

Paul G. Chace (保罗·切斯)
William S. Evans, Jr. (小威廉·艾文斯)

Celestial Sojourners in the High Sierras: The Ethno-Archaeology of Chinese Railroad Workers (1865–1868)

西垭山¹的天国来客：对中国铁路工人的民族考古学 (1865-1868)

ABSTRACT

This exact paper with 30 slide illustrations was presented originally at the 1969 meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) and led to the formation of the SHA's Overseas Chinese Research Group. It is useful for measuring paradigmatic shifts in the field. The presentation summarized the then-known ethnographic descriptions of Chinese railroad workers, described the archaeological materials found at their work camps at Donner Pass nearly 50 years ago, and proposed that these cultural materials represented an archaeological "horizon style," one indicative of the immigration of Chinese laborers worldwide, with their initial arrivals in many countries dating between 1850 and 1870.

本论文最初连同30张幻灯片发表于1969年历史考古学学会的会议，并在该学会内促成了海外华人研究群的诞生。缘此，我们将衡量这个领域所发生的典范转换。本报告内容如下：概括当时已知的关于中国铁路工人的民族志学描述；描述50年后在多纳关中国劳工营考古发掘的材料；论证这些文化材料展现了一种“横向”的考古模式：此一模式表明了中国劳工始于1850至1870年之间，在世界范围内向多个国家移民的状况。

Presentation Transcript

Introduction

In the third quarter of the nineteenth century two events of international impact occurred. One was the construction of the transcontinental railroad, and the second was the mass immigration of Chinese to the countries of the Western Hemisphere. These two events are the context of this paper, "Celestial Sojourners in the High Sierras." It was the Chinese sojourners who built the Central Pacific Railroad over the difficult Sierra Nevada in California. They labored three years to carve a mile of tunnels at the Donner Pass summit.

In this paper we have three purposes: first, to summarize the ethnographic descriptions of these Chinese railroad workers; second, to describe the materials found in their work camps; and third, to propose this description as an "horizon style" useful in assessing materials of this temporal horizon from countries throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Our attention was brought to this material in 1962 by Joe Hickox who brought us a carton of broken Chinese rice bowls from a Donner Pass site. I spent three days surveying the region in 1966 and Evans joined me for three more days in 1967.

Donner Pass is 7,000 feet high in the Sierra Nevada, on the route between San Francisco and Reno, Nevada. The terrain is solid granite, and soil of any kind is rare. There are few spots that are flat or habitable. In winter snow accumulates to depths of forty feet. Here the Chinese camped while they whittled the railroad tunnels through the granite dome beneath them, from October 1865, through winters and summers to June of 1868.

Ethnography

These Chinese were young men of little means who had emigrated from south China as indentured sojourners to earn their fortunes. Ultimately, after several years of labor, they hoped to return with money to their south China villages and their families. Thus, acculturation to American ways was not their purpose. They maintained Chinese culture in all spheres not requiring accommodation of local circumstances.

The sojourners wrote no histories of themselves. Descriptions by contemporary American travelers and journalists are meager. Worse, they are fraught with problems for the "celestial citizens" were new and totally unfamiliar to most European and American writers, who understood little, if anything, of the Chinese culture. Only a patch-work ethno-history is possible.

The first Chinese arrived in California in 1848 and thousands came with the gold rush. Gangs of Chinese were first employed on the railroad construction in 1865, and 14,000 sojourners were on the payrolls three years later. Organized in crews of 10 to 40 men, each with a Chinese foreman and a cook, they had a European supervisor. The Chinese foreman directed the men and maintained order, and received and distributed the monthly pay in gold coin for the gang and their cook. The Chinese gangs camped apart from other workers. They had cramped wooden huts or small tents, depending on the location and season. They worked six days each week, using American made tools. After work, they rushed to camp to bathe and change into fresh clothes. Clothing included the long, full Chinese blouse and wide straw hat but American boots and maybe trousers. Each gang messed together on Chinese fare, primarily rice and tea, but with a variety of meats and vegetables. Gambling was a common evening pastime in the camps as apparently was the consumption of quantities of whiskey of the cheapest and rawest varieties. Holiday trips to larger Chinese communities, particularly San Francisco's Chinatown, provided the men with fuller participation in the Canton culture established in these settlements.

Archaeology

The location illustrated is the largest of the twelve camp locations we surveyed at Donner Pass (Figure 1). The power pole has fallen between two huts sites. The earth floor is held in place by a rough stone foundation. The floor was twelve by twenty-five feet. The presence of nails indicated a wooden superstructure. The adjacent hut was twelve by thirty feet. Both had extra stone outside one end which probably was the remains of a fire hearth. We discovered a third hut at another site. This one, which employed a huge granite monolith as a rear wall, was fifteen foot square with the extra stone again in the center of one end. The other camps were simple, open sites in the places the terrain was flat and treeless. These areas invariably had a surface litter of camp debris. All of the materials were on the surface. We undertook no excavations.

The materials in each of the camps was essentially the same. Identical forms and patterns were found in each location.

Bottle glass was found in most camps. Large bottles with hand formed collars, they are primarily whiskey and wine bottle forms. One bottle panel is even marked "Bitters." Buttons were not uncommon, and we found some metal buckles such as are used today on work overalls. These metal buttons indicate the adoption of some American clothing as the traditional Chinese button is cloth. We also recovered in several of the camps rusted fragments of marked American made shovels, but other tools were lacking. A number of coins, Chinese "cash," were picked up (Figure 2). The characters in relief, the square hole, and the large sizes



FIGURE 1. Donner Pass, 21 August 1967. Photograph shows house floors of Site 2, looking northeast. Note the telephone pole fallen between floors. (Photo by Paul G. Chace.)

make them easy to identify. We know that wagering was important, and apparently the “cash” was so traditional that imitation pieces were cut from copper and iron. Illustrated are three of these locally fashioned gaming tokens. We also picked up an 1853 dime and a Sacramento druggist’s trade token. There were also brass opium boxes with Chinese characters embossed in the center.

Of the ceramics, the crude, heavy porcelain rice bowl illustrated was by far the most common form and pattern (Figure 3). We have several score vessels of this same, repetitious, underglaze blue pattern. The motif is repeated three times around each bowl. There is a tree on the left and on the right is the character for “Double Happiness.” This simple, mass-produced, provincial Canton ware was packaged and sold in lots of ten in Canton markets, according to one informant. Certainly, many times ten were used at Donner Pass. Some of the bases are marked with other words wishing fortune and prosperity. There were other underglaze patterns on rice bowls forms: this dotted floral, and this stylized leaf combined with this tailed figure. The three circles motif also appears with the tailed figure.

Besides the peasant wares, we did recover a few rare pieces of finer porcelain. This small celadon cup and bowl are very fine, thin porcelain. This “green bean blue,” as it is termed in Cantonese, is used traditionally by rural doctors. Some of this celadon is distinctively marked. A Canton born informant told us the glaze comes from “Quan-see.” We found some overglaze enamel painted porcelain. The tree-in-the swamp motif appeared at several sites. These hand-painted blue, underglaze designs were unique.

This tiny redware item with a matt finish is the bowl of an opium pipe (Figure 4). We found this redware at several sites but only in tiny fragments. Similar matt



FIGURE 2. Coins and tokens found at Donner Pass. Most are Chinese “cash,” easily identified by the square center hole. *Top row, center*: trade token from a Sacramento druggist. *Top row, right*: 1853 dime. *Bottom row, right*: three locally fashioned gaming tokens. (Photo by Paul G. Chace.)



FIGURE 3. Porcelain rice bowl, “Double Happiness” pattern. (Photo by Paul G. Chace.)



FIGURE 4. Red-earthenware opium-pipe bowl. (Photo by Paul G. Chace.)

finished black ware opium pipes bowls were also present at two of the camps, but no complete forms could be reconstructed.

A group of buff earthenware had an exterior white slip. The form was a globular, wide mouthed, jar or tea pot.

This huge, barrel shaped vessel is a brown stoneware with a rich black-brown glaze (Figure 5). The rim, wiped clean of glaze, has a medium color between the unglazed body and the dark, glazed surface. This huge crock is nineteen inches tall. Presumably this transported some food stuff from China across the Pacific to San Francisco and then to Donner Pass. We found a number of these. There were also more globular jar forms with tie lugs near the small mouth. An identical, complete specimen from a San Francisco collector measured fifteen inches in height. Our Canton born informant identified this as the stoneware made near Canton at Shek-wan. This Shek-wan Brown Ware is not unknown in the literature. These small, crudely fashioned, saucer shaped items just may be lids for the globular pot, although waxed paper covers tied with string are known to be used.

Fragments of very large, flat pans, like an American milk pan, are the same Shek-wan Ware only they are unglazed. They may be cooking pans. We found similar pans in Chinatown, said to be for cooking herbs. Other sherds represent smaller vessels of the Shek-wan Brown Ware. These are wide and narrow mouth jars without curving rims, some with spouts. These are containers for Chinese spirits, soy sauce, and salted foods. The glaze color varies from black to a rich chocolate brown. The glaze is unusually glossy and rarely dull. The vessels forms are flat based, and the shoulder are high and rounded. Soy sauce and liquor packaged in this or nearly identical ware can still be purchased today in San Francisco's Chinatown.



FIGURE 5. Barrel-shaped jar, Chinese brown-glazed stoneware. (Photo by Paul G. Chace.)

An Horizon Style

The material just described, particularly the ceramics, we would propose are an horizon style. This particular style of cultural materials is indicative of an archaeological horizon. Fortunately, that horizon can be well defined historically as the wide dispersal of Chinese laborers during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The concept of horizon denotes a style of materials found over a very broad space and which were spread there during a very short period of time. Broad space and short time are the particular features of an horizon, and this Chinese immigration fits the concept perfectly. The presence of provincial Canton style ceramics, particularly peasant wares, is an horizon marker.

These wares should be found everywhere the sojourners labored. That area includes the South Pacific and most countries in the Western Hemisphere. We have a table to hand out which indicates the countries the sojourners immigrated to and the dates of their arrivals. The Chinese were in Canada, the U.S., Mexico, Peru, Cuba, many of the West Indies, and elsewhere. Notably, and most useful for historical archaeologists, the dates for their arrival in these various countries are all very close, most are between 1850 and 1870.

The horizon style defined from the 1865–1868 Donner Pass sites in California should be particularly useful in assessing archaeological materials throughout the Americas and elsewhere. We are looking forward to learning of materials from this horizon from other areas for comparative study. Several collections have already come to our attention. We are anxious to see more. We invite your communication.

PAUL G. CHACE
PAUL G. CHACE & ASSOCIATES
2665 KUANA LOA DRIVE
ESCONDIDO CA 92029

WILLIAM S. EVANS, JR.
(1922–2009)

Endnote

¹西 垓 山 (the High Sierras, or the Sierras-Nevada), 在中国通常译为内华达山脉。但因为此山主体仍在加利福尼亚州, 为避免歧义, 此处按音译作西垓山。