In the spring of 1969, through constant snow and freezing temperatures, archaeologists with the Department of Parks and Recreation, local volunteers, and college students excavated the remains of Yreka, California’s, third Chinatown, occupied from 1886 through the 1940s. It was a large-scale salvage excavation designed to recover as much archaeological evidence of the Chinatown prior to its destruction by the construction of Interstate 5. After three months of excavation, archaeologists had dug 73 units and two trenches, identified nine features, and recovered over 13,000 artifacts. The artifacts include Chinese (porcelain, medicine vials, eating utensils, coins, opium pipes) and non-Chinese (liquor bottles, patent medicine bottles, toys) items. When combined with historical research and archival information, these artifacts help tell the story of Yreka’s Chinese community and provide a glimpse into their daily lives and struggles.

In the winter of 1969, archaeologists with the Department of Beaches and Parks (now the California Department of Parks and Recreation [State Parks]), who had been contracted by the California Division of Highways (now California Department of Transportation [Caltrans]), conducted salvage excavations at Yreka’s third Chinatown prior to its destruction by the construction of Interstate 5 (I-5). They were aided by local volunteers and anthropology students from Sacramento State University and Chico State University. This was one of the earliest excavations of a Chinese community in California and represents a very early collaborative effort between State Parks and Caltrans. Archaeologists excavated 73 units and two trenches, recorded nine features, and recovered more than 13,000 artifacts.

Analysis of the Yreka materials began in 1978, almost a decade following the excavation, when State Parks was trying to build their collections and money had become available through Federal Title II funding to analyze and catalog the collection. Detailed studies on artifact form, function, and artifact distribution were conducted as part of this work. For various reasons, the technical report for the project was never finalized. Nearly three decades later, the collection was analyzed by Liu (2006) for this master’s thesis. His thesis was more descriptive than interpretive, providing detailed descriptions of diagnostic artifacts, manufacturer/company histories, and translations of Chinese characters.

Until recently, no attempt had been made to gather the various field notes, reports, and artifact studies into a single coherent and complete report. The recently published 36th volume of California State Parks’ Publications in Cultural Heritage series, entitled *Archaeological Investigations of Yreka’s Chinese Community*, pulls together all of the disparate pieces of this 50-year-old project into a single volume, and adds another narrative to the history of the Chinese diaspora in California (Heffner 2019). The volume can be read online or downloaded for free as a pdf at the California Department of Parks and Recreation’s Cultural Heritage Publications site (https://www.parks.ca.gov/29395).

The Yreka Chinatown Collection is currently housed at the State Archaeological Collections and Research Facility (SACRF) in McClellan, California, which is directed by Senior State Archaeologist Richard Fitzgerald and his staff, Associate State Archaeologist Peter Hanchett and Assistant State Archaeologist Heather Martin. In addition to the collection of artifacts from the Yreka excavations, State Parks has all of the documents associated with the original excavation and later research efforts, including site photos, site records and notes, lab forms, and maps showing distribution of artifacts by form and function.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF YREKA’S CHINESE COMMUNITY

Early Beginnings

Yreka developed following the discovery of gold in a ravine near the present-day City of Yreka in 1851 by Abraham Thompson (Figure 1). The area became known as “Thompson’s Dry Diggings” and the discovery drew nearly 2,000 miners to the area in less than two weeks. This led to the development of the mining camp of Shasta Butte City. By 1852, the population of Shasta Butte City was around 10,000. It was later renamed Yreka, after the Shasta word meaning “north mountain” or “white mountain,” a reference to Mt. Shasta (City of Yreka 2020). The City of Yreka was incorporated on April 21, 1857.

The May 15, 1853, issue of the Shasta Courier reported on the arrival of 35 Chinese individuals to Yreka, an event that apparently “threw the good people of that place into quite a ferment” (Shasta Courier May 14, 1853) as they were the first Chinese people to arrive in the area and their appearance caused quite a bit of excitement (Jones 1986:33). By 1860, there were 320 Chinese people living in Yreka. Most of them who came to Yreka worked in placer mines that had largely been picked over by Anglo-European miners. At this point in time, the Chinese population of Yreka was settled in an area on the south side of the 500 block of West Miner Street. Many of them moved from this location in 1868 to a stretch of Main Street located between Center and Miner streets. In 1870, there were 327 Chinese persons enumerated in the census for Yreka, most of whom were miners.

The Chinese owned and operated a large placer mine on the flats behind what is currently the location of the Yreka High School on Preece Way. The mine was run by the Bing Tong Company and was very successful, operating from about 1884 to 1894/1895 (Herzog 1953:13). Deposits from this mine yielded an average of $100,000 worth of gold per year (Anonymous 1930).
In 1871, a major fire destroyed several prominent Chinese businesses and homes, with stated losses totaling $23,700. After the fire, the Chinese quickly rebuilt. According to the United States Bureau of the Census (1880), there were 245 Chinese people in Yreka in 1880, working primarily as miners or cooks.

**Trials and Tribulations at a New Home**

Following a fire in 1886, Yreka’s Chinese community relocated to the east side of Yreka Creek, away from the main part of town, south of where Center Street ended and west of the Yreka Western Railroad tracks (Figure 2). The City of Yreka had purchased land from James Wheeler, who operated the saloon at the Franco-American Hotel and who had deeded it to the Chinese.

The creek was crossed on a two-plank wooden bridge during the winter months. In 1890, after a series of heavy rains and snow, Yreka Creek crested over its banks and flooded Yreka’s Chinatown. It washed away the footbridge at Center Street that led to Chinatown’s main street and swept away some seven to eight houses (Figure 3). According to Jones (1986:34), “rebuilding [after the flood] was not the intent of most of the area’s Chinese, though the handful who remained did repair and live in the damaged buildings.”

Yrekans’ Anglo-European population was mainly concerned with repairing the recently built railroad bridge following the 1890 flood rather than aiding the Chinese residents who had lost their homes and businesses (Jones 1986:32). By 1900, there were only 86 Chinese individuals recorded in Yreka; by 1910 it had dropped to 37. A 1913 International Chinese Business Directory lists seven Chinese businesses operating in Yreka; these include five general merchandise stores, one drug store, and a laundry.

By 1920, there were only 21 Chinese individuals enumerated in the census records for Yreka (United States Bureau of the Census 1900, 1910, 1920). In November 1923, a fire broke out in Yreka’s Chinatown and left about 20 individuals homeless. At this time, the Chinese community was described as consisting of approximately 30 quarters that were all connected (San Francisco Chronicle 1923). The January 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map is the first Sanborn map to depict Yreka’s Chinese community after it was moved to the east side of Yreka Creek (Figure 4).

![Figure 2. Yreka Chinatown in the late 1880s. Photograph courtesy of the Siskiyou County Museum, Yreka, California.](image-url)
Figure 3. Yreka Chinatown, ca. late 1890s, showing the effects of flooding. Photograph courtesy of the Siskiyou County Museum, Yreka, California.

Figure 4. 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing Location of Third Chinatown (Sanborn Fire Insurance Company 1927).
The population of Chinese living in Yreka in 1930 showed a slight increase from 37 to 39 individuals (United States Bureau of the Census 1930). By 1940, there were only three Chinese people recorded as living in Yreka. These included Jimmy Wong, a cook at the Yreka Inn; Gilbert Fong, also a cook; and Dear Chomling, listed as a “Gantryman” (United States Bureau of the Census 1940). A “gantry” is defined as either a “frame for supporting barrels” or a structure or platform spanning on or around something that could support a crane or other moveable structure. Based on this description, Mr. Chomling may have been a construction worker or heavy equipment operator. A year prior to the construction of I-5 through Yreka, Lee Shee On and Harry On and his wife are listed as the sole property owners in the area that was once Chinatown (California Division of Highways 1967).

Where Did They Go?

The steady decline of Yreka’s Chinese population from the 1920s through the 1940s was likely the result of three primary factors: (1) lack of employment opportunities as mines in the area played out; (2) repeated flooding of Yreka Creek and a fire that left many without homes; and (3) anti-immigration laws that greatly restricted Chinese immigration into the United States and led to a gradual decline in the Chinese population. Yreka’s Chinese population may have relocated to San Francisco, as suggested by Aretta Jonkheer (née Meamber), who reported that the Chinese community of Yreka left and moved here after Chinatown burned in 1923 (Jonkheer 2012). Cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland had larger, more established Chinatowns that would have also offered more economic opportunities. Others may have chosen to return to China.

A Silent Reminder

Just east of Yreka, off Montague Road and past the I-5 overpass, lies a small cemetery with a single headstone, a gazebo, and a metal plaque containing the names of 55 individuals known to have been buried at this location. This cemetery was created for the Chinese by the Yreka City Board of Trustees in 1877 and is a silent reminder of the Chinese individuals who lived, worked, and died in Yreka and surrounding mining communities. This cemetery is the only physical location associated with Yreka’s historic Chinese community that has been preserved in situ; the rest was destroyed with the construction of I-5.

EXPLORING THE DAY-TO-DAY LIVES OF YREKA’S CHINESE COMMUNITY

Analysis of the Yreka Chinatown artifact collection, in combination with archival research and GIS mapping, aided in addressing research topics identified in the California Department of Transportation’s thematic contexts on Agriculture (Caltrans 2007), Mining (Caltrans 2008), Townsites (Caltrans 2010), and Work Camps (Caltrans 2013), including site structure/land use, economic strategies, household composition and lifeways, and immigration and ethnicity. An additional research topic not specifically called out in Caltrans’ thematic contexts, but that weaves through all these themes, is chronological ordering. By attempting to answer questions associated with each of these research topics, one can better interpret the archaeological record of Yreka’s third Chinatown and the individuals who lived there.

Site Structure/Land Use

Archaeology offers an ideal means of examining changing land use and spatial organization through time. Archaeological remains can add significantly to the description and study of evolving formal and informal landscapes, and the layout of a household, business, or community. Studies of gardens, trash disposal
areas, work areas, and other features can be enhanced by combining historical and archaeological data sets. Identification of architectural remains (e.g., building foundations, cellars) can be compared to the historical record to complement the study of design and layout (Deetz 1977). Questions related to site structure and land use include:

1. How was Chinatown laid out in relation to surrounding natural and manmade features (e.g., Yreka Creek, railroad tracks)? Were the principles of feng shui employed in the design and layout of Yreka’s third Chinese community? Feng shui, which literally translates to “wind, water” refers to the “science and art of coordinating human settlements and burial places with the environment” (Haibei 2000:i). The goal of feng shui, according to Haibei (2000:12), is to “create balance and harmony between the forces of nature and the living spaces of man, to obtain the greatest benefit, peace, and prosperity.”

2. Can separate use areas be distinguished in the archaeological record?
3. How did the layout and spatial arrangement of Yreka’s third Chinese community compare to other Chinatowns in the region and in other parts of the state?
4. Is there evidence that natural and manmade disasters (such as fires and flooding) changed the layout of Yreka’s Chinatown?
5. How did anti-Chinese sentiments influence the location and layout of Yreka’s Chinese community?

The 1969 excavations were located at what had been the third manifestation of Yreka’s “Chinatown” that had been established in the late 1880s, following a fire that burned Chinese and non-Chinese businesses and homes. It is unclear from historical records whether the Chinese community of Yreka was forcibly relocated to the area between Yreka Creek and the Yreka Western Railroad Tracks, although this was not an uncommon practice in an era of discriminatory legislation and anti-Chinese sentiment. The Anglo-European community viewed Chinatown as a fire hazard (the 1871 fire was thought to have been started by two boys playing with fireworks on back porch of a Chinese laundry), and racist stereotypes at the time frequently portrayed urban Chinese communities as filthy, crowded, and unsanitary places. Similar examples of fire being used to force Chinese individuals out of their communities can be found in many places across the western United States (e.g., San Jose and Truckee, California; Jacksonville, Oregon).

The land purchased by the City of Yreka from James Wheeler was in an undesirable location, wedged between Yreka Creek and the railroad tracks. According to the principles of feng shui, this location would not have been ideal as it was in a low-lying area susceptible to flooding and stagnant water, leading to the creation of sha (noxious vapors, air, still/stagnant water) (Mueller 1987:3, 6). However, following the flooding of Yreka Creek in 1890 (Figure 5), the planting of a line of locust trees west of the boardwalk and facing Yreka Creek would have created an “unequivocal feng shui remedy for the effects of Yreka Creek” (Mueller 1987:20) by protecting against malign winds and fostering good growing chi or qi (Ritchie 1993:365).

In the late 1880s, Yreka’s Chinese community consisted of two rows of approximately 17 structures arranged on either side of Main Street and facing Main Street, as well as a large, two-story building at the southwestern end (see Figure 2). An open passage at the south, leading through the main thoroughfare of town, would have provided a clear view of the beneficial influences of the “Phoenix/Red Bird” and the warmth of the summer season (Mueller 1987:6). The sides of the buildings were oriented in a linear fashion, north along Center Street. North of Center Street lay the Klamath Mountains, which would have provided a protective shield against the cold northern winds and the evil influences of the “Tortoise” or “Dark Warrior,” according to feng shui practices (Mueller 1987; Ritchie 1993; Haibei 2000).

The larger two-story building had a pyramid roof with a wrap-around porch on each level. It may have housed several of the merchants (of which there were seven, according to the 1880 census). Or it may have served as the location of a district association, which were two-to-three-story buildings decorated with traditional Chinese motifs (e.g., decorative scrolls, pagoda roofs, wrap-around porches). Typically, the first floor of these district buildings held the main council chamber where judicial meetings were held and antechambers for private meetings. The second floor was used as a school and had several classrooms, while the top floor was used as a sanctuary and frequently contained a small altar (Stellman 1917; Chinn 1969).
Despite major damage from the 1890 flooding of Yreka Creek, the Chinese community of Yreka persisted. Past resident of Yreka, Pete Scheld, who visited Yreka’s Chinatown as a child in the 1900s, described the buildings in the town as follows:

The town buildings were of unpainted wood in one continuous row but of different shapes and design as were the front porches and roofs. The Joss House was separated from the others by a vacant lot. It was the last building on the south and much better constructed [Scheld 1965:44].

There were four or five stores that operated in a row of approximately 14 buildings. Each store had a “short counter and shelves on both sides loaded with cans and paper containers covered with Chinese characters” (Scheld 1965:45). In addition to these stores and the temple, there was a large hotel, and wash houses. A photograph taken of Yreka in the 1910s depicts a somewhat different picture than what Scheld described in his account (Figure 6). In this photograph, there are at least eight buildings in a row facing Yreka Creek, and numerous smaller shacks and sheds behind these eight structures.

The effects of the 1923 fire and 1927 flood on Yreka’s Chinese community are partially portrayed on the 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The map depicts six dwellings facing towards Yreka Creek and labeled as “Chinese Dwellings Old and Dilapidated” (see Figure 4). Three vacant buildings are located behind the row of dwellings and are oriented facing Center Street. A seventh dwelling is situated behind and east of the six dwellings, between Center Street and the railroad tracks.

An aerial photograph from 1946 depicts at least five wood-framed, gable roof buildings oriented along a dirt road lined with locust trees and situated just east of Yreka Creek (Eastman 1946; see Figure 7). Another wood-framed building is oriented facing East Center Street.

In 1947, the city building inspector visited Yreka’s Chinatown and decided that the remaining buildings must be razed and replaced with homes (Watson et al. 1990:77). The row of six dwellings depicted in the 1946 aerial were removed; however, the wood-framed building facing East Center Street appears to have been left in place, as evident on a 1954 USGS topographic quadrangle map for Yreka, California, and a 1955 aerial photograph (United States Geological Survey 1954, 2019).
Figure 6. Yreka Chinatown, ca. 1910-1915. Photograph courtesy of the Siskiyou County Museum, Yreka, California.

Figure 7. 1946 Aerial showing Yreka Chinatown buildings just prior to their removal (Eastman 1946).
Economic Strategies

This research theme explores how the Chinese individuals made a living and sustained themselves. Adaptive reuse of items, establishment of supply and trade networks, and inventiveness were necessary components of success, particularly in a remote location such as Yreka. Census records indicate that the majority of Chinese living in and around Yreka were miners. These individuals may have chosen to supplement their income with other endeavors, such as selling vegetables, or washing and mending clothes. The presence of materials such as crocks, canning jars, and related items, combined with the presence or absence of wild game, indications of home butchering, and floral remains, are pertinent to exploring how much home production was occurring at the site (Caltrans 2007:187). Research questions related to the theme of economic strategies applicable to the study of Yreka’s Chinese community include:

1. How did individuals make a living? What were the most common occupations?
2. Did individuals supplement their income with secondary jobs? If so, what archaeological or documentary evidence is there for this?

The second set of research questions relates to the theme of Household Composition and Lifeways, and includes:

1. What were their food preferences?
2. How was food being stored and prepared?
3. What did the Chinese residents of Yreka do when they were sick?
4. Can the archaeological record inform us about the types of ailments being treated?

By the mid-1860s, the Chinese in Siskiyou County had largely replaced Anglo-European miners who had abandoned their claims to seek gold elsewhere. The construction of the Central Pacific Railroad (1863-1869) drew many Chinese away from the mines until the Central Pacific Railroad Bed was finished about 30 miles north of Yreka near Ashland, Oregon (Jones 1986:33). Many returned to mining, as jobs in agriculture or manufacturing were not available to them in rural Siskiyou County, and “the exhaustion of easy surface gold deposits dissuaded white mining operations” (Jones 1986:33). Chinese were also employed digging and maintaining ditches for mining companies, such as the Yreka Water Company.

In 1880 (six years prior to their move to the east side of Yreka Creek), 245 Chinese individuals were enumerated in the census for Yreka, 130 (53 percent) of whom were listed as miners (Table 1). The second most common occupation was cook (31 or 13 percent), either for the miners, a private family, a hotel, or a wash house. There was also a “cook’s assistant” listed. Some individuals worked more than one job, as evidenced in the census records for a “cook and miner,” “cook and janitor,” and “servant/gardener.” Other occupations included brothel owners and workers, a wagon driver, store clerks, four doctors, a gardener, storekeeper, seven merchants, two butchers, and more.

Mining remained the primary occupation in 1900, with 36 individuals (out of a total population of 86) listed as miners, as well as a mine owner, mine engineer, and mine foreman. It is possible that this represents a small mining endeavor. “Cook” was the second most common occupation (20 of 86). Other occupations listed in the 1900 census included waiter, restaurant owner, hotel keeper, laundry worker, carpenter, banker, farmer, and boarder. By 1910, there were more cooks than miners (13 versus 3); other occupations included dishwasher, merchant, laborer, laundry owner, and laundry worker. As mentioned earlier, a 1913 International Chinese Business Directory lists seven Chinese businesses operating in Yreka; these include five general merchandise stores, one drug store, and a laundry. By 1920, although there were only 20 Chinese individuals enumerated in the census (versus 37 in 1910), there was a greater diversity of occupations recorded as compared to the 1910 census, including gardener, restaurant owner (and his/her partner), four different types of cooks (cook for a family, cook at “China House,” restaurant cook, hotel cook), as well as a laundry owner, store owner, miner, and logging teamster.
### Table 1. Chinese Population in Yreka, 1880, with Occupations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>miner (includes 8 boys aged 14-17)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooks for miners (includes 1 boy aged 15)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cook’s assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cook and miner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cook/servant (includes 1 boy aged 17)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hotel cook</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cook (includes four boys aged 12, 15-17)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cook and janitor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wash house cook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sawmill worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>merchant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keeping house</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>butcher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>servant (includes 2 girls aged 12 and 15)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wagon driver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>store clerk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doctor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wash house owner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wash house worker</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gardener</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown/not recorded</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brothel owner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lives at brothel (includes 3 girls aged 11, 14, and 16)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selling opium</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>servant/gardener</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prostitute</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boarder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tailor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>storekeeper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>213</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>children</strong> a</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>220</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excludes children already counted in “occupation” column. Children are assumed to be any individual younger than 18 years of age.

Individuals and families may have chosen to supplement their income by mending clothes, selling vegetables, or performing various odd jobs. Twenty-five sewing-related items are listed in the catalog, including a thimble, safety pins, crochet hook, and metal sewing machine. The catalog includes 118 tools, such as files, axe heads, and whet stones, that may be related to home repairs, woodworking, or repairing items for others.

**Household Composition and Lifeways**

Reconstructing the daily lives of residents within a house, town, work camp, or other abode requires a careful examination of demography, subsistence preferences, and consumer behavior, including healthcare and grooming, sanitation, and other personal choices made by the occupants.
Questions related to the theme of household composition and lifeways focus on addressing all aspects of “Who, What, When, and How”; for example, “Who lived in the household?,” “What was their main occupation?,” “When was the household formed?,” and “How was the household organized?” These questions are primarily designed to better understand the organization and structural hierarchy of a particular household. Other questions are geared to interpreting how families lived their day-to-day lives, including dietary preferences and healthcare practices. The following section focuses on these latter two research topics.

**Diet**

Under this research topic, I explore dietary preferences as evidenced through the archaeological record of Yreka’s third Chinese community. Of the 6,962 items catalogued from the Yreka Collection as being associated with “Domestic” use, 62.7 percent (4,363) items were related to “Food Preparation and Consumption” and consisted of items such as white earthenware fragments, saucer, teacups, bowls, plates, mugs, pans, egg cup, drinking glass, forks, spoons, and a butter knife. A total of 1,997 items (28.9 percent) were related to “Food Storage,” and included a milk bottle, canister lid, fruit jar seal, globular jar, shouldered food jar, ginger jar, and crock, among others.

Regrettably, faunal and floral materials were not collected as part of excavation and laboratory procedures. Dry and wet screening of artifacts was only performed at the start of the excavation but was quickly abandoned due to the amount of time it took to screen each unit.

Despite the lack of faunal and floral materials in the collection, artifacts associated with food storage, food preparation, and consumption can shed light on what the occupants of Yreka’s third Chinatown were eating and how they prepared these foods. Meals were prepared with the aid of grinding bowls, shallow stoneware cooking pans, metal frying pans, and meat cleavers. A variety of traditional foodstuffs (rice, soybeans, mixed vegetables, ginger, salted duck eggs) were imported from China and likely purchased from a local Chinese merchant or grocer. An anonymous essay published in the 1930s stated that Chinese businesses in Yreka in the 1860s and 1870s were “well patronized [not only] for their specialties of tea, nuts, candied ginger and other confections, their shrimp, herring or dried vegetables . . .” (Anonymous 1930).

In his description of the foods available for sale to Chinese workers on the Merced Railroad in the early 1870s, Nordoff (1873:190) listed:

- . . . dried oysters, dried cuttlefish, dried fish, sweet rice crackers, dried bamboo sprouts, salted cabbage, Chinese sugar (which tastes to me very much like sorghum sugar), four kinds of dried fruits, five kinds of desiccated vegetables, vermicelli, dried sea-weed, Chinese bacon cut up into salt cutlets, dried meat of the abalone shell, pea-nut oil, dried mushrooms, tea, and rice.
- They also buy pork of the butcher, and on holidays they eat poultry.

Various sizes and shapes of stoneware storage vessels were used to keep the food fresh and free from contaminants. Chinese brown glazed stoneware (CBGS) storage jars present in the collection include shouldered jars, barrel jars, ginger jars, soy sauce or spouted jars, and globular jars. As noted by Yang and Hellmann (2013:218), CBGS food storage jars were frequently reused for a variety of purposes to fit an individual’s unique needs (Table 2).

Wide-mouthed jars were used to store sugar as well as various condiments. In their interviews with Chinese elders, Yang and Hellmann (2013:220) found that straight-sided jars were also used to store Chinese medicinal herbs and ointments. Liquor jars could contain medicinal wine or rice wine and were often used in cooking. Foods were also stored in glass mason jars and condiment bottles.

Additionally, the Yreka collection contains numerous cartridge shell casings, a fishing lure, and a harpoon point, suggesting that individuals were supplementing their diet with wild fish and game (such as deer, small mammals, and birds). Occupants of Yreka’s Chinatown may also have been gathering locally available plants, although due to the salvage nature of the project, no botanical remains were recovered.
Table 2. Traditional Names of Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware Vessels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandarin</th>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Archaeological Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wa Hu</td>
<td>Nga Hú</td>
<td>瓦壷</td>
<td>stoneware pot</td>
<td>spouted jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuo Kou Wa Ping</td>
<td>Fùt Hów Ngá Peng</td>
<td>濶口瓦瓶</td>
<td>wide-mouthed pottery bottle</td>
<td>shouldered jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ying</td>
<td>Ang</td>
<td>瘿</td>
<td>round jar with small opening</td>
<td>globular jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa Gang</td>
<td>Ngá Gong</td>
<td>瓦缸</td>
<td>pottery barrel</td>
<td>barrel jar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the Gin Lin Hydraulic Mining Site (35JA5003) on the Little Applegate River in southwestern Oregon, roughly 38 miles northwest of Yreka, archaeologists uncovered the remains of a black-tailed deer, which LaLande (1981:115) suggested may be evidence of reliance upon native game species. At the Jacksonville Chinese Quarter site in Oregon, mammal remains recovered consisted of deer, black bear (lower limb and paw segments, possibly used for medicine), and fox, in addition to cattle, sheep or goat, domesticated pig, and domestic cat. Species of fowl in the collection that might have been hunted locally included pigeon and turkey. Local fish species, such as salmon and trout, were also identified in the collection (Johnson 2016).

Historical photographs of Yreka’s Chinese community show backyard areas with numerous sheds and other outbuildings, as well as fenced-in areas, suggesting that individuals may have owned livestock and tended gardens. Gardeners are listed as occupations for the 1880 and 1920 censuses. Items related to gardening and/or lawn maintenance in the Yreka Collection include a sprinkler nozzle, flowerpots, axe heads, saw blades, rakes, and a hoe blade.

**Healthcare Practices**

Analysis of healthcare related items in the Yreka Chinatown Collection reveals that residents relied on a combination of traditional and non-traditional (Anglo-European) medicines. Healthcare items in the Yreka Chinatown Collection consist of medicine vials and bottles, extract bottles, and a syringe (Figure 8). Of the 115 medicine vials in the collection, most are Chinese in origin and are small, hand blown aqua glass vials.

According to Armstrong (1979:236), older archaeological reports often refer to these items as “opium bottles.” However, this is a misnomer as they did not contain opium but rather single doses of medicinal pills, powder, or oil. Chinese glass medicine vials were made as tubes and then dipped into molten glass, and afterwards shaped on a hard surface to produce a rectangular form (Lister and Lister 1989:70). The vial was snapped off the tube, which resulted in a sheared neck or lip of the bottle (Lister and Lister 1989:70). Bottles were securely sealed with a wax-covered cork. Paper labels were affixed to the outside of the bottle, indicating their contents and the name of the manufacturer. However, these peeled off easily under certain conditions and were replaced with embossing (Go 2003:113).

While paper labels on Chinese medicine bottles are frequently not preserved in the archaeological record, studies of Chinese medicine bottles in museum collections can provide clues as to what ailments they were used to treat. A bottle from the Asian American Comparative Collection at the University of Idaho Laboratory of Anthropology in Moscow, Idaho, with red paper label and wax seal, contained a remedy for the treatment of colds and stomach discomfort, while another was for protecting the eyes. In some cases, they claimed to treat a range of ailments. For example, a bottle of “Po-Sum-On Oil,” also in the Asian American Comparative Collection, was used to treat colds, congestion, skin irritations, and upset stomach (Heffner 2012:126).

Recent chemical analyses of residue left behind on medicine bottles in the Yreka Chinatown Collection has provided clues as to what medicines were being consumed by the Chinese community and what types of ailments were being treated. Three bottles contained traces of what are known as “stone drugs” in Chinese medicine, mineral-based medicines that were used to treat a variety of ailments. Examples in the Yreka
Chinatown Collection include cinnabar (mercuric sulfide), used to treat a variety of bacterial and fungal infections; realgar (arsenic disulfide), used as a bactericide, detoxicant, and anti-parasitic agent; and chalcopyrite, used in Chinese medicine to regulate and strengthen the liver (Bodley 2020; Price 2020a, 2020b).

European American medicine bottles include both patent and prescription medicines. A patent medicine is a “preparation to which sole manufacturing rights are claimed by virtue of owning the formula,” rather than truly patented with the U.S. Patent Office (Bingham 1994:5). Patent medicines typically contained a mixture of ill-tasting herbs mixed with alcohol, water, and sugar. Makers of these “medicines” claimed they could treat a variety of ailments. As the name implies, prescription medicines required a doctor’s written prescription to obtain, while patent medicines did not. Patent medicines in the collection include Dr. J. Hostetter’s Stomach Bitters, McMillan and Kester’s Essence of Jamaican Ginger, Fletcher’s Castoria, and Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup, among others. A prescription bottle from Churchill’s Drug Store, a pharmacy that operated in Yreka from 1898 through 1932, is also in the collection (East 2015). While some patent medicines were designed to treat specific ailments, such as malarial fever, indigestion, and coughs, many claimed to cure a whole host of ailments.

Yreka’s Chinese community may have chosen to consume Anglo-European medicines as they were inexpensive, easy to obtain, and did not require a prescription (and therefore, a visit to the doctor). The high alcohol content of certain patent medicines (such as Dr. J. Hostetter’s Stomach Bitters, which could have up to 40 percent alcohol) may have led to its use as a substitute for alcohol, or as a cooking wine. According to Toulouse (1970:63), bitters originated in the early 1700s as a means of classifying whiskeys and gins in the medicinal field by adding herbs and various flavoring substances, which removed them from the whiskey tax bracket. This would be handy for those wishing to enjoy an alcoholic beverage during the Prohibition Era.

The collection also contained small, colorless glass homeopathic vials. Homeopathy was first introduced by Samuel Hahnemann in 1810 and involved administering tiny doses of medicine (Bivins 2007:89-90).
Homeopathic treatments were made from a mixture of herbs, minerals, and animal parts whose chemical properties produced symptoms similar to the disease being treated. Homeopathic medicines were sold as individual vials or in kits for home use with instructions for proper administration.

Other artifacts in the Yreka Collection whose primary use was likely not medicinal but may have been used for medicinal purposes consist of opium smoking paraphernalia (opium brass cans, ceramic pipe bowls, glass opium lamps, pipe connectors, opium pipe repair holes), scored stoneware cooking pans, and CBGS liquor jars. In addition to its use as a “recreational drug,” opium was also considered to be a general analgesic and was frequently used to treat indigestion (Benedict 2011:108-109). There are 225 items related to opium smoking in the Yreka Collection, including 143 opium pipe bowls (see Figure 9), 54 opium can fragments, 12 glass opium lamps, seven opium pipe connectors, and two opium pipes with repair holes. Several unglazed shallow cooking pans with repeated score marks on the interior of the vessel are in the collection (Figure 10).

Similar vessels have been found at other Chinese sites, including American River Chinatown in Folsom, California, the Woodland Opera House site, and China Camp. These vessels were used for macerating vegetables, preparing sauces, and grinding herbs, and are still sold for use in kitchens today. There are 357 CBGS liquor jars in the Yreka Collection. These are typically teardrop shaped vessels with narrow necks, flared rims, and a dark brown glaze. In addition to holding wine for cooking and for drinking, these jars could also contain medicine distilled in alcohol. These are referred to as “tonic wines” and contained herbal ingredients distilled in liquor and were thought to have restorative powers. They could increase one’s energy flow (or qi), enhance blood circulation, strengthen the kidneys, and treat rheumatism. Mei Gui Lu/Mui Guai Lo, or rose-essence wine, was a tonic/medicinal wine that contained rosebuds and crystal sugar and was about 50 percent alcohol by volume. Chinese rosebuds were used to treat stomach pain, indigestion, poor appetite, depression, irritability, and other ailments (Shi et al. 2010).

Immigration and Ethnicity

Research issues centered on immigration and ethnicity appear frequently in historical archaeological studies. Historians have long addressed social inequality and the role of race, class, and gender. Archaeologists have tended towards identifying ethnographic traits or markers in the archaeological record and how these have evolved over time. While earlier studies from the 1980s and 1990s on overseas Chinese households focused heavily on quantifying levels of assimilation/acculturation, later works have adopted a more holistic, agency-oriented approach that “investigates how cultural practices participate in the ongoing production of identities and communities, and, in doing so, to understand ethnicity as historically constituted, sustained, and transformed” (Voss and Allen 2008:5-6). Ethnic diversity may be evident in deposits associated with a variety of themes and could add to a reconstruction of the lifeways of the region’s inhabitants. Research questions relevant to the study of immigration and ethnicity among Yreka’s Chinese community include:

1. How was the Chinese community of Yreka treated by the Anglo-European community?
2. Is there evidence regarding links to a homeland, import of specialized food or items from a homeland, and/or maintenance of traditional culture?
3. Are ethnically distinct technologies evident at the site?

The arrival of a group of 35 Chinese individuals in Yreka on May 15, 1853, was greeted with a mixture of welcome and disgust by the community. Some viewed them as industrious, thrifty, and having immaculate hygiene, while others viewed them as lazy, immoral, and filthy. In her thesis, Californians and Chinese: The First Decade, Wood (1961:19) observed that, “In California a Chinaman was either an exotic being or a freak – he was rarely a person.” This mindset was used to justify indiscriminate acts of violence against the Chinese that often went unpunished and the use of increasing (legalized) discrimination.

Newspapers regularly related acts of violence towards the Chinese in mining communities throughout the west. Chinese residents were frequently the victims of name calling, hair pulling, and rock throwing, often by Anglo-European youths (Scheld 1965; Smith 1953; Speegle 1931). During a July 4th celebration in 1856...
Figure 9. Orange-glazed opium pipe bowl with Chinese characters. Photograph by Brian Baer.

Figure 10. Cooking pan fragments with incised lines on interior. Photograph by Brian Baer.
in Yreka, several drunken white miners terrorized the Chinese community, vandalizing their homes and
harassing and beating up the occupants.

After several fires, for which the Chinese were often blamed, Yreka’s Chinese community was forced
to move to the outskirts of town to the area between Yreka Creek and the railroad tracks. This pattern of
“driving out” Chinese from their communities happened in towns across the western United States. Though
physically segregated from the rest of the town by Yreka Creek, important celebrations such as Chinese New
Year’s drew Chinese and non-Chinese spectators from the town as well as surrounding mining communities.
Festivities included fireworks, a Chinese band, a parade, indulging in wine and sweets, and a “bomb toss”
where participants would compete to see who could carry a lit firework to the temple.

Yreka’s Chinese community maintained their links to their homeland through the consumption of
traditional foods stored in CBGS storage and food jars, prepared using metal cleavers, cooked in shallow
stoneware pans or large iron woks, served on Chinese porcelain tableware, and eaten with chopsticks and
soup spoons. White earthenware in a variety of forms (plates, bowls, tea tugs, mugs, soup tureens), forks,
and knives were also used in the preparation, serving, and consumption of food. The presence of numerous
small, aqua Chinese medicine vials as well as Anglo-European patent medicine bottles indicate a blending
of two very different styles of medical treatment. Gambling, which has been a prominent part of Chinese
culture since as early as 2,300 BC and was thought to have been invented in China (Chang 2004), provided
a relaxing outlet after a hard day in the mines and a way for Yreka’s Chinese community to strengthen and
maintain friendships and community ties. Gambling items in the Yreka Collection include gaming pieces,
coins, dominos, and a poker chip.

CONCLUSION

Reanalysis of the more than 13,000 artifacts recovered from the 1969 Yreka Chinatown excavations
and associated documentary materials has provided a better understanding of the daily lives of Yreka’s
Chinese community. The availability of digital reference materials, mapping software, and residue analysis
has allowed for a more in-depth interpretation of the collection than what was done previously, and has aided
in addressing research questions related to land use, economic strategies, dietary preferences, healthcare
practices, and immigration and ethnicity. The artifacts and documents tell a story of a community that endured
numerous natural and manmade disasters, physical violence, and legalized discrimination.

The Yreka Chinatown Collection is one of three collections located at SACRF containing materials
from excavations of Chinese immigrant communities in the State of California, the other two being from
the Woodland Opera House site and China Camp Village in San Rafael. All three collections contain a rich
array of materials that, through additional research and laboratory analysis, can contribute to the telling of
the story of the Chinese experience in California.

I am currently in the process of conducting additional research on the Yreka Collection, including
artifact translation, further residue analysis, and high-resolution photography. From this research, I plan to
publish more specialized technical studies and eventually develop an online exhibit featuring photographs
of unique artifacts from the collection to allow individuals to experience the collection remotely. Through
all of this, I hope to be able to better aid the Chinese American community in connecting with their past.

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