

"Chinese Women in Evanston 1869 to 1900" by A. Dudley Gardner

There are three generalizations that can be made about Wyoming in the second half of the nineteenth century. First, in Wyoming Chinese were a distinct minority. Second, in Wyoming the ratio of Chinese women to men was even less than the male to female ratio in most frontier communities. Third, very few Chinese children lived in Wyoming.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, Chinese communities in the northern Rocky Mountains and Plains could be characterized by one basic generalization; few Chinese women and children lived in these communities. Alberta, Canada, in 1891, had one Chinese woman living in the Province and



by 1901, when the next census was taken, she had moved away. More typical of the interior west were places like Silver Bow County, Montana, or Rock Springs, Wyoming, where one or more women lived amidst a predominately male population. In Rock Springs, for example, there were 335 Chinese men in 1880 and only one woman. Having given these generalizations, there are some exceptions. Specifically, in the 1800s, in places like Helena, Montana and, Evanston, Wyoming, Chinese families and women made up at least a small portion of the population.

In this paper we will focus on the Chinese women who lived in Evanston, Wyoming, from 1869 to 1900. We will look briefly at the historical record, then at the material cultural remains that distinguish women's spaces from male spaces at the Evanston Chinatown. Specifically, we will look at jewelry pieces found in excavation and then show that in at least one case in the area excavated at the Evanston Chinatown one Chinese woman and children lived within a space belonging to a high-status family.

In 1869, when Chinese first arrived in Wyoming to stay, the special census reported one female in the territory. Yet since the population of Chinese in the territory was also small, the ratio of men to women was relatively high, seven to one (or 14%). Granted this data set is small. Given this small data set, this figure might seem not significant or spurious. But the interesting thing is that for Evanston, Wyoming, as the number of Chinese increased and a Chinatown formed, the ratio of males to females remained at or near this 14% level.



In 1880 Chinese women represented 14% of the population of Evanston. By 1900, Evanston women represented 9% of the population. By comparison, in 1880, in the much larger Chinatown at Rock Springs, only one woman lived. Expressed as a percentage, this would be .003 percent or 335 to 1. It appears that in 1900 no Chinese women remained in Rock Springs. The difference is striking, but most Chinese villages along the southern tier of the state had no immigrant women from China living within the smaller mining and railroad communities. Many of the smaller villages ranged from 6 to 30 individuals in size. More importantly, some of the smaller railroad section camps, or towns, were made up almost entirely of Chinese immigrants.

At Evanston some intriguing trends emerged. The average age of the females living in town was 18.45 in 1880 and 30.75 years of age in 1900. In 1870 no female children lived in Wyoming. In 1880 nearly half the town of Evanston's female population was under 14 years of age. Thirty-three percent of these females were born in the United States or Wyoming. Interestingly, where immigration data is available, regarding the age females that came to the United States and found their way to Wyoming entered the country at the average age of 14 years 6 months. However, and this is an important however, data is available in the census records for only three females who emigrated to the United States and settled in Wyoming, thus the small data sample precludes making any generalization regarding the age at which Chinese women living in Wyoming first immigrated into this nation. It is known that like the male population in Evanston, the average age in the census slowly rose, showing that there were few births to Chinese women in Evanston after 1880, and also there were fewer younger female immigrants entering the area.

Finding material cultural remains from women and children who occupied such a numerical minority is



difficult at best. But at Evanston, Wyoming, archaeologists from Western Wyoming Community College (WWCC) have uncovered items such as fasteners, clothing articles, and jewelry that indicate the presence of women in at least two

structures excavated between 1993 and 1997.

The most distinctive pieces of jewelry recovered during excavations that can be attributed to women are earrings. Photographs of Chinese women in Evanston show women wearing earrings similar to the ones uncovered in excavation. Other jewelry items uncovered in excavation are less useable as indicators of gender. However, the earrings recovered, as well as the other jewelry items uncovered, come from one living space that posses an internal courtyard. Based on the gold, silver, Ming Dynasty ceramics, jade fragments, variety and number of coins recovered, and sheer quantity of artifacts found in this one area, we contend that the occupants had a relatively high economic status--especially when compared to the Chinese coal miner's quarters north of Evanston at Almy and even railroad laborers homes inside the Evanston Chinatown.

Based on the excavations conducted in the Evanston Chinatown, we do know that at least one female lived in this higher status structure, and if we could correlate the census and historic 1890 Sanborn maps together, we might state this more empirically. We do know that in 1880 women in Evanston Chinatown lived in households consisting of two to four females. Unfortunately, the Sanborn maps do not correlate to the census

records and also were produced in the 1890s thus creating a problem in correlating available census records to existing maps. We can, however, correspond the Sanborn maps to where the archaeological excavation grids. The artifacts we can attribute as belonging to women came from one area. In this case women lived within one of the larger structures in town. It also appears that in the structure excavated several entrepreneurial efforts were undertaken. However, this is one case, as noted below their are cases where it appears women may be living in substandard housing even by nineteenth century standards.



In general, and this generalization should change or at least be refined with further excavation and research, at the Evanston Chinatown it appears women with families were married to high-status males in Evanston. The married women in the 1880 census lived with husbands who either were Chinese community leaders, merchants, or professional men. This pattern is seen throughout the West.

Conversely, at Evanston, based on historical records, there were smaller structures housing women Chinese prostitutes. It appears, from the historical records, that women at Evanston did not always occupy the larger structures. The interesting thing is that by the turn of the century one of the prostitutes succeeded in becoming an entrepreneur involved in several different businesses. "China Mary" as she was called, became the first woman to purchase property in Evanston. And there is some indication that she was the first Chinese person to own property north of Chinatown. As indicated in historic photographs from the early twentieth century, "China Mary" at the time of her death she lived in a relatively large house. To date China Mary's home and business have not been excavated, and archaeological excavations would go a long way in determining Mary's overall material wealth and the size of the space she controlled for her own use.

Much more needs to be done to document the use of space by Chinese women at Evanston. But it is clear that at least some Chinese women achieved a high degree of status earlier in nineteenth-century Wyoming than historians once thought. The amount, extent, and nature of upward mobility of women were initially limited by Chinese cultural norms and by the dominant American society, but the successes the women in Evanston achieved were testaments to their abilities and is even more impressive in light of the dual problem of being born in a society that was male dominated. Moreover, these women lived on a frontier where in the words of one Chinese man: "As individuals our work ethic was admired, but we were collectively hated."

Chinese

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The Number of Chinese Women in Uinta County, Wyoming from 1869 to 1900

Name	Age	Marital Status	Length of Residency in the U.S.	Occupation
Carter County 1869				
Hop See Healy	18	nd	10	Washer
Total Chinese Population Carter County 1869 = 7 (Total 1 Female or 14%)				
Uinta County				
Evanston 1870	0	0	0	0
Evanston 1880				
Lux Shew	34	M	nd	Keeping House
Quin Lex	4	S	nd	At Home
Qua Kein	2	S	nd	At Home
Sun Foy	14	S	nd	Servant
Kom Moon	30	M	nd	Prostitute
Neig Gee	28	M	nd	Prostitute
Ye Fun	33	M	nd	Prostitute
Yung Cow	22	M	nd	Prostitute
Maug Chung	29	M	nd	Keeping House
Yan Toy	14	S	nd	Servant
Ah Won	25	M	nd	Keeping House
Ah Luu	7	S	nd	At Home
Ah Wong	S	S	nd	At Home
Ah Woung	2	S	nd	Daughter
Total Chinese Population Evanston 1880 = 105 (Total 15 Females or 14%)				
Evanston 1900				
Len Ah	44	M	20	House Keeper
Ho Ah	23	S	11	Roomer

Lung Kar(en)	35	M	nd	[At Home]
Du Yu Yock	21	M	nd	[At Home]
Total Chinese Population Evanston 1900 = 42 (Total 4 Females or 9%)				

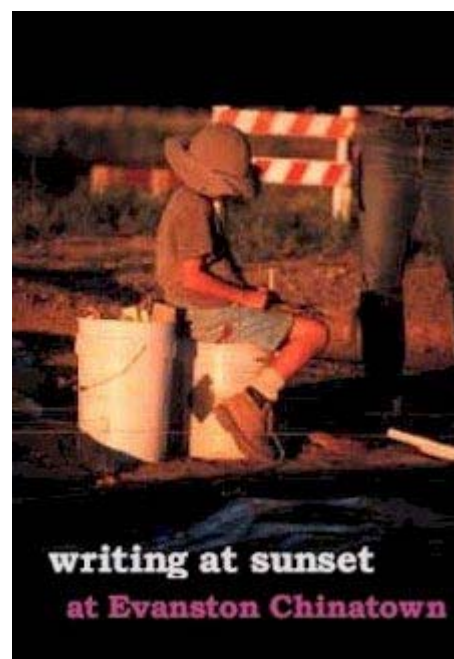
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Volunteer Drew Hutchinson taking notes at the Evanston Chinatown

