacus would be like a business office without a typewriter" (Siu 1987:65).

The limited number of accoutrements needed to run a Chinese laundry was one of the attractions of the business. With the exception of such amenities as running water and electricity, the requirements changed little over the years: a boiler to heat the water, a stove to heat the irons and food, drying racks (outdoors into the early 20th century), sinks, shelves, ironing beds, dining table, and sleeping beds. Even when the laundry workers lived elsewhere, the long hours often left workers too tired to return home:

Then five or six people would crowd into the bed together. Some slept on the ironing tables, and the small children slept on the shelves. The shades would be pulled over the display windows and the door. The laundry would become a cozy new home, almost safe from the night footsteps, the traffic, the city outside. The boiler would rest, and no ghost would know that there were Chinese asleep in their laundry [Kingston 1976:137-138].

The tools also experienced little change, except for replacement of the Chinese mouth-blower by American-made sprinklers. From the beginning, Chinese laundry workers had blown water through brass tubes to sprinkle clothes for ironing. While providing great merriment to youngsters everywhere, this practice also supplied a main focus for anti-Chinese laundry movements over the years. Archaeologists have yet to recognize a traditional sprinkler tube, but they have recovered other tools of the laundry trade. Refuse in the backyard of Stockton's Sing Lee laundry included dye bottles, hundreds of safety and straight pins, clothespins, blueing



Figure 8.7. Tools of the laundry trade. The recovery of a Chinese inkstone, abacus beads, and a Chinese ceramic lamp connect with the day-to-day work of these Chinese laundry workers and demonstrate a degree of literacy (Trench 5237).

balls, scissors, soapstone clothes markers, a sad iron, and a pleat roller (Figure 8.8). In addition, a starch box and a laundry stamp were recovered from Hop Lee's loft in Lovelock, while hundreds of blueing balls were recovered in West Oakland. The large quantity of plain, white buttons and collar studs from everyday cotton shirts and dresses found at all four laundries indicate that they specialized in "whites." Hop Lee, in fact, advertised his specialty as "white cuffs and shirts" (Brown and Rusco 1979:630).

Operating a Chinese laundry outside the confines of Chinatown was a dangerous business, as anti-Chinese vandalism often focused on laundries. During a parade by the local Stockton militia to celebrate the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, every window was broken at the Sam Lee laundry just around the corner from Sing Lee (Minnick 1988:134-135). Broken windows would have been a perennial problem for the laundry on Seventh Street in West Oakland (*West of Market Boys' Journal* November 1939). The trench excavated by archaeologists behind the laundry may have



Figure 8.8. A Chinese-laundry assemblage from Stockton. Over the years, the workers at the Sing Lee laundry in Stockton discarded refuse in the rear of their parcel. Archaeologists recovered only a portion of this material in advance of construction of a cinema complex.

been part of an outdoor drying rack. Extending from a few feet south of the back porch through the west-central part of the parcel, it ran parallel to the lot line. The trench fill had been burned and contained charred wood and other construction debris. Given the documented persecution of these Chinese workers, it is possible that a fire was set in their yard as a prank, destroying the drying rack. Although horses were still needed to deliver laundry, the stable disappeared from the property between 1889 and 1902. The iron-clad laundry building itself did not burn, and was still standing in 1912. Other structures associated with the laundry, however, may have been destroyed by fire, encouraging the Chinese launderers to move on.

Robbers also frequently targeted Chinese laundries. As a precaution, the cash drawer generally only contained small change for the day's use (Siu 1987:61). Only a few Chinese and American coins of small denomination were found behind the laundries in Stockton and West Oakland. A cache of 24 small-denomination American and Chinese coins was found in the dirt floor of Hop Lee's laundry in Lovelock, while a Weyman's snuff jar with a Chinese brown-glazed stoneware lid containing \$1,865 in gold coins was found hidden in a pit beneath the small cottage next door (Hattori 1979:426). It was not uncommon for the Chinese to hide their wealth rather than to trust American banking institutions.

Deposits from all four of the laundries contained both traditional Chinese and English/American ceramics. At 1813 Seventh Street, almost equal proportions of each were discovered, with all the common patterns present—Double Happiness, Celadon, Four Flowers, and Bamboo from China, and decal, molded, plain white, and transfer-printed ceramics from England (Figure 8.9). The laundry workers ate and drank from a mishmash of plates, bowls, saucers, tumblers, and cups in all sizes, shapes, and patterns. The meager ceramic collection from behind the San Fong Chong laundry in Sacramento also included about equal portions of Chinese and English/American tableware; while the workers at Sing Lee's in Stockton discarded a wider range of Asian tableware in many patterns with fewer pieces of English or American origin. The Lovelock collection contained the usual Overseas Chinese tableware patterns, supplemented with

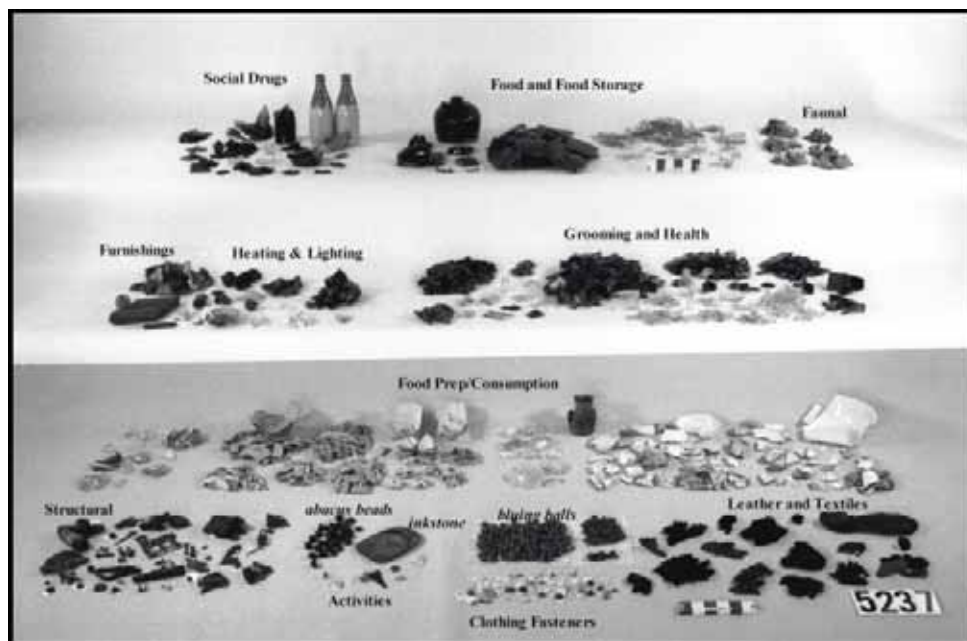


Figure 8.9. The Seventh Street Chinese laundry assemblage. A large quantity and variety of materials were found in the long trench associated with the Chinese laundry on Seventh Street in West Oakland around the turn of the 20th century. Many items represent the laundry trade, including blueing balls, quantities of buttons, clothing remnants, and wood abacus beads.

inexpensive Staffordshire whitewares and some more expensive pieces of Chinese and European origin (Table 8.2).

The relatively small collection of bone from the trench behind the West Oakland laundry provides a glimpse into the meals served. Bones of cow, sheep, and pig were represented in approximately equivalent numbers; in addition, there were a few chicken bones. About half the beef bones were steaks from the porterhouse, sirloin, and rib. The remainder was soup bones. Most of the mutton and pork were also soup bones, with a couple of steaks and roasts from higher priced cuts. Overall, this accumulation of food bone demonstrates acquisition of low-priced meat items, with an occasional purchase of a high-priced cut. While the majority of the butchering marks are those of standard, commercial butchering of the time, there are a couple of knife scores indicating removal of meat from steak bones (Gust 1993). This probably reflects cutting up the steak meat into small pieces for stir-fry or soups. Such a practice would be consistent with cooking for a group on a small budget, which is also represented by the large amount of soup bones present. Residents of the Hop Lee laundry in Lovelock emphasized traditional Chinese meat preferences of pork and chicken, as well as pond turtle and squid. While pork cuts of all price ranges were eaten, high-cost cuts of beef predominated over lower-priced cuts (Rusco 1979:650-651). Pork cuts also predominated in the diets of Stockton workers at Sing Lee's, although when they opted for high-cost cuts, they chose mutton. The remains of two butchered cats were also recovered from their refuse deposit.

Flotation samples from the trench at 1813 Seventh Street show that the laundry workers ate local fruits (peach, fig, tomato) and imported Chinese olives. The numerous Chinese brown-glazed stoneware containers would have contained a wide variety of traditional foodstuffs imported from China. Probable contents include soy sauce, black vinegar, peanut oil, preserved tofu,

Table 8.2. Frequencies and Percentages of Various Artifacts at Overseas Chinese Laundry Sites

Artifact	Lovelock*		Sacramento		Stockton		Oakland	
	Hop Lee #	%	San Fong Chong #	%	Sing Lee #	%	1813 Seventh St. #	%
Double Happiness	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	1.6
Bamboo	21	.8	3	2	4	.4	4	2.2
Four Flowers	131	4.9	5	3.4	21	1.8	4	2.2
Celadon	198	7.4	1	.7	32	2.8	8	4.3
Other Chinese tableware	40	1.5	2	1.3	23	2	0	0
Japanese tableware	0	0	0	0	4	.4	2	1.1
English/American tableware	800**	30	8	5.4	22	1.9	29	15.7
Chinese brown-glazed stoneware	57†	2.1	31	20.8	19	1.6	9	4.9
Bitters bottles	2	0	3	2	59	5.1	22	11.9
Chinese medicine containers	77	2.9	2	1.3	34	2.9	0	0
Chinese wine	25	.9	1	.7	128	11.1	5	2.7
Other alcohol	361	13.6	4	2.7	230	19.9	11	6
Clothing fasteners	742	27.8	89	59.7	571	49.3	87	47
Opium-related	91	3.4	0	0	7	.6	1	.5
Gaming pieces	120	4.5	0	0	3	.3	0	0
Totals	2665	99.8	149	100	1158	100.1	185	100.1

* counts for Lovelock ceramics are by sherd; other sites are by vessel

** approximate number

† vessels

sweet bean paste, beans, pickled turnips, cabbage, carrots, scallions, salted cabbage, melons, cucumbers, ginger, salty duck eggs, shrimp paste, sheet sugar, and soybeans (Hellmann and Yang 1997:182-190). These vessels are the most common component of all the sites discussed here; many can still be purchased in only slightly updated forms at Chinese markets today.

The workers at 1813 Seventh Street drank bitters (22 bottles in the collection, mainly Hostetter's), beer, wine, and Chinese liquor for their health and relaxation, and smoked opium and tobacco on occasion. Their counterparts in Stockton also consumed large quantities of bitters, Chinese liquor, American and Japanese beers, and other liquors. The Stockton laundry workers smoked opium on the premises, but the evidence of this indulgence is much less striking than that of their alcohol consumption. Meanwhile, at the Hop Lee laundry in Lovelock, individuals drank Chinese wine and other alcoholic beverages, but did not exhibit a preference for bitters. Quantities of opium were consumed on the premises; written and artifactual information suggests that Hop Lee imported and distributed opium (Kuffner 1979). Artifacts from the floor of Hop Lee's laundry ("bldg 2") indicate that opium-smoking and gambling occurred more frequently in this building than elsewhere on the Lovelock property. The lack of evidence for opium and gambling in Oakland and Sacramento may be due more to the outside location of the excavated deposits than to any lack of gambling by these laundry workers. In fact, the bail bondsman who took over the San Fong Chong laundry in Sacramento recalled that opium pipes and other items had been found abandoned in the building's cellar. Gambling is an ancient Chinese pastime, according to a Chinese laundry worker in Chicago: "We Chinese

people in America—there is no gambling if one person is alone, but as soon as two persons get together, there is gambling” (Siu 1987:227).

From the historic archaeological studies described here, the Chinese laundryman may be best characterized as a pioneer outside the confines of Chinatown, often educated and working with family members and with fellow villagers treated as family. Increasingly in the 20th century, families managed laundries while living in or adjacent to the premises. The laundry proprietors were often successful businessmen who undertook other activities from their laundries and who formed business guilds to protect and promote themselves. They had connections with other Chinese businessmen throughout the West and back in China. Laundrymen were frugal in their business investments, but less so in their personal lives. Luxury foodstuffs, jewelry, and clothing were purchased on occasion, and expensive bitters and other alcoholic beverages were commonplace at all the laundries studied. A hybrid of Chinese traditional foodways combined with local products, cooked in and served on what was readily available seems to best portray the eating habits of laundry workers.

Despite constant harassment from youths and thugs, as well as discrimination by local authorities, many Chinese laundry ventures persevered for decades in the same location and eventually rewarded their proprietors with a relatively comfortable standard of living, as reflected archaeologically in their consumption patterns. Whether this adequately compensated their hard work and personal trials is not knowable—each individual’s history, priorities, and goals would influence their view in this regard. If “success” is measured by their descendants, then many Chinese laundry workers may be said to have succeeded.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINESE LAUNDRY WORKERS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

Little is known of the relationships between Chinese laundrymen and their customers and neighbors, except for easily documented incidents of racial discrimination and harassment. The subtitle of Paul Siu’s study of laundrymen is, in fact, “A Study of Social Isolation”; Siu (1987:272) believed that, with some exceptions, social barriers prevented such personal contacts. While archaeology is not generally in a good position to make contributions to this discussion, the large scale of the Cypress Project provides an opportunity to look at the material culture of both the Chinese laundrymen and their landlords, who lived only a few blocks away.

When Irish butcher Edward Murphy died in 1879, he left his shop at 1813 Seventh Street to his two sisters and 11 nieces and nephews. Five of the nieces and nephews were living with their father, Michael McLaughlin, at 881 Cedar Street. Michael, an unemployed laborer, had received custody of his four minor children, who ranged in age from 7 to 16 years. Two of the children, Martha O’Brien and her family and Edward McLaughlin, remained in the family home for the next 40 years—a period that spanned the laundry’s period of operation from before 1889, when it is shown on the Sanborn map, until as late as 1912, when the Sanborn map labels the building as “vacant.” By 1914 Edward McLaughlin had moved his business into the former laundry, converting it into a plumbing shop.

A cache of domestic artifacts associated with the McLaughlin and O’Brien families around 1900 was recovered during the Cypress Project excavations. These materials, the contents of Pits 2870 and 2800, show the family’s interest in things Chinese by the quantity and variety of Asian ceramic vessels that they collected and eventually discarded. Seven Asian porcelain tableware vessels were found, including a Bamboo bowl, a handpainted Chinese bowl and

*LEW HING:
OAKLAND ENTREPRENEUR AND RENAISSANCE MAN*

One of the pivotal figures in Oakland's Chinese community was Lew Hing. This early entrepreneur made his mark in West Oakland and employed many people who once lived in the Cypress Project area. Like his Euroamerican neighbors, Lew Hing prospered by his proximity to the railroad, the region's agricultural potential, and its cheap locally available immigrant labor.

Lew Hing's father had traveled to San Francisco during the Gold Rush, but returned home disappointed after a few months. In the late 1860s, Lew's oldest brother came to San Francisco to seek his fortune, establishing a small business on Commercial Street between Kearney Street and Grant Avenue. After a few years, the brother wished to return to China to visit his family and sent for Lew Hing to run the business in his absence. Lew Hing arrived in San Francisco in 1871, but the brother drowned when his ship sank off the coast of Japan, leaving Lew Hing in charge of the small business at age 13. The young man learned English by attending a church mission school in the evenings and became associated with a small cannery on the corner of Sacramento and Stockton streets. Here he experimented on canning foodstuffs and eventually developed a successful method (Liu 1981).

In 1904 Lew Hing organized the Pacific Coast Canning Company at 12th and Pine streets, adjacent to the railroad tracks in West Oakland. A loading spur ran into the complex, where the cannery processed asparagus, tomatoes, and local fruits for shipment throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America under the "Buckskin" label. The company principals were Lew Hing, his relatives, and others from his region in China, as well as several local Euroamerican businessmen.

The cannery employed many Portuguese and Italian women during the season. In the 1920s, 250 employees worked year round, with up to 1,000 during the summer months. One of Oakland's largest businesses, the Pacific Coast Canning Company, had holdings of more than \$250,000 at its height (Ma with Ma 1982:50-51). The cannery figures prominently in the memories of many of those interviewed for the Cypress Project.

The earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed San Francisco's Chinatown, and tens of thousands of Chinese fled to Oakland. Lew Hing set up a tent camp at his cannery and arranged for meals for many of the refugees. The disaster also destroyed Lew Hing's home; fortunately, his family was traveling in China at the time. Like many others, Lew Hing decided to move to Oakland, but he did so in a novel way. Spotting a two-story residence on Eighth between Harrison and Alice streets, Lew Hing offered the owner a few thousand dollars. The man accepted, packed his suitcase, and left the residence fully furnished for Lew Hing's family to move into on their return (Liu 1981).

The cannery prospered and Lew Hing continued to diversify; he co-founded the China Mail Steamship Company, opened a sardine cannery in Monterey on what became Cannery Row, expanded to the West Coast Canning Company in Antioch, developed a cotton plantation in Mexicali known as Wah Muck, invested in the import of art goods and wholesale foodstuffs from China, and developed two hotels in San Francisco's Chinatown along with other ventures (Liu 1981). The stock-market crash and the Depression ruined Lew Hing's businesses before he died in 1934 (Ma with Ma 1982:51).



Figure 8.10. An unusual Mandarin take-off on Rebekah. The Chinese laundry workers in West Oakland rented from the Edward Murphy estate. Many of his heirs lived a few blocks away at 881 Cedar Street. The connection with their tenants appears to have inspired a liking for things Chinese, including this Mandarin take-off on the ubiquitous Rebekah-at-the-well teapot (Pits 2870 and 2800).

McLaughlin family were thoroughly oriented toward Europe. Yet, by 1900 popular taste had changed sufficiently to accommodate these conventionally exotic artifacts. What may have brought about this change? The perceived threat of Chinese immigrants to the American status

unidentified vessel, three handpainted Asian bowls, and a Japanese handpainted dish. Food storage vessels included a Chinese stoneware ginger jar and Chinese brown-glazed stoneware container. The family's Mandarin Rebekah teapot, which features a Chinese man in the place of the biblical Rebekah, is very unusual (Figure 8.10). Of the dozens of Rebekah teapots found during the Cypress Project, this is the only Chinese variation. This deposit contained more Asian ceramics than any other excavated for the Cypress Project, including features associated with the McLaughlin family and deposited some 20 years earlier that contained no items of Chinese origin or motif.

The 1880s were the height of the anti-Chinese movement and, in spite of appeals from the era's tastemakers, the aesthetics of the Irish-American



Figure 8.11. "Oakland: A California Wonder," 1907. By the early 20th century, Oakland boosters advertised the exotic character of its Chinese- and Japanese-American neighborhoods. (Courtesy Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room)

quo had declined to be sure. However, the decades-long relationship with the Chinese laundrymen who rented their Seventh Street property may have engendered in the McLaughlin family an affinity with things Asian. As elsewhere in West Oakland of the era, residential propinquity seems to have fostered a level of neighborly acceptance of ethnic heterogeneity. By the early 20th century, Oakland boosters were touting the exotic “wonders” of their town’s Asian-American residents (Figure 8.11).

MATERIAL REMAINS OF THE “RESOURCEFUL CHINESE”

Despite overt racial prejudice and discriminatory legislation that persisted into the mid-20th century, the Overseas Chinese contributed to the growth and development of Oakland in numerous ways. Many elements of the mid-19th-century local infrastructure—railroads, irrigation projects, roads, and agricultural plantings—were created by Chinese labor. In a pioneer region lacking female inhabitants, Chinese men took over the roles of cook and launderer. Their skills as problem solvers and inventors enabled advances in mining, food-processing, and elsewhere. While serial migration and remittances to China were practiced, this was (and is) a near universal adaptation on the part of families throughout the world to economic uncertainties at home and abroad. Careful study of the historical and archaeological records adds character and weight to the often anonymous Chinese immigrants of the past, and situates them firmly in particular California cities and neighborhoods. These men, women, and children came and contributed their various skills and efforts in remarkable ways.

Questions regarding the “ethnic markers” of Overseas Chinese material culture were resolved by archaeologists decades ago: the Overseas Chinese brought with them distinctive ceramics and foodways. The important issues for historical archaeology—or local history for that matter—are not *which* goods the Overseas Chinese used, but *how* this group used, reused, and adapted them, in what quantities, and for what outcomes in particular locations. How did individual Overseas Chinese households function within the community in which they settled, and how did this articulate with and contribute to the development of that community? Chinese districts disappeared from many places in the early 20th century and only reappeared many decades later when favorable immigration laws prompted new waves of immigration. It is important that the role of early Asian immigrants in the development of California be reaffirmed and celebrated as a message to this group of new arrivals.

Historical archaeology, broadly defined as infused with archival research and oral history, ties the contributions of the Overseas Chinese to the lives of particular people and enhances with material remains the evidence of their successes and sacrifices. The Overseas Chinese were instrumental in the settlement and development of the West. The magnitude of this accomplishment can be viewed in the cultural landscape of remote areas throughout the region as ditches, mine tailings, levies, roads, railroads, stone fences, irrigated fields and vineyards, cabins, hearths, and camps. Artifactual evidence can be found in privies, wells, and refuse middens protected beneath the parking lots, freeways, and open spaces of today’s urban centers and of now forgotten 19th-century communities. Historical archaeology has an important role to play in uncovering and telling the stories of the Chinese immigrants who helped make Oakland and California what they are today.

