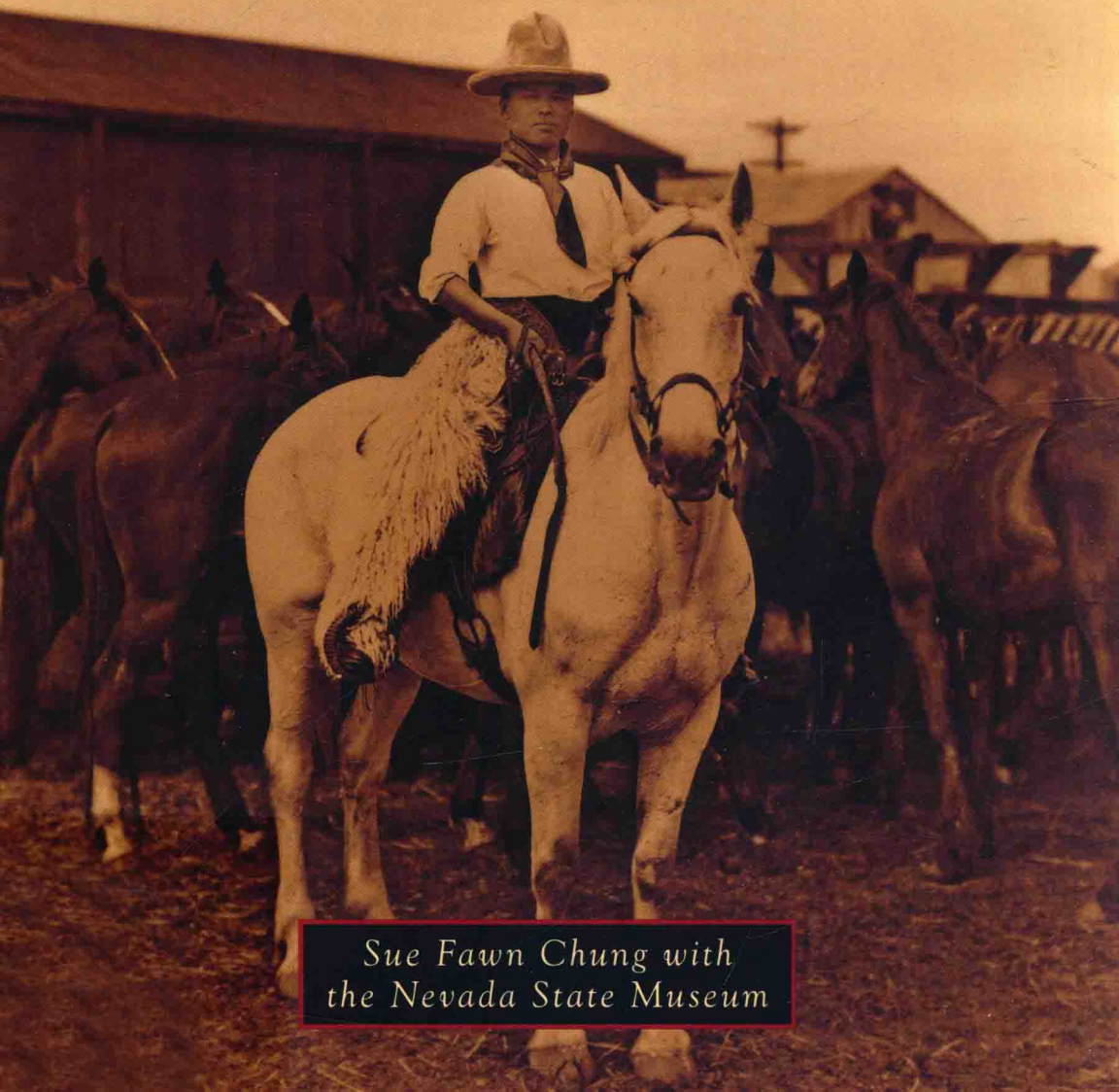


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THE CHINESE IN NEVADA

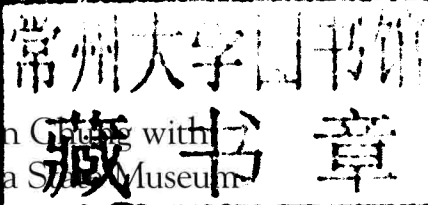


*Sue Fawn Chung with
the Nevada State Museum*

IMAGES
of America

THE CHINESE IN NEVADA

Sue Fawn Cheng with
the Nevada State Museum



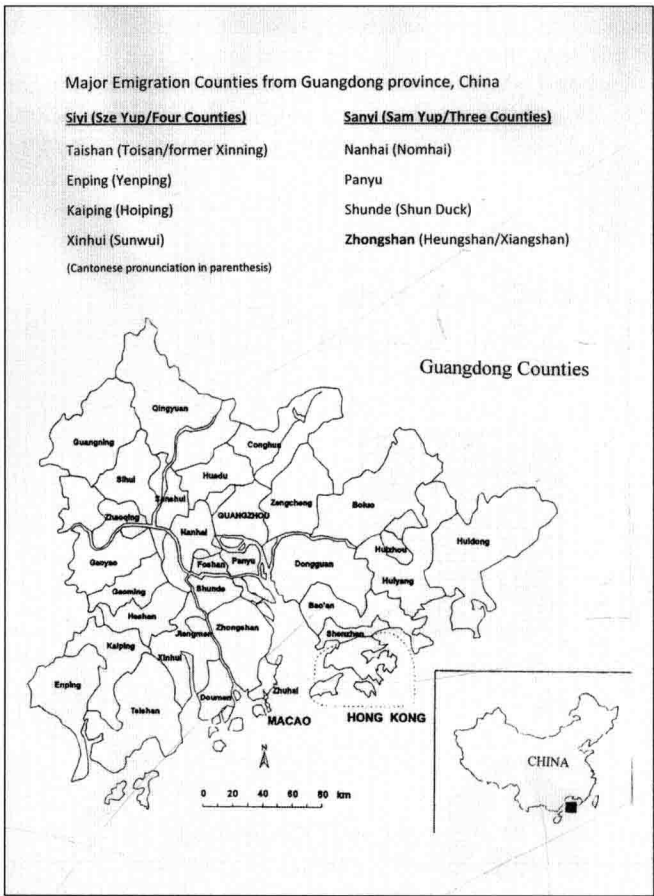
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EMIGRATION MAP.
Approximately 90 percent of the Chinese immigrating in the 19th century came from three counties in Guangdong: Siyi, Sanyi, and Zhongshan. These counties spoke different dialects of Cantonese that were often unintelligible to each other. Like some European immigrants, many Chinese were a part of chain migration, in which families, kinsmen, and fellow villagers traveled together or followed one another and settled in the same parts of the American West.

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NEVADA



ARRIVAL. The Chinese could each bring a small trunk full of personal items when they arrived from China. An immigration station was established on the San Francisco wharf in a wooden shed until Angel Island, located in the San Francisco Bay, was opened from 1910 to 1940. (National Archives and Records Administration.)

On the Cover: UNKNOWN CHINESE COWBOY. In 1913, a Chinese cowboy dressed in white chaps on a white horse won the rodeo in Elko. Chinese cowboys, although small in number, worked all over Nevada, and most were born in California. (Nevada Historical Society.)

IMAGES
of America

THE CHINESE IN NEVADA

Sue Fawn Chung with
the Nevada State Museum



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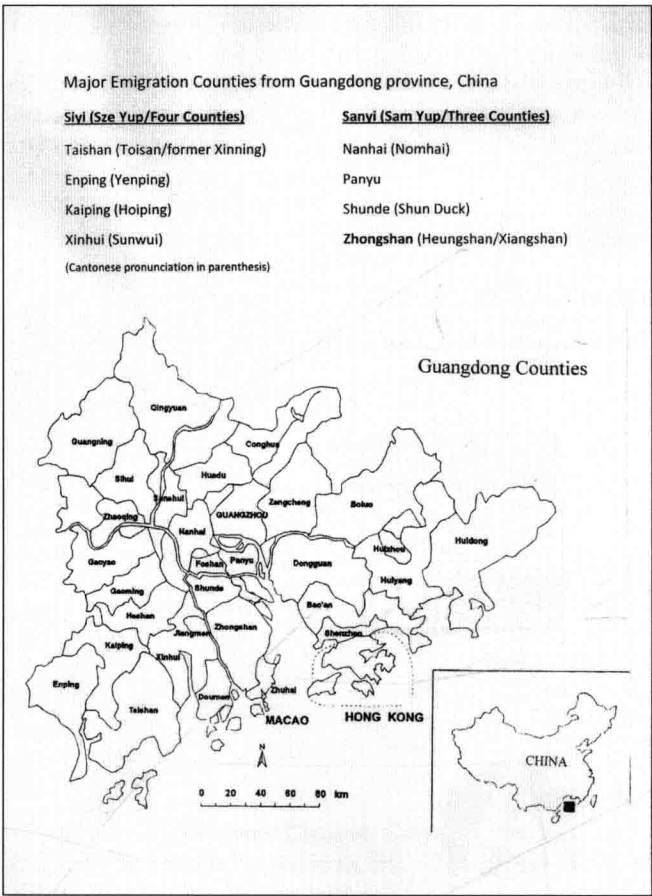
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INTRODUCTION

In 1849, the Chinese in south China heard about the discovery of gold in California. This coincided with a period of economic, social, and political unrest as the weak Manchu rulers of China began to lose their control of China and cheap Western imports, such as cotton cloth, eliminated traditional jobs. Floods, famine, and banditry also contributed to high unemployment. Thousands of Chinese came from Guangdong province in southeastern China in pursuit of instant wealth in “Gold Mountain,” the Chinese name for California and often, in general, the United States. They sought new opportunities and a better life.

The two main occupations that attracted them to Nevada were placer mining and railroad work. Around 1855, Mormon settlers invited Chinese laborers to build irrigation ditches for farming and mining and allowed them to settle in Genoa and Johnstown (later called Dayton) to mine. When the rich gold and silver mines of the Comstock (primarily Virginia City and Gold Hill) were discovered in 1859, the Chinese moved there but were prohibited from mining due to local laws. They found opportunities in establishing restaurants, boardinghouses, and laundries, which were primary occupations that employed them into the early 20th century. They operated gaming halls, opium dens, and houses of prostitution. The 1870 census manuscript for Virginia City listed 647 Chinese males and 103 Chinese females with an average age of 23.4 years, but the local press reported about 2,000 Chinese, making it close to the same size as San Francisco's Chinese population. The Chinese traditionally valued land ownership, so the 1861 Nevada Constitution that allowed “alien residents” to own land attracted Chinese associations and wealthy Chinese individuals who purchased property throughout Nevada as well as mining claims outside of the Comstock that Euro American miners, who staked the original claim, sold to them. Most of the Chinese miners worked in organized groups for mutual protection from anti-Chinese violence.

Racial prejudice usually kept them in segregated neighborhoods, but none of the Chinatowns were self-sufficient, so there was interaction with the rest of the population. In Dayton, for example, the Irish-Canadian Walmsley family was friends with and employers of the Chinese. Contrary to popular belief, some stayed in Nevada for the rest of their lives. “Old Jim,” one of the original Chinese men in Johnstown, lived there until his death in 1895.

The second major attraction to Nevada was railroad construction. In 1863, plans were laid for the building of the first transcontinental railroad that opened the American West. Charles Crocker, one of the “Big Four” responsible for building the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR), hired hundreds of Chinese workers, half of whom were already in the United States and the other half through Chinese or Euro American labor contractors in South China. The Chinese workers, who made up about 90 percent of the workforce of 15,000 men, leveled roads, built up roadbeds, cut down trees, built trestles and bridges, created snow sheds, dynamited mountains to create tunnels, and performed hundreds of other tasks as they crossed the Sierra Nevada. In Nevada, they lived in tents and received their pay in a train car that was attached to recreational train cars that provided gambling and women. Chinese workers had to hammer in the final gold and silver spikes

at Promontory, Utah, in May 1969 because Leland Stanford of the CPRR and Thomas Durant of the Union Pacific were unable to complete the task. No one knows how many Chinese workers died during construction, but the number was in the thousands. Some Chinese workers went on to build other interstate and intrastate railroad lines, narrow gauges for lumber and mining companies, and roads. Some performed maintenance work, while others opened restaurants, often on land leased from the railroad company, to serve the traveling public. Nevertheless, at the centennial celebration in 1969, the Chinese railroad workers were almost forgotten.

After cutting down trees and clearing roads, some worked in the lumber industry, especially in the Sierra Nevada, and one group even formed its own short-lived lumber and milling company at Glenbrook. Wood was an essential commodity in the building of the West. It has been estimated that 50 to 75 percent of the logging workforce in the Sierra Nevada from about 1870 to the 1910s were Chinese. Newspapers reported as many as 1,000 Chinese people "in the mountains."

Later, mining towns evolved that were scattered throughout Nevada. The Chinese community played an important role in the multi-ethnic mining towns of Tuscarora, Island Mountain, and American Canyon in the 1870 to 1900 era. Some mining crews were multi-racial. There were individual miners as well, but as anti-Chinese movements grew violent, it became more prudent to work in teams of 10 to 20 men. In many of the relatively isolated mining towns, such as Island Mountain, the Chinese often constituted the majority of the population and interethnic harmony among Chinese, Euro Americans, and Native Americans was not uncommon.

The coming of the Chinese coincided with the rise and growth of labor unions and post-Civil War racial anxiety, which led to the spread of anti-Chinese movements and the passage of several anti-Chinese immigration laws put into effect between 1882 and 1924, when the doors were closed to most Chinese immigrants. In the land that welcomed "the poor, tired, and hungry," the Chinese were the first group to be excluded. The 1875 Page Law discouraged Chinese women from immigrating, because they had to prove that they were not prostitutes. The predominately single-men society, although about a third were married with their wives living in China, contributed to the migratory nature of their lifestyle and their indifference to temporary housing. Only diplomats, students, and merchants were among the classes permitted to immigrate.

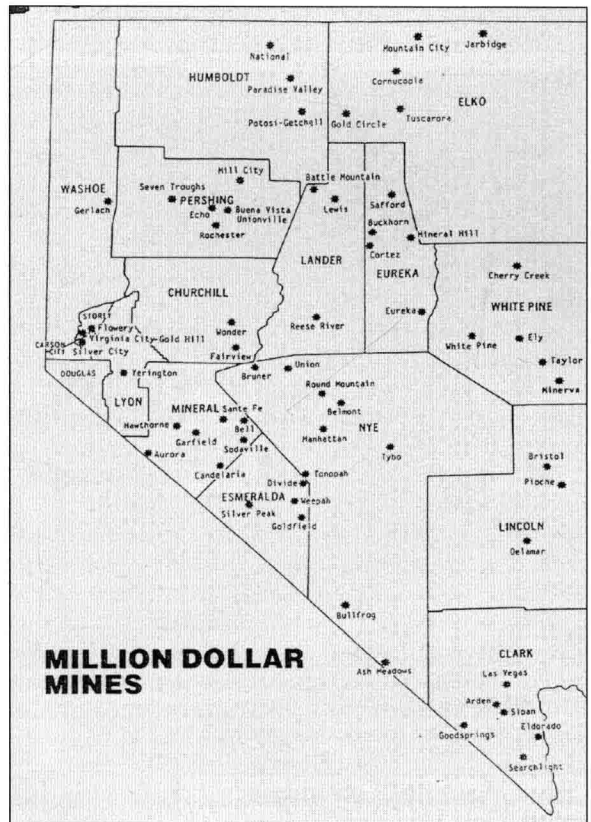
The men often joined fraternal, district, and family associations as a means of obtaining companionship, protection, mutual aid, funding for major endeavors, and employment assistance. Larger Chinatowns, like Virginia City, had a branch of the Chinese Six Companies (Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association). Smaller towns had secret brotherhoods like the Chinese Freemasons. These organizations sponsored Chinese New Year's celebrations in many locations, and the Euro American population was often invited to participate.

By the 1870s through the 1950s, Chinese families grew as the second generation of Chinese Americans came of age and started their own families, as seen in Tonopah. The Chinese in Reno popularized traditional Chinese medicine, entertainment, and casinos in the 1920s through the 1950s. The exclusion laws were repealed in 1943 when China and the United States became wartime allies. The repeal allowed 100 Chinese to immigrate annually; most of these were women who started families, gradually balancing the gender ratio by 1980. This created a more stable community.

The civil rights movement of 1954 to 1968 opened new doors of opportunity in all fields, and the Chinese, like other Asians, earned the appellation of "model minority" as they excelled in numerous fields. Chinese American businesses thrived and continued to sponsor traditional festivals. They were no longer segregated into Chinatowns but were free live in other parts of town. They became active in politics and community affairs. The repeal of anti-miscegenation laws allowed greater freedom in selecting marriage partners. The civil rights movement also stimulated an interest in Chinese American history that is now being actively researched and more accurately interpreted.

One

EARLY MINING AND RAILROAD CONSTRUCTION



NEVADA MAP. Gold and silver mines were scattered throughout Nevada. Copper, borax, and sulfur mines also employed the Chinese, but it was railroad construction that attracted most Chinese to Nevada in the 1870s. (Dangberg Foundation.)

POPULATION OF CHINESE IN U.S. AND NEVADA, 1860-2000
Including Foreign-born and Citizens, 1900-1940, 1990-2000
And Clark and Washoe Counties, 1950-1990

Year	Total Population in Nevada	Total Chinese Population In U.S.	Chinese Population in Nevada	Percent of Chinese in Nevada	Chinese Males in Nevada	Chinese Females in Nevada	Ratio of Males to Females
1860	6,057	34,933	23	.03	--	--	
1870	42,491	63,199	3,162	7.4	2,817	306	1:9
1880	62,266	105,465	5,416	8.7	5,102	314	1:16
1890	47,355	107,488	2,833	6.0	2,749	84	1:33
1900	42,335	89,863	1,352	3.2	1,283	69	1:19
Foreign Citizen		80,853 9,010					
1910	81,875	71,531	927	1.1	876	51	1:17
Foreign Citizen		56,596 14,935					
1920	77,407	61,639	689	0.9	630	59	1:11
Foreign Citizen		43,107 18,532					
1930	91,058	74,954	483	0.5	410	73	1:17
Foreign Citizen		44,086 30,868					
1940	110,247	77,504	286	0.3	221	65	1:3
Foreign Citizen		37,242 40,262					
1950	160,083	117,629	281	0.2	205	76	1:3
Clark Washoe		56 82					
1960	285,278	237,292	572	0.2	388	184	1:2
Clark Washoe		225 249					
1970	488,738	433,469	915	0.2	567	384	1:1.7
Clark Washoe		457 411					
1980	800,495	812,178	2,979	0.4	1,490	1,489	1:1
Clark Washoe		1,725 1,089					
1990	1,201,833	1,645,472	6,618	0.5	3,180	3,438	1:1
Foreign Clark Washoe		529,837 4,185 2,121					
2000	1,998,257	2,432,585	14,113	0.7	N/A	N/A	
Foreign		988,857					

POPULATION CHART. The Chinese population in Nevada reached its peak in 1880 at 5,416 (5,102 males, 314 females), or 8.7 percent of the population. The male-to-female ratio did not equalize until 1980. By the early 21st century, the Asian population was the fastest growing minority group in Nevada.



YINSHAN. Nevada is called the "Silver State," so it is not surprising that the Chinese called Nevada "Silver Mountain." California is called "Gold Mountain."



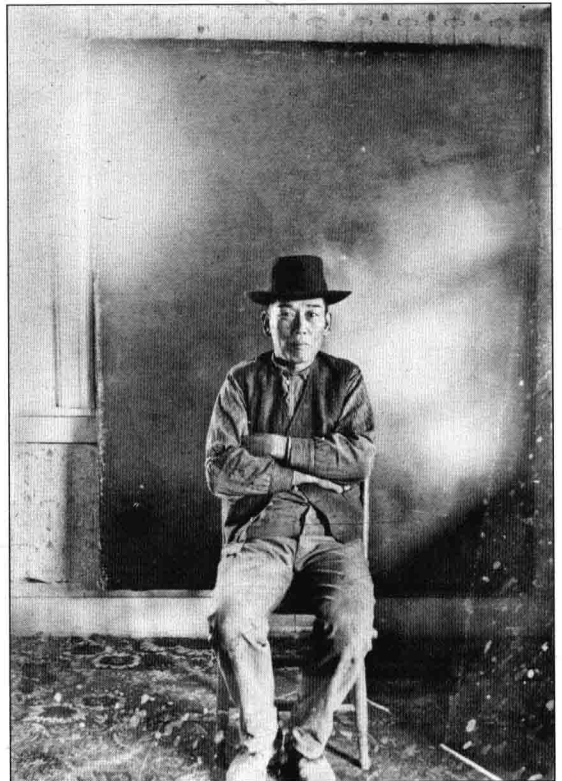
MINER, 1860s. The Chinese miner often carried equipment like the long tom and stoves on a traditional shoulder pole. In 1859, in Gold Canyon, some 50 Chinese gold miners reportedly earned over \$35,000. (NHS.)



DAYTON, 2006. This store, one of the few original Chinese buildings in Nevada dating from the mid-1800s, is located in Dayton, one of the two original Chinese settlements.



BIG SAM AND YOO SIN. Yoo Kee (born in 1876), the daughter of Yoo Sin (born in 1850), a cook and one of the four Chinese women living in Dayton in the 1880s, is seen with Big Sam (born in 1822). (NHS.)



MAN, c. 1905. While some men wore traditional Chinese clothing or modifications of the same, others adopted Western-style dress like this man in Dayton. (NHS.)

OSCEOLA DITCH. The Chinese were hired to construct irrigation channels, including the famous Osceola Ditch that cost \$250,000 in the 1870s. In May 1877, the largest gold nugget in Nevada, valued at \$6,000, was discovered here.



MAN, VIRGINIA CITY, 1880s. This man, probably a merchant, has his tea alongside a narcissus plant, which was introduced from China and blooms during the Chinese New Year. He was a friend of the harness maker, Jacob Kline. (Kline.)