

Erasure and Reclamation

Centering Diasporic Chinese Populations in Oregon History

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PEOPLE OF CHINESE DESCENT have settled, lived, and worked in Oregon since at least 1850, nine years before statehood. They are among the earliest generations of non-Indigenous people to settle in this region. Yet, Oregon's public memory — composed of the big, often ahistorical stories that groups create to explain their world and shape their collective identity — largely excludes those early Chinese residents' role in shaping the state's development.¹ Their economic and cultural contributions, as well as the basic facts of their statewide existence, have been subjected to nearly two centuries of erasure, something that scholars have begun to correct only in recent decades.² The works contained in this special issue substantially advance this expanding area of scholarship.

I am honored to serve as a guest co-editor alongside historical archaeologist Chelsea Rose for this special issue of *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. This issue reclaims and rethinks the place of Chinese people in Oregon's history by gathering a multidisciplinary body of research on early Chinese populations throughout the state. Together, the pieces shift our understandings not only of the state's past, but also of the histories of settler-colonialism and immigrant labor in the American West. The Chinese in Oregon are more than just tangential to the state's history; they are central actors in Oregon's past. Chinese migrants and immigrants have shaped the state's economic and industrial development, political landscape, and categories of race. Their experiences help us understand Oregon's and America's place within the transpacific world. The works in this special issue compellingly demonstrate that reclaiming the place of Chinese people paves the way for nothing less than a new understanding of Oregon's history.

Population data alone of early Chinese settlement forces a critical rethinking of Oregon's history. At different times during the state's first fifty years, Chinese immigrants formed significant portions of the state's general population. Census records — which generally undercount non-White, immigrant populations —



Peter Britt Photograph Collection, Southern Oregon University Hannon Library Special Collections

THIS PORTRAIT of a couple was taken by studio photographer Peter Britt in Jacksonville, Oregon, sometime between 1883 and 1905. During this time, Chinese men greatly outnumbered Chinese women due to restrictive immigration policies. Men who could claim “merchant status” were allowed to bring their wives to the United States and start families.

show that in 1870, Chinese people comprised 42 percent of Grant County, 12 percent of Jackson County, and 19 percent of Josephine County.³ In both Clatsop County and its town of Astoria in 1880, Chinese accounted for nearly 30 percent of the total population.⁴ And the 1890 census revealed that Chinese people were

nearly 10 percent of the total population of Portland, the largest city in Oregon.⁵ In rural and urban places across the state, this mostly pre-Exclusion generation of Chinese Oregonians worked in gold mining, logging, fish canning, railroad construction, laundries, restaurants, domestic service, as interpreters, and as entrepreneurs. They ranged from poor laborers to millionaire businessmen. Throughout the American West, early diasporic Chinese populations were primarily male, due to longstanding cultural conventions that made it difficult for women to migrate and racially restrictive laws that barred Chinese women's immigration to the United States. Women and children would comprise a small portion of this population until the years during and after World War II, when the United States began to ease immigration restrictions against Chinese people. Because of this gender imbalance, men made up a higher percentage of the region's workforce than their population numbers suggest.

Despite this sizable presence, the existence and critical contributions of Chinese people have been twice erased from Oregon's history. First, racist violence, intimidation, social ostracism, and exclusionary laws before and during the Exclusion Era (1882–1943) reduced population sizes and resulted in social, political, and economic marginalization. Next, the producers and reproducers of historical knowledge doubly erased Chinese Oregonians by largely ignoring their experiences or interpreting and diminishing their complexities through an Orientalist or Eurocentric lens.

The articles in this special issue contribute to an emerging body of work that reclaims the central place of Chinese migrants in Oregon's early history. They illustrate how Chinese immigrants built dynamic communities throughout the state and engaged in complex networks of transpacific business, trade, and familial and social interaction. In highlighting the significance of early Chinese communities throughout the state, the authors posit that Chinese people have been integral to the making of Oregon.

OREGON AS ONE PART OF THE CHINESE DIASPORA

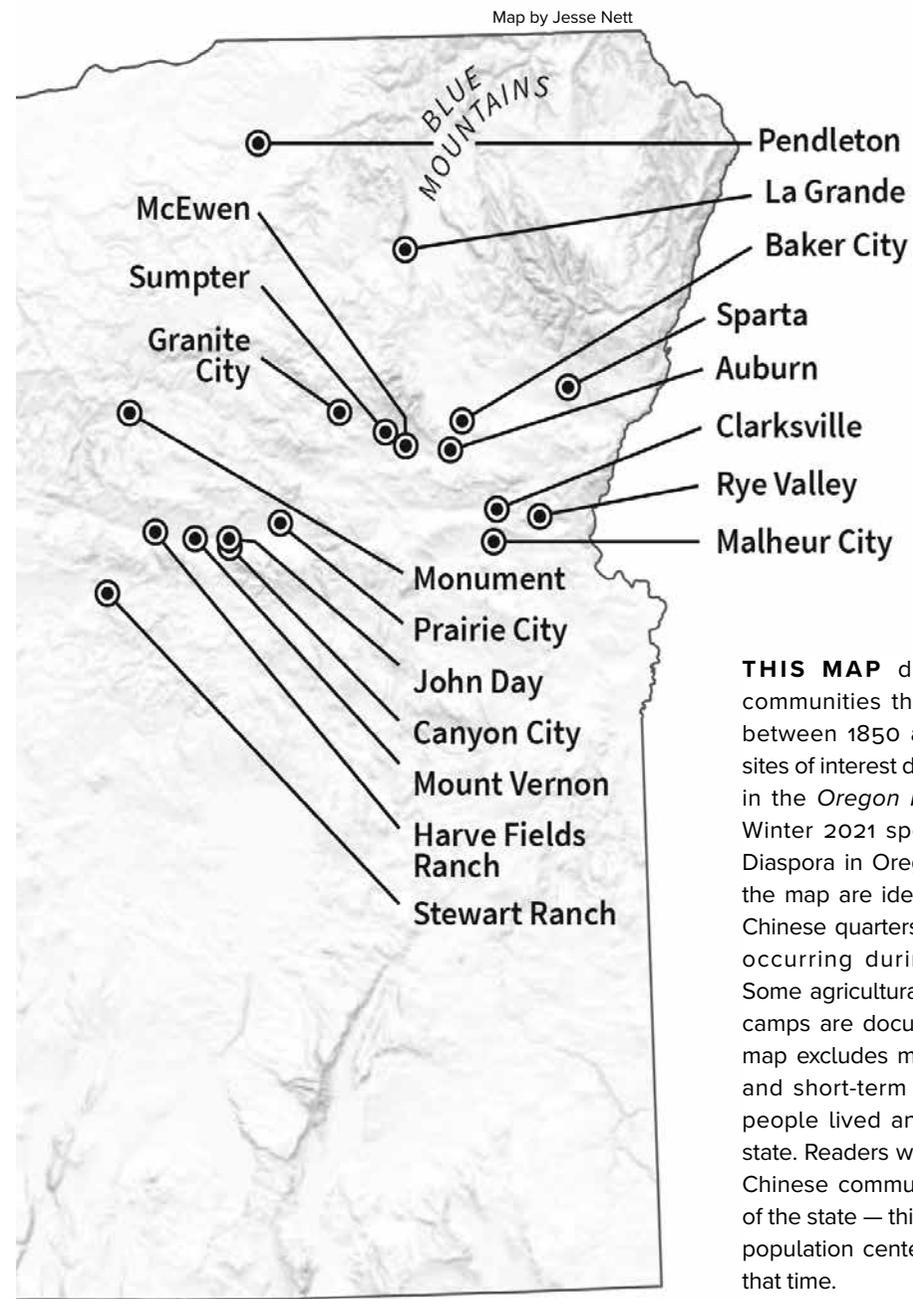
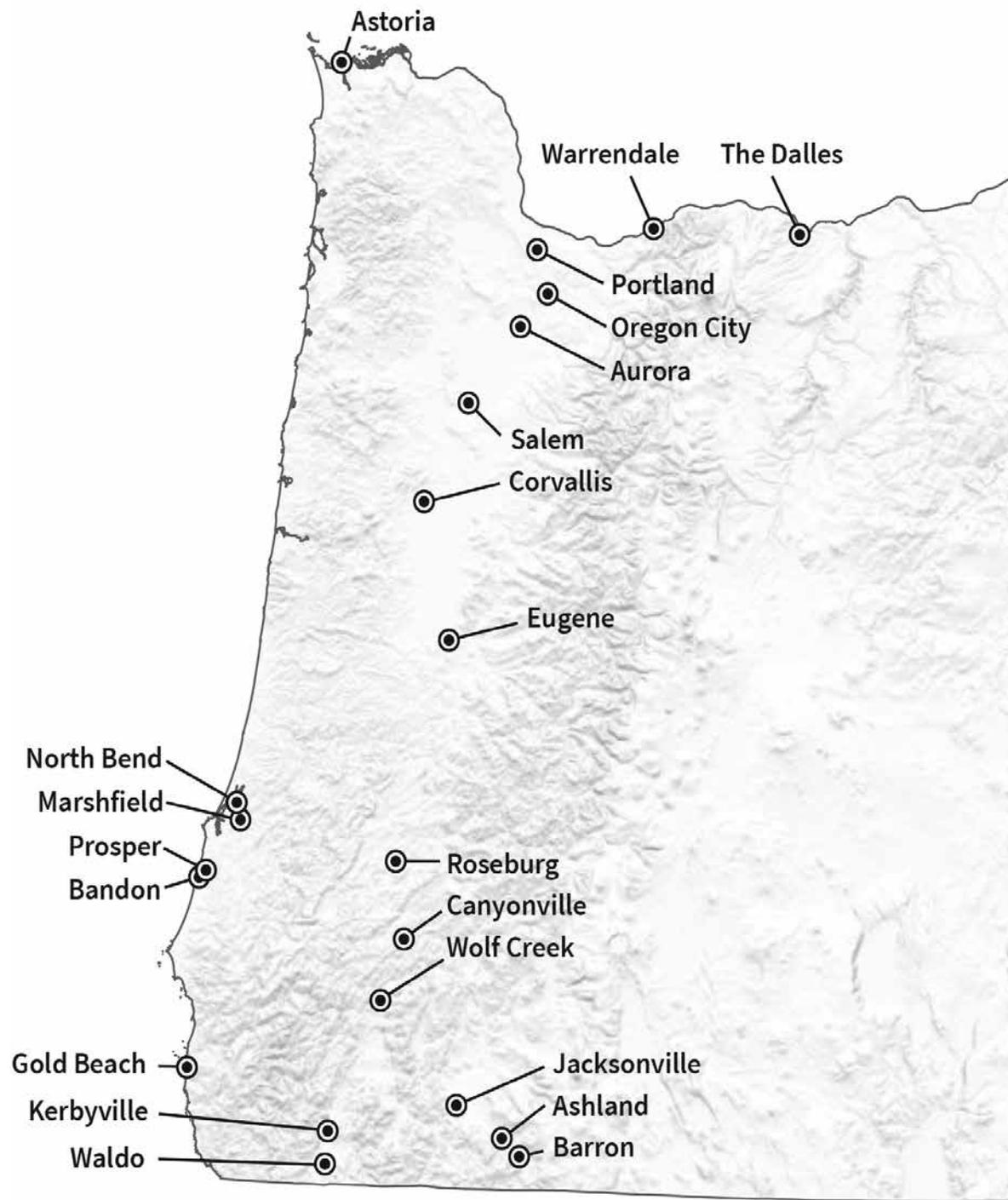
From the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, the overwhelming majority of Chinese people who came to the United States were Cantonese Chinese, a term that describes a diverse array of regional, linguistic, and ethnic groups in southern China. The contributions to this special issue focus exclusively on this population of Cantonese Chinese immigrants. Most of these individuals came from rural villages in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province (廣東 Kwangtung) in southern China, specifically the Sanyi District (三邑 Sam Yup) and Siyi District (四邑 Say Yap or Sze Yup), composed of the following counties: Nanhai (南海 Namhoi), Panyu (番禺 Panyu), Shunde (順德 Shuntak), Taishan (台山 Toisan or Toishan; prior to 1914 Xinning, 新寧 Sunning), Kaiping (開平 Hoiping), Enping (恩平 Onping or Yanping), and

Xinhui (新會 also Sun Wei or Sunwui).⁶ Among these counties, immigrants from Taishan represented well over half of all Chinese in the United States until 1940.⁷ These generations of Chinese Americans spoke Cantonese or Taishanese (both part of the Yue dialect group) as opposed to Mandarin, which has been the largest dialect group and national language of China since 1911.

This group of Cantonese Chinese comprises one of the largest diasporas in human history. Cantonese Chinese had engaged in out-migration for centuries before their arrival in the United States. During the second half of the nineteenth century, social and political unrest, unsustainable population density, and economic uncertainty in southern China were not as pronounced in other parts of the vast country and set the stage for mass migration in ways that distinguished that period from others before. Over 2.5 million people, primarily young men, left China, traveling to Southeast Asia, Oceania, South America, the Caribbean, and North America.⁸

Migration became such a valuable strategy for Cantonese Chinese families to survive that by the 1890s, Taishanese had become highly dependent on their overseas relatives.⁹ Family members who emigrated from Taishan and other parts of Guangdong supported relatives at home by regularly sending remittance payments. That money not only helped support families in southern China but also funded many public works projects, including the construction of roads, schools, libraries, hospitals, and other infrastructure.¹⁰ The construction of multi-story defensive structures known as *diaolou* (碉樓), for example, fused a flamboyant blend of Chinese and Western structural and decorative forms, representing a transnational response to the banditry that was common throughout the region.¹¹ It therefore is also true that Chinese in Oregon, and across the diaspora, were integral to the making of twentieth-century Taishan.

This process of movement — of people, money, and ideas — transformed Taishan and other southern Chinese villages that experienced high out-migration into communities “unbounded by physical space.”¹² Everywhere they went, early diasporic Chinese brought distinctive religious and cultural practices of their southern Chinese villages, which they reproduced and reinterpreted in new lands. Historian Madeline Hsu argues that migration is “a fluid process of mobility and diversification rather than an invasion or uprooting.”¹³ In the United States, all sites of early Chinese settlement possess some form of these Cantonese cultural traits. Early diasporic Chinese also brought technological knowledge and expertise that they applied to their work in mining, railroad construction, and business. Most also dutifully maintained cultural, social, and familial ties and sent remittances to spouses and other relatives in China. The ostracization and exclusion of Chinese immigrants from American society only strengthened the ties that diasporic Chinese maintained with



THIS MAP documents Chinese communities that existed in Oregon between 1850 and 1943, along with sites of interest described in the articles in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly's* Winter 2021 special issue, "Chinese Diaspora in Oregon." Communities on the map are identified as Chinatowns, Chinese quarters, or hubs for activities occurring during the time period. Some agricultural, mining, and railroad camps are documented, however, the map excludes many of the ephemeral and short-term sites where Chinese people lived and worked across the state. Readers will note the absence of Chinese communities in large swaths of the state — this generally follows the population centers in the state during that time.

their families and communities in China. This transnational flow of people, ideas, capital, and customs is something that historians and archaeologists on across the Pacific have recently begun to explore.¹⁴

Oregon, because of the discovery of gold, happened to be one of many destinations where this diasporic population landed. Small groups of miners and merchants first arrived in Oregon Territory between 1850 and 1853, forming what historian Douglas Lee describes as a “geographical and chronological extension” of Chinese mining activity that originated in northern California after the first gold strike in 1848.¹⁵ The majority of these men established camps and more complex mining and business operations in Josephine and Jackson counties, with some also settling in Grant and Douglas counties.

The number of Chinese people in Oregon grew significantly as economic opportunities in the state expanded after the 1860s. During this period, Chinese migrants lived and worked in many different settings across the entire state. They created urban Chinatowns, ethnic communities in more rural cities and towns, fishing communities, and a variety of work camps.¹⁶ They continued to work as miners, but many more worked in railroad construction and the state’s rapidly developing canning, commercial agriculture, lumber, and fishing industries. Some found employment as domestic workers in White households or as cowboys on ranches.¹⁷ Others owned or were employed by laundry, restaurant, dry goods, and trading businesses. Some amassed significant wealth working as labor contractors, recruiting Chinese laborers to work in White and Chinese-owned industrial and agricultural endeavors. Ah Bing, for whom the Bing cherry is named, is one famous example. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Ah Bing worked as the foreman of Seth Lewelling’s orchards in Milwaukie, Oregon, and is credited, to varying degrees, for cultivating the popular cherry.¹⁸

Chinese people were the largest group of non-European migrants to come to the United States during the mid to late nineteenth century. As soon as the Chinese arrived, European Americans raised questions about whether they should be welcomed or expelled. Some industrialists praised Chinese workers as being an ample source of reliable, hard-working, and cheap labor. Others argued that Chinese immigrants undercut American workers or that they were criminals, sexual deviants, disease vectors, and unassimilable.¹⁹ This particular form of racialization, based on Orientalist tropes, cast Chinese people as perpetually foreign and fundamentally un-American.²⁰

The categories of race and definitions of Americanness are nebulous and determined by ever-shifting contingencies of politics and culture.²¹ In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that race is an “unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”²² The concept of race might reference

biologically based human characteristics, but the ascribing of meanings and hierarchies to these particular human features is always a social and historical process.²³ In the United States, for example, criticisms against Chinese immigrants in the mid to late nineteenth century bore similarities to arguments used by nativist Americans against Irish Catholic immigrants who had arrived in significant numbers a generation earlier. While anti-Irish xenophobes vilified and racialized Irish immigrants because they viewed the immigrants’ Catholicism as a threat to American Protestantism, they begrudgingly accepted those immigrants as people with common European roots. Chinese immigrants, by contrast, they viewed as decidedly *not* White, *not* European, and *not* Christian. In the eyes of White Americans, the physical, cultural, and religious “otherness” of Chinese migrants pivoted on nationality, ethnicity, and race. The “othering” and eventual exclusion of Chinese immigrants during the last decades of the nineteenth century (and all Asians by 1924) broadened and reinforced the definitions of Americanness and Whiteness to include previously vilified and marginalized groups such as Irish Catholics and Germans.²⁴

During the 1850s and 1860s, within the context of the forced displacement and genocide of Native Americans, debates over African slavery, and the violent conquest of the West, White Americans viewed the question of Chinese immigration and settlement as more of a racial issue than an immigrant issue. As historian Erika Lee argues, Chinese immigrants were more closely likened to African Americans and Native Americans as “race problems to be stringently controlled (as in Jim Crow segregation) or expelled and driven off (as in the ongoing war against Native Americans)” than to the Irish Catholic immigrants who preceded them.²⁵

In 1857, as sixty delegates met to draft the Oregon Constitution, they debated “the question” of Chinese alongside “the question” of African Americans. Within these debates, all issues pivoted on two concerns: eligibility for citizenship and the privileges associated with it.²⁶ Nationally, the issue of African American chattel slavery loomed large in the minds of all Americans. The specter of the Chinese “coolie” degrading labor, driving down wages, and becoming another enslaved people sparked great anxiety among Americans on the eve of the Civil War.²⁷ Many Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States indebted to (Chinese) labor contractors, family associations, benefactors, and more. They were often, and incorrectly, identified as coolies, in reference to a system of unfree labor associated with Chinese and South Asian laborers who worked plantations in the Caribbean and Latin America in a system grafted directly upon Afro-Caribbean slavery. William H. Watkins of Josephine County articulated this mischaracterization during the constitutional debates, when he described Chinese as “practically slaves, [who were] bought and sold to one another, and to White men, as much as Negroes were in the

south.”²⁸ According to Watkins and other anti-Chinese advocates, the presence of these perceived “coolies” in Oregon (and the rest of the United States) would lead to a new form of slavery and a degradation of free, White labor. The anti-Black and anti-Chinese prejudices articulated during the convention became codified in the state’s constitution in ways that stood out from other state constitutions in their extremity. Oregon became the only state admitted to the

Union with an exclusion clause against Black people, who were prohibited from being in the state, owning property, voting, and making contracts.²⁹ The sections addressing the presence of Chinese people stood out from other state constitutions in the lengths they went to prohibit the land ownership and voting privileges of this free immigrant population.³⁰

In the years between Oregon’s admission to the Union in 1859 and passage of the national Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinese immigrants continued to arrive in Oregon in greater numbers and to face an increasing array of restrictions. While the constitution did not contain explicit exclusion clauses prohibiting Chinese from living or working in Oregon, state and municipal governments developed ordinances and taxation

policies that greatly restricted and regulated the work and living locations, environments, and conditions of Chinese. In Oregon as well as California and Washington, taxes on mining access (for Chinese, Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Black miners only) and regulations on ceiling elevation, capacity, and hair length, represent but a few ways that benign-seeming laws were crafted to hinder the ability of Chinese migrants to freely work, conduct business, and live throughout the American West.³¹ Beginning with and accelerating after the 1876 presidential election, as Republicans and Democrats attempted to gain Western votes, anti-Chinese leaders successfully leveraged the power of the

regional electorate to demand that lawmakers in Washington, D.C., take action against Chinese immigration. In the wake of Reconstruction, the Democratic Party’s efforts to rebuild and distance itself from slavery compelled leaders to unite Southern and Western racists in an anti-Chinese campaign. All these actions paved the way for the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.³²

EXCLUSION AND RESISTANCE

The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 marked the first time the federal government excluded an immigrant group based on nationality and class. The law prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers. In an effort to preserve commercial and diplomatic ties with China, the law permitted the entry of those deemed to be merchants (and their families), diplomats, students, tourists, and returning laborers. By singling out a specific nationality of immigrants for exclusion, the Chinese Exclusion Act legalized xenophobia on an unprecedented scale. The Chinese Exclusion Act also set a precedent by creating a category of “illegal immigration” and defining those who fell into that category as criminals. The law thereby enabled the erasure of Chinese immigrants by reducing the population of Chinese people in the United States and by pushing immigrants who entered the country illegally into the margins of American society. The landmark law would become the blueprint for the exclusion of other groups of “undesired” immigrants during the decades since and into the twentieth century.³³ It would not be repealed until 1943.

Chinese people in the United States and China recognized the racism behind the Exclusion Act. They viewed the law as unjust, morally and socially illegitimate, and thus, unworthy of compliance.³⁴ This resistance is evidenced by the ways Chinese people on both sides of the Pacific organized and worked together to circumvent the restrictions and used litigation to challenge the legalities of exclusion. By banning new Chinese laborers while allowing merchants, diplomats, students, tourists, and returning laborers, the Chinese Exclusion Act sought to rigidly categorize a population that was nebulous and shifting. Would-be migrants quickly learned to present themselves to immigration authorities as anything but a new Chinese laborer. Immigrants typically posed as a member of the exempted elite (most often a merchant), as a relative of a merchant already in the United States, to have previously resided in America, or to be “in-transit” across the country.³⁵ Soon enough, an entire multinational business arose around circumventing exclusionary laws. Known as the “paper sons” system, Chinese immigrants or returning residents exaggerated the number of their children when testifying before immigration officials and sold those additional family spots to prospective immigrants. Brokers and other go-betweens prepared and sold falsified immigration and identification documents and coaching books that painstakingly detailed the



WHITE AMERICANS during the mid- to late-nineteenth century argued over whether Chinese people, such as this young man fishing along the Columbia River, should be welcomed or banned. These debates largely took place within the context of African American chattel slavery.

home village and relations of this fictitious child, or “paper son.” Immigration officials quickly caught on to this practice. At ports of entry, Chinese migrants were subjected to intensive interrogations and detentions by U.S. immigration officials, many of whom possessed severe anti-Chinese biases.³⁶ This strategy of entering the United States was so prevalent during the Exclusion Era that many present-day Chinese Americans who trace their family history to this period find paper sons and daughters in their family.³⁷

Chinese in America also were politically active and litigious, using the tools of American democracy to push back against unjust laws. Between 1880 and 1890 alone, they brought over twenty appeals before the United States Supreme Court. During the same decade, the Federal District Court of Northern California and the state circuit court heard over 9,600 *habeas corpus* cases brought by Chinese petitioners.³⁸ These cases included fights for the right to return to the United States after travel to China (*Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 1889), against the loss of naturalization rights (*In re Ah Yup*, 1878), for the guarantee of birthright citizenship (*United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, 1898), for the right to attend school (*Tape v. Hurley*, 1885), for the right to work (*Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 1886), and for the creation of refugee and political asylum laws (Public Law 29 and “Pershing’s Chinese refugees”). As scholar Gary Okihiro argues, the core values and ideals of the United States emanate not from the mainstream, but from the margins — from among Asian and African Americans, Latinx and American Indians, women, and gays and lesbians. In their struggles for inclusion and equality, these marginalized groups have helped “to preserve and advance the very privileges that were denied to them, and thereby democratized the nation for the benefit of all Americans.”³⁹ Through this interpretive lens, the Chinese in America used the courts to fight against increasing marginalization and exclusionary laws every step of the way, calling out racial hypocrisy and engaging — intentionally or not — in the practice of creating a more perfect union.

WHAT EARLY DIASPORIC CHINESE COMMUNITIES CAN TELL US ABOUT OREGON

The works contained in this special issue showcase exciting new research on the early Chinese diaspora in Oregon being produced by archaeologists, historians, genealogists, and Chinese American community members interested in learning more about their ancestors, often in collaboration with each other. Covering nearly all parts of the state, the articles demonstrate that this subject exists within the intersections of southern China and the United States, of Whiteness and non-Whiteness, and of public and academic history and archaeology. They add dimension to the histories of Asian Americans, business and labor, technology and industry, and urban and rural life. They connect Oregon’s history to broader histories of the West, the nation, and the Pacific world.

Many of the contributions to this special issue highlight collaborative projects, particularly the important work of the Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project (OCDP). Working from sites across the state, the OCDP is a multi-agency collaboration that uses public history and archaeology to promote research in and education about early Chinese heritage in Oregon. It is among a few truly transnational Chinese diaspora archaeological projects in the world. Pooling resources from state and federal collaborators, the OCDP offers a model for how collaborative research on Chinese Americans can be successfully executed.⁴⁰

The special issue begins with two articles examining rural sites of Chinese American labor and community. Don Hann’s and Katee Withee’s pieces about early Chinese gold miners in Oregon powerfully assert that Chinese migrants ought to be centered in the history of Oregon. Hann’s “Chinese Mining *Kongsi* in Eastern Oregon: A Case Study of Cultural Amnesia” demonstrates that, although Chinese miners brought with them sophisticated mining techniques and business practices, managed their own mining claims, and engaged in complex and sustained interactions with White miners, their contributions were diminished through a process of “cultural amnesia.” Hann traces this process of erasure in scholarly and historical accounts about Chinese workers in Oregon. He argues that this reproduction of error has led to a disconnect between the reality of Chinese mining, as a large and well-organized business venture that dominated placer gold production in Grant County during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the ways popular and scholarly accounts of Chinese miners solidified the false characterization of these individuals as unskilled laborers.

Withee’s “Stacked Rock Features: Archaeological Evidence of Chinese Miners on the Malheur National Forest” adds depth and detail to our understanding of those early Chinese migrant communities. The analysis of stacked rock features offers insights into how Chinese miners lived, cooked, and spent their time. The archaeological findings corroborate the argument that Chinese *kongsi* (公司) mining involved large-scale ventures designed for permanency. Simultaneously, the findings humanize the miners themselves and fill the gaps left unanswered by documentary evidence. They also offer a new take on the state’s early economic, industrial, and racial history, demonstrating how our understanding of Oregon’s early history can shift when we include Chinese migrants as central economic actors.

In “The Buck Rock Tunnel Archaeological Site: Documenting Chinese Laborers and the Construction of the Oregon & California Railroad,” archaeologists Terrance Christian, Chelsea Rose, Lisa Rice, Aaron Ennis, and Duane Ericson push the case that centering Chinese labor, skill, and expertise enriches our understanding of how the West was built. The authors have contextualized the

unfinished Buck Rock Tunnel site within the broader history of railroad construction in the West and Chinese migration to the United States. In doing so, the work offers an example of how archaeological research can offer insights to historians and Asian Americanists, particularly when it comes to populations who left behind few written documents.

The impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act shaped and influenced nearly all aspects of life for Chinese American populations. While the law banned the immigration of laborers, it continued to permit the immigration of merchants, diplomats, and students. Chelsea Rose, Jacqueline Y. Cheung, and Eric Gleason's "‘Bona Fide’ Merchants: Negotiating Life, Labor, and Transnational Mobility in the Time of Chinese Exclusion" and Trish Hackett Nicola's "Rediscovering Toy Kee's True Son: Chinese Immigration and Federal Bureaucracy Documented in Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files" analyze how merchants and Chinese-owned businesses helped anchor Chinese communities across the state, foster the transnational lives of the Chinese people who lived in those communities, and facilitate resistance and resilience in the face of increasing racial oppression.

One product of Exclusion was the creation of detailed immigration records about and interrogation transcripts of Chinese Americans and immigrants seeking entry or re-entry to the United States. Both "‘Bona Fide’ Merchants" and "Rediscovering Toy Kee's True Son" rely heavily on Chinese Exclusion Act case files from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). In "‘Bona Fide’ Merchants," the authors skillfully piece together how the business partners of stores in The Dalles and Ashland leveraged the relative privileges granted to the merchant class to circumvent immigration restrictions that they, and most other Chinese in America, found to be illegitimate and "unworthy of compliance."⁴¹ "Rediscovering Toy Kee's True Son" illustrates how historians can use the Chinese Exclusion Act case files to add a more human dimension and depth to immigration stories.

Articles by Fitzgerald, et al., Ruiz, et al., and Lee offer in-depth explorations of various aspects of urban life for Chinese communities and individuals. "Searching for Salem's Early Chinese Community" by Kimberli Fitzgerald, Kirsten Straus, and Kylie Pine not only offers a compelling historical narrative of a community largely erased from Salem's past, but also presents an example of how Chinese American communities in Oregon are collaborating with governmental agencies to reclaim their forgotten histories. The work of centering histories of marginalized peoples within broader historical narratives should be happening not only within academia but also in public history, state and local governments, and cultural institutions of all sizes and areas of focus. The work currently being done in Salem is evidence of this shift. It serves as a model for how erased histories can be reclaimed and brought into mainstream historical narratives.

Myron Louie Lee's "Portland's Louie Chung (1876–1926)" examines the remarkable life of Louie Chung, who immigrated to Oregon in the 1880s as a contract laborer and became a wealthy Portland merchant. Many of the themes explored throughout this special issue are embodied in the life of this one person. After working in a variety of fields, as a laborer on the railroad and throughout Portland, a house servant for a White family, and a bartender for White clientele, Chung became a part-owner of On Wo Tong and was granted merchant status. Chung's life, laid out in vivid detail by his grandson Myron Lee, covers a significant portion of the Exclusion Era, and his experiences highlight the myriad challenges Chinese immigrants faced in Oregon. Chung, despite all odds, achieved a degree of success in his adopted homeland and gave back to his community all along the way. Most others were not as lucky.

Christopher Ruiz, Marlene Jampolsky, and Jon C. Krier's "Longevity: The Archaeology of a Chinese Gift Store and Restaurant in Eugene, Oregon's, Market District" focuses an examination of urban Chinese communities on the interaction of Chinese merchants and businesses with White Oregonians. The work relies on archaeological findings and business records related to Chinese merchants to piece together the history of a Chinese community that has largely been erased from Eugene. "Longevity" closely examines a Chinese gift shop operated by Ho Wing Kee Westfall and Marie Westfall, tracing how the Westfalls took advantage of White Americans' interests in Chinese products and successfully marketed their Chinese ethnicity to a White customer base. In doing so, the Westfalls engaged in a process of self-Orientalization as shrewd business strategy to successfully carve out a livelihood in Eugene.



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DESPITE WORKING in many vital industries, Chinese Oregonians faced a series of racist federal and state laws aimed at preventing immigration, family formation, and economic mobility. Many individuals found ways to successfully circumvent these laws, which they viewed as unjust and illegitimate. Here, a Chinese laborer stands at a worksite in Portland, Oregon, in about 1885.

Trish Hackett Nicola's "'I think I'm going to fly': Chinese Pilots Trained in Portland During the 1930s" and Dale Hom's history comic, "They Called Him . . . Buckaroo Sam: The Imagined Life of a Chinese Cowboy" offer additional glimpses into the lives of Chinese Oregonians. Nicola's essay uses Chinese Exclusion Act case files from NARA to piece together a series of short biographies of young Chinese Americans who trained to become pilots in Portland with the intention of aiding China during the Sino-Japanese War. The article offers an introduction to an extraordinary story of Chinese American service and to the complex transnational identities and lives many individuals led during the last decade of the Exclusion Era. It also serves as an example of the type of information that researchers can glean about Chinese American individuals and communities from the NARA Chinese Exclusion case files.

Hom's history comic, "They Called Him . . . Buckaroo Sam," offers another example of how a life can be imagined through historical research. Hom tells the story of Ah Sahn, a Chinese immigrant who eventually became the foreman at Harve Fields Ranch, one of the earliest ranches in the John Day Valley. With details of Ah Sahn's life scant, Hom crafted a biographical narrative by drawing on a variety of sources related to Chinese pioneers in Oregon. In tracing Ah Sahn's path to becoming a cowboy in John Day, Hom challenges the conventional narrative of the White cowboy figure in the West. "They Called Him . . . Buckaroo Sam" sheds light on the ways working-class Chinese migrants interacted with non-Chinese people and on the varied lines of work Chinese migrants took as railroad and mining opportunities decreased during the late nineteenth century.

The final article in this special issue offers a guide to conducting research on southern Chinese immigrants using the *Village Database*. The prevalence of "paper sons" has made it challenging for researchers to uncover the real identities of many Chinese Americans who entered the United States during the Exclusion Era. Henry Tom's "The *Village Database*: A Resource for Chinese American Genealogy Research" offers prospective researchers a guide to navigating the *Village Database*, an online resource, initially created by the American Consulate General in Hong Kong in the 1970s, for finding family lineages of Chinese descendants from the Sanyi and Siyi regions of China. Along with being a useful tool for researchers, Tom's guide to the *Village Database* drives home the importance of centering the transnational nature of Chinese immigrants and their descendants in the United States.

In centering the experiences of Chinese people in Oregon's past, this special issue encourages a rethinking of the state's earliest waves of colonization and economic, political, and social development. By illustrating how Chinese people were transnational historical actors, navigating a social and cultural terrain that was oftentimes unwelcoming and oppressive, the works humanize early

Chinese settlers in a way that avoids reliance on, or reinforcement of, Orientalist stereotypes and Eurocentrist assumptions. This issue also helps us avoid a tendency to reduce Chinese immigrant experiences to either resistance or victimization. Each contribution in this issue helps to undo nearly two centuries of erasure and to reclaim the place of Chinese people in the history of Oregon.

While this issue is focused on the experiences of Cantonese Chinese Oregonians up through the Exclusion Era, it is our hope that these works offer a model for how research related to diasporic populations in Oregon (and beyond) can be developed and expanded. This issue's examination of historical erasure could inspire future scholarship to be developed in dialogue with the existing body of work examining the erasure of other non-White populations. One would not have to look much further than past issues of *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, particularly the Winter 2019 special issue, "White Supremacy & Resistance," or Johanna Ogden's study of Punjabis in early-twentieth-century Oregon (Summer 2012), to begin thinking comparatively about the intersections of erasure, vigilante violence, and the shaping of racial boundaries.⁴²

At the same time, there is a need to broaden the study of Chinese Oregonians to better represent the significantly larger and more diverse population of Chinese Americans today. Just as Asian Americans are not a monolithic population, the same holds true for Chinese Americans, particularly in the post-Exclusion era. More research must be done that examines women's experiences, the dynamics of immigration during the post-Exclusion era and post-1949 era (when the Chinese Communist Party gained control of mainland China), and the decades after the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, as well as the experiences of those who emigrated from other parts of China and the diaspora, "white collar" immigrants, and more. These individuals might not all have been vital contributors to the early development of Oregon, but they, as Asian Americans and part of the fastest growing population group in Oregon, are key players in the rapidly changing demographics of the state.⁴³ The articles in this special issue offer models for how this scholarship can be expanded into the more recent past and how this work can be accomplished through collaboration across academic disciplines and professional fields.

NOTES

1. Matthew Dennis and Samuel Reis-Dennis, "What's in a Name?: The University of Oregon, De-Naming Controversies, and the Ethics of Public Memory," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:2 (Summer 2019), 182.

2. Some notable recent works include Bennet Bronson and Chuimei Ho, *Coming Home in Gold Brocade: Chinese in Early Northwest America* (Bainbridge Island: Chinese in Northwest America Research Committee, 2015); Sue Fawn

Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011); R. Gregory Nokes, *Massacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009); Chelsea Rose and J. Ryan Kennedy, eds., *Chinese Diaspora: Archaeology in North America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020); Marie Rose Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

3. U.S. Census Bureau, *1870 Census: Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1872/dec/1870a.html> (accessed August 16, 2021). In this introduction, I deliberately capitalize the term “White” when used as a racial identifier. In doing so, my intention is to push back against the implicit notion of Whiteness as racially-neutral default and to call attention to the specific conditions, experiences, and privileges of this racial category.

4. Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 56–57. See also Aaron Daniel Coe, “Chinese Merchants and Race Relations in Astoria, Oregon, 1882–1924,” (M.A. thesis, Portland State University, 2011), 5.

5. Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 166.

6. In this special issue, the co-editors have decided to use the *putonghua* pronunciations in Pinyin romanization for most of the Chinese place names, such as Guangdong and Taishan, and terms, *diaolou*. The names of individuals, such as Ah Sahm, and businesses, such as Kam Wah Chung, follow the romanized version of Chinese names as they appear in the original sources or in our common understanding.

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8. Rose and Kennedy, *Chinese Diaspora: Archaeology in North America*, 3.

9. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 40.

10. Rose and Kennedy, *Chinese Diaspora*, 5.

11. “Kaiping Diaolou and Villages,” <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1112/> (accessed August 23, 2021).

12. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 11.

13. Ibid.

14. See Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*; Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Gordon H. Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2020); Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Barbara L. Voss, Ryan J. Kennedy, Jinhua (Selia) Tan, and Laura W. Ng, “The Archaeology of Home: *Qiaoxiang* and Nonstate Actors in the Archaeology of the Chinese Diaspora,” *American Antiquity* 83:3 (July 2018): 407–426.

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22. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 110.

23. Ibid.

24. Lee, *America for Americans*, 78–79.

25. Ibid., 81.

26. Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 28; Oregon Constitution, art. 2, sec. 6.

27. Moon Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

28. Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 29–30; Charles Henry Carey, ed., *The Oregon Constitution and Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1857* (Salem, State Printing Department, 1926), 361.

29. Gregory Nokes, “Black Exclusion Laws in Oregon,” *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/exclusion_laws (accessed October 29, 2021).

30. Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 34.

31. For more about Portland’s regulatory measures, see Wong, *Sweet Cakes, Long Journey*, 35–43. For more about anti-Chinese ordinances in Jacksonville, see Chelsea Rose,

“Burned: An Archaeology of House and Home in Jacksonville, Oregon’s Chinese Quarter,” in Rose and Kennedy, *Chinese Diaspora Archaeology in North America*, 163–87.

32. See Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Chapter 5: “To Overcome the Apathy of National Legislators.”

33. Lee, *America for Americans*, 97, 79.

34. Chelsea Rose, Jacqueline Y. Cheung, and Eric Gleason, “‘Bona Fide’ Merchants: Negotiating Life, Labor, and Transnational Mobility in the Time of Chinese Exclusion,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 122:4 (Winter 2021): 412–41.

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