



[History](#)

[FAQ's](#)

[Links](#)

[Rights & Permissions: Homework](#)

© 2014 CPRR.org. Use of this Web site constitutes acceptance of the [User Agreement](#) which permits personal use web viewing only; no copying; arbitration; no warranty.

FUSANG: THE CHINESE WHO BUILT AMERICA: *THE CHINESE RAILROAD MEN*

By **STAN STEINER**

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK, HAGERSTOWN SAN FRANCISCO LONDON

Copyright © 1979 by Stan Steiner. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Reproduced by permission. *Courtesy Vera John-Steiner, Ph.D.*

"Stan Steiner is a national treasure. He is one of our most eloquent defenders of the Faith, the Faith in the humanity of all men and women everywhere, and of those especially who helped to build America. In Fusang he does this once again for that wonderful people, the Chinese. It is, perhaps, his most moving book."

—ASHLEY MONTAGU

"Fusang is a book of marvels—which we Chinese Americans performed as we built this country. America, our country all along. We are an integral, heroic part of her history, and Stan Steiner gives the facts, the history, the research to confirm what we should not have forgotten during Exclusion. At last—a book that recognizes and celebrates our discovery and building of America. We will embrace this book as part of our arsenal of citizenship papers."

—MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

"I am sorry to have to say to you that I think you are making a grave error in listing anything on your website by Stan Steiner. His work is so ludicrous as to make any knowledgeable historian shake his head in disbelief. Especially his [saying the Chinese lived in tents in winter while working in the Sierra](#). There is not one shred of evidence that I have found in my very extensive studies of the building of the first railroad across the Sierra to support anything even close to what Steiner wrote. He is the very worst historian it has been my misfortune to read about. ... I most sincerely regret that you are using Steiner's trash. It takes away from the marvelous work you have done."

—LYNN FARRAR, VALUATION ENGINEER (RETIRED), SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD

Views Along the Line of the Pacific Rail Road.

No. 7148 "John Chinaman on the RailRoad."

Union Pacific Rail Road.

Published by E. & H. T. Anthony & Co.

[Chapter X, pp. 128-140.]

THE CHINESE RAILROAD MEN

Men of China (the Chinese railroad foreman said) were skilled at work like the big job. . . . Their ancestors had built fortresses in the Yangtze gorges, carved and laid the stones for the Great Wall [of China].
—The Great Iron Trail

There was no train to Jerusalem, and the Lord of Life rode into the city in the humblest guise, upon a donkey.
—The World on Wheels, Chicago, 1874

AND THEN the day came when the final spike, the "Golden Spike," was to be hammered down to bold the last length of track. The iron rails had spanned a continent. In celebration of the occasion, the dignitaries came—bankers and railroad tycoons, politicians and railroad men—to be photographed at the uniting of the nation. Of the hundreds of people in that memorable photograph taken at Promontory Point in Utah, on May 10, 1869, there was one large group who were wholly invisible. □

The Chinese . . .

Nowhere to be seen were the thirteen thousand railroad men from China who had dug the tunnels, built the roadbeds, and laid the track for half of the transcontinental line—that of the Central Pacific Railroad—crossing the most precipitous mountains and torturous deserts of the West. These Chinese workmen had become faceless. They had disappeared.

One oil painting of the event later symbolically depicted three railroad men crouching beside the tracks as they drove in the Golden Spike. Two of the three were Chinese.

That [famous painting](#) was reprinted in hundreds of thousands of copies; it proudly hung in saloons and brothels throughout the West for years. And yet, in the reproduction of the painting a curious thing had happened. Beneath the painting there was a drawing in which the people who had gathered for the joining of the tracks were outlined, each face numbered, so the viewers might identify who was who. But there was no drawing of the three railroad men.

Once again, the Chinese railroad men had been rendered faceless. They had vanished from history.

Men of China not only built the western half of the first transcontinental railroad, they built the whole or part of nearly every railroad line in the West. In spite of that, or perhaps because of it, their labors were belittled and

their heroism disparaged for a century afterward; the white workers on the western railroads were resentful of the skill and strength of the "little yellow men" whom they contemptuously compared to midgets and monkeys.

From the beginning, the white railroad men had ridiculed the young men of China as too "effeminate" to do a "real man's work," such as laying iron rails. They were too "delicate." They had "too small hands." They were much too small. □ A railroad historian reflected the popular prejudice of the time when he described how "the Chinese marched through the white camps like a weird procession of midgets."

So convinced were the white railroad men that these "celestial monkeys" could not do the work of white men that when [James Strobridge](#), the tough-minded Irish work boss of the Central Pacific, was ordered to hire Chinese men he exploded with rage: "I will not boss Chinese. I will not be responsible for work done on the road by Chinese labor. From what I've seen of them, they're not fit laborers anyway. I don't think they can build a railroad."

His contempt was a commonplace. When Leland Stanford, one of the owners of the Central Pacific, was elected governor of California, he condemned the Chinese emigrants as a "degraded" people who were the "dregs of Asia." They were unfit for honest labor.

The "lack of manhood" of the men from Kwangtung was evident not only in their diminutive size, but in the ways they dressed and bathed. In the rugged frontier camps, after work they religiously washed in hot bathtubs made from empty whiskey kegs. Every man soaped and rinsed himself "like a woman," in "flower water," and emerged "smelling of perfume." Surely to the Yankees from the puritan East who were roughing it in the wilderness, and to the peasants from Europe to whom bathing was an aristocratic vice, these habits were suspiciously feminine.

Stranger still, and more suspect, were the odd ways they ate. It was said "the Celestials devoured mice and rats." In their work camps their cuisine was even more exotic. They refused to eat the manly diet of beans and beef that the white men consumed. Instead they imported their food from China: dried oysters, dried fish, dried abalone, dried fruits, dried mushrooms, dried seaweed, dried crackers and candies, and an endless variety of roasted, sweet and sour, and dried meats, poultry, and pork, rices and teas. Each group of twelve to twenty Chinese workmen had its own cook, who prepared dishes to fit the local palate. And each cook had the duty not only of preparing these feasts of "Un-Christian foods," but of brewing the barrels of tea that had to be served all day long in tiny cups such as "ladies see fit to use."

In these customs of the Chinese the Yankees imagined dark, mysterious rituals. These men from China were not merely "heathens," they turned ordinary things into "heathen" and somehow "feminine" practices that were deeply disturbing to the men of the frontier.

And yet the dreams of conquest of the railroad owners were more powerful than their workmen's prejudices. Though the Central Pacific had been founded in 1861 to construct the western section of the dreamed—of transcontinental railroad by 1865, it had succeeded in laying only thirty-one miles of track. Not only were the owners humiliated by the lack of progress, but the work was frustrated by the lack of responsible workmen. Strobridge needed five thousand men, he said, but his work crews rarely numbered eight hundred. Even these were untrustworthy and worse: The Sacramento Union sarcastically referred to these white workers as the "enterprising cutthroats" who either ran off to the gold camps or preferred to work at "robbing Sacramentans at the alley corners." Those who did stay on the job were more trouble than those who did not, for they tended to be "drunken and wayward."

"Hire Chinese!" was the order of the railroad's General Superintendent Charles Crocker.

Strobridge, a stubborn Vermont man, unwillingly hired fifty Chinese workmen; he assigned them to menial jobs such as filling dump carts. They were too "frail" to swing a jack hammer, he insisted.

On the day these men were at last permitted to work at grading the roadbed for the tracks, it was reported that "the coolies' right of way was longer and was smoother than any white crew's." It was embarrassing, for the Chinese were so inexperienced that many had never been on a railroad or even seen one.

Enraged, the white crews vowed to avenge their shame. In the days that followed, they not only worked at top speed, but voluntarily halved their lunch break. Still, at the end of a week the roadbeds of the Chinese workmen were the longest of "any gang on the line." The white railroad men "who wouldn't work within a hundred rods of them" threatened to strike or quit, and many did.

An observer wrote that this was surely "the cruelest blow of all to the ego of the whites."

The muscular young men from China were given the jobs that the whites had abandoned. "Wherever we put them, we found them good," said the delighted Crocker. "And they worked themselves into our favor to such an extent, we found if we were in a hurry for a job of work, it was better to put Chinese on it at once." Even the stubborn Strobridge barked, "Send up more coolies."

And they came as the gold miners had come before them, from the same regions of Kwangtung province on the Canton delta, mostly from the sea-swept maritime districts of Sunwui and Toishan, in the area known as Sze Yup. They came by the thousands and tens of thousands. So many young men wished to come that the ships of the Pacific Mail Line, which brought most of them, were often overloaded by their captains with a third too many passengers. At the inevitable congressional investigation of this lawlessness, the captains were redundantly accused of greed, though no one asked the young men of Kwangtung to testify as to why they were so eager to come to America that they crowded onto the obviously overloaded ships.

Of these men it is said that most were the sons of farmers, but on the land of their fathers, near the coast, the traditions of the seas were as alive as the sea's winds. These were the lands where the seamen and adventurers of China had come from for centuries, and these young men were aggressive and pugnacious. Even more than the gold miners, they seemed to enjoy, to relish, to seek after the challenge of unknown and exotic foreign lands and the adventures they offered. And working on the railroad they found them.

On the undulating hills of those ridges of rock that form the spine of the Sierra Nevada foothills, the serpentine iron rails climbed in winding arcs. The ravines and valleys in between had to be filled by untold tons of dirt or be bridged by great trestles. Some of these trestles, such as the one at Deep Gulch, rose one hundred feet high and were five hundred feet long. They were built of logs, felled and tied by hand, for there were no steam or power tools; even the tons of dirt had to be moved entirely by band. In awe of the strength and skill of the men from China who did this work, Albert Richardson of the New York Tribune, who had been Horace Greeley's most distinguished correspondent during the Civil War, attempted to describe the epic scene:

"They [the Chinese] were a great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel. The rugged mountains looked like stupendous ant-hills. They swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, wheeling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth . . ."

Soon the "great army" was to face ever greater mountains. On a high, sheer cliff towering above the gorge of the American River, the roadbed of the railroad was to climb fourteen hundred feet up the sides of the precipitous rock face. There were no ledges. There was not even a goat trail. The blasting crews chipped away at the seventy-five-degree incline for days. Inch by inch, they advanced less than a foot on some days.

The tale is told of how one day a Chinese work foreman came to see Strobridge. He politely waited, hat in hand, until he could speak. "Maybe, we can be of some help," he supposedly said, "My people, you know, built the Great Wall of China! Of stones."

The carving of roads that clung to cliffsides, like bird nests on inaccessible ledges, was a very ancient art to Chinese engineers. One spectacular reminder of their skill was depicted in the famous painting of Emperor Hsuan tsung's retreat from his Tang dynasty capital, in 775 A.D. Upon a mountain in the painting there is a winding road that is supported by logs and dug into the side of a sheer rock face; it is perched on the mountain as though suspended in air.

Feats of road construction such as this had been commonplace in China for thousands of years. If the ability of the men from Kwangtung to hang from cliffs at dizzying heights and to blast a road out of midair seemed amazing to their Yankee bosses, who "sneered in disbelief" at the thought, it was not new to Chinese technology.

Skeptical as ever, Strobridge gave his begrudging approval. He had nothing to lose.

□ The men wove great baskets, large enough to hold several workmen, of tall reeds and vines. On the waist-high baskets they knotted four eyelets, in the directions of the Four Winds, and inscribed them with the proper prayers. Ropes were tied to the eyelets and the baskets, each holding two or three men, were slowly lowered from the edge of the cliff down to the site of the marked roadbed hundreds of feet below. In the swaying wind, the Chinese workmen set □ dynamite blasts in the rock face and swung away for their lives with all their might. Many fell below. Many □ died. But in a few weeks the roadbed had been blasted from the rock. They were "becoming expert in drilling, blasting and other rock work," said the railroad's engineer, Sam Montague.

The summit lay ahead.

In the icy winds that whistled through the infamous Donner Pass, which rose to 7,042 feet in the High Sierras, the crews were snowed under during the winter of 1865. The engineers had planned a tunnel that was to be dug beneath the summit, exactly 1,659 feet long and wide enough for two tracks. But the rock was so hard the "blasting powder merely shot back out of the holes." □ And the Chinese tunnelers were forced to camp, in thin canvas tents, under ten- to twenty-foot snow drifts. For month after month, they lived like seals, huddled together in padded cotton clothes. Several of their camps were swept away by avalanches in the arctic oblivion of those mountains, and the dead were not recovered until the snow thawed.

Spring brought a renewal of work on the tunnels. There was not one but fifteen tunnels to be dug and hundreds of ravines to be crossed before the railroad could go through. And by the winter of 1866 the tracks still had not reached the summit. Not willing to wait for another spring, the railroad owners ordered that three locomotives be pulled over the mountains by band. It seemed an impossible task.

In the snow that was higher than a man, hundreds of young men from Kwangtung bitched themselves to mule teams that were to attempt this feat. The men cleared a path two hundred feet wide through the forests on the mountainsides. "Not Yankee trees" is the way an official described the

giant trees. And yet "the tiny lumbermen" cut a roadway in the snow that was miles long. On log sleighs that they greased with pork lard, they pulled the locomotives and an entire wagon train of highly volatile nitroglycerin and supplies up the mountainside.

Said a historian of the railroad: "The yellow man had proven his superiority by hard labor."

In their desperation to span the mountains before their rival railroad builders did, the owners of the Central Pacific forced the Chinese crews to work from dawn to dark, seven days a week. Still, the Irish crews of the Union Pacific had the advantage of easier terrain and wealthier owners. That meant better wages and entertainments.

On the dry flats of the deserts of Utah, the Chinese crews of the Central Pacific, coming from the West, and the Irish crews of the Union Pacific, coming from the East, met head on. They literally blew each other up. In the race of the railroads to lay the most track (the government subsidized each mile at \$16,000 to \$42,000, plus hundreds of millions of acres of right-of-way), the rivals ordered their crews to lay parallel roadbeds for hundreds of miles. In grading their roadbed, the "Irishmen were in the habit of firing their blasts without giving warning to the Chinamen," reported a surveyor for the Union Pacific, Grenville Dodge, and "from this cause several Chinamen were severely hurt." The Chinese crews, "appreciating the situation," responded in kind. One day they set off a dynamite charge right above the Irish crews, and several Irishmen were buried alive.

"From that time the Irish laborers showed more respect for the Chinamen, and there was no further trouble," said Dodge.

In the race of the railroads to outdo one another, these Chinese crews were to distinguish themselves in more productive ways. Crocker, in bravado and some say on a bet, announced that on a single day, April 28, the Chinese crews would lay ten miles of track; the "Ten Mile Day," he named it. Together with eight Irish rail handlers, they did just that, laying ten miles and fifty-six feet of new track, spiking 3,520 rail lengths to 25,800 wooden ties.

The feat was a fitting finale to the completion of the great transcontinental track less than two weeks later. On Promontory Point, where the nation was joined together by the "iron nerves" of the iron rails and orators proclaimed "This way to India!" the historic event that created a truly United States was symbolized to a contemporary writer by the image of "the Anglo Saxon and the Celt met in friendly greeting [with] the tawny Asiatic—a fantasy that was more real than the fact.

Years later, in his [testimony](#) before the joint Special Subcommittee of the Congress in 1876-77, which was deciding whether the Chinese had the "right" to remain in the West they had pioneered and built, one of the railroad builders, West Evans, declared forthrightly: "I do not see how we could do the work we have done here without them; at least I have done the work [on the railroads] that would not have been done if it had not been for the Chinamen . . . work that I could not have done without them."

On the prairies and in the mountains of the West there were few railroads that these young men of Kwangtung did not build, in whole or in part. They helped build the Southern Pacific in the deserts of the southwest and the Northern Pacific in the forests of the northwest. They worked by the thousands upon the Canadian Pacific as well. They built the roadbeds and laid the track of almost every railroad from Texas to Alaska: the Atlantic and Pacific; the California Central and California Southern; Nevada's Virginia and Truckee; Eureka & Palisades; Carson and Colorado; and Nevada; California and Oregon; the Oregon Central; the Seattle and Walla Walla; Texas Pacific, and the Houston and Texas Central; the Alabama and Chattanooga; and numerous smaller lines.

And thousands of these young men gave their lives in the building of the railroads. The dead were never counted, nor have they been memorialized. Some twenty thousand pounds of bones were gathered from shallow graves along the roadbeds and rights-of-way, according to a newspaper of 1870 quoted in *The History of the Chinese in America*, by Philip Choy and H. Mark Lai. These bones of about twelve hundred Chinese who died in the building of the transcontinental line were eventually shipped home. But many others lie to this day in unmarked graves in every western state.

The ghosts of these Chinese railroad men hovered over the mountains and lingered beside the roadbeds and haunted the whistle-stop depots long after they had gone. On the prairies, where there was "not a tree nor living thing in sight," one early traveler on the transcontinental trains recalled coming upon a bowl decorated with "some quaint pattern for Chinese ware," like a specter of the past; and at Omaha, one day, he was surprised by the sight of a "steam caravan come in from what used to be 'forty years in the wilderness' region, direct from the Golden Gate." That, he said, was "a tea train from the Celestial Kingdom." Surely "the Iron Horse" was the "Angel of Abundance" and the "arm of Christendom," for "its mountain-eagle elocution" would carry civilization into the wilderness and "whistle [the] barbarism of the Orient down the wind." By 1874, the year this was written, the travelers on the transcontinental railroads had already forgotten that those Chinese men who were buried beside the roadbeds had laid many of the tracks they traveled on.

And it remained for a stranger from Europe to perceive the blindness of those white men who could not see the Chinese as humans. On his tour of America in 1879, the Scottish novelist Robert Louis Stevenson traveled to California in a third-class "immigrant car" on the Union Pacific Railroad. He grew troubled by the segregation of the Chinese railroad men in a separate car; but even more disturbing to him was the attitude of the white passengers toward those who had helped build the railroad they were traveling upon—"the stupid ill-feeling," he called it.

Of these white Americans' conceptions of the Chinese railroad men, Stevenson wrote: "They seemed never to have looked at them, listened to them, or thought of them, but hated them a priori." They did not see them at all.

Still, there were quiet nights along the rails when the ghosts emerged. On those nights, in the darkness, the history of the railroad men from China reappeared as an apparition, a folktale, a fantastic legend.

One of these folktales was reported in the Daily New Mexican of Santa Fe, New Mexico, on the twenty-seventh of March, in the year 1880.

At Galisteo Junction, the terminus of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, south of the territorial capital of New Mexico, the specter appeared. Soon after the arrival of the evening train from Santa Fe, the station operator and a few friends had taken a stroll along the tracks. Coming "from above them" in the sky they heard loud voices and, looking up, they were startled to see a "large balloon coming from the West"! Whoever was in the gondola of the balloon was talking in a strange language, "entirely unintelligible" to the people on earth.

The marvelous balloon was "monstrous in size," the newspaper said. More wondrous than its hugeness, though, was its design, for "it was in the

shape of a fish." Painted on its sides were "very elegant" and "fanciful characters" of an unknown but obviously Asian language, which added to its mystery.

As the fish-balloon sailed overhead, its mysterious occupants dropped two objects onto the desert below. One was a "magnificent flower" made from a "fine, silk-like paper," and the other was an earthen cup, perhaps a teacup, with a blue design.

Sounds of music and of laughter drifted down from the fishballoon. In the cool of the evening air it fluttered there, like a cloud, for a moment. Then, as silently as it had appeared over the Sierra Colorado mountains, it disappeared. It simply sailed away. On the evening of the following day a "collector of curiosities" on horseback happened to ride by the isolated depot in the desert. He bought the silklike flower and the cup for a large sum of money. Being a connoisseur of curiosities, he was asked where, in his learned opinion, he thought the fish-balloon might have come from, and he answered at once, without hesitation, that the "balloon must have come from Asia."

BIBLIOGRAPHY [pp. 244-248]

The Chinese Who Built America

No one to my knowledge has written anything that comes within a shadow of portraying the epic feat of the Chinese in the building of the West. Perhaps it is still too soon after the event to expect anything but shallow journalism and narrow scholarship. After all, so often the greatest literature of an era is not written until years, decades and sometimes centuries later.

In any event, few of the books I here recommend do justice to the nobility of their theme. They are all merely beginnings.

The sweeping drama of the Chinese endeavors in America has been most enthusiastically and heroically portrayed in two books that are not really books at all. One is the tersely and factually written outline, *History of the Chinese in America* by H. M. Lai and P. P. Choy (Chinese American Studies Planning Group, San Francisco, 1973), and the second is *A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus* edited by Thomas Chinn, H. M. Lai and P. P. Choy (Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969). Although the first covers a greater span of history, the second is written in greater detail.

Some of the histories hinted at by these outlines are elaborated in *The Life.-Influence and Role of the Chinese in the United States, 1776-1960* (Chinese Historical Society of America, 1976). These essays are taken from the proceedings of the Society's national conference held as a part of the Bicentennial celebration at the University of San Francisco.

The modern history of the Chinese in America begins with the Spanish conquest. Merchants and traders from China began arriving in the Americas in large numbers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the Spanish ships that crossed the Pacific, ships which the Chinese built. These voyages are described in *The Manila Galleons* by W. L. Schurz (Dutton, 1939). And further documentation is to be found in "The Chinese in Mexico City in 1635" by H. Dubs and R. S. Smith (*Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 1, 1941) and in "Notes on Chinese Abroad in the Late Ming and Early Manchu Periods" by C. R. Boxer (*Tien Hsia Monthly*, Vol. 9, Aug.-Dec., 1939). The previously mentioned *Europe and China* by G. F. Hudson also discusses the voyages of these early traders.

Once the crossings of the oceans became common, the explorations in both directions became common too. These are noted in the *History of California* by H. H. Bancroft, Vol. VII (San Francisco, 1890). The "opening" of the Pacific Northwest by the Chinese frontiersmen and settlers is described in the *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789 from China to the North*

West Coast of America by (Captain) John Meares (London, 1790). The story of the trade routes is expanded in *The Old China Trade* by Foster Rhea Dulles (New York, 1931), *Adventures to China: Americans in the Southern Seas* by James Kirker (Oxford, 1970), *The Rise of American Civilization* by Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard (Macmillan, 1927) and *Culture Contacts of the United States and China: 1784-1844* by George Danton (Columbia University, 1931).

The spirit of the people who later came from China to California is described judiciously by Mary Roberts Coolidge in *Chinese Immigration* (Holt, 1909; Arno, 1969). After all these years it is still to me the pre-eminent book on this subject, for it depicts the Chinese as integral to American history.

Fittingly, the history of the Chinese in America is to be found for the most part not in books about the Chinese as a minority but in books about American history. H. H. Bancroft's vast histories of the West are a good place to start the search, or one may begin with the chapter on "Asia and Africa in America" in the great historian's *Retrospection* (Bancroft, 1913). From there one may go to *Mining Camps: A Study in American Frontier Government* by C. Shinn (Scribners, 1884; Harper & Row, 1965), *The Mining Frontier* edited by M. Lewis (University of Oklahoma, 1967), *The Songs of the Gold Rush* edited by R. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter (University of California, 1965), *Pigtails and Gold Dust* by A. McLeod (Caxton, 1948), *Three Years in California* by J. D. Borthwick (Oakland, 1948), *Mining Frontier of the Far West* by R. W. Rodman (New York, 1963), *The Hard Rock Miners* by R. E. Lingenfelter (University of California, 1974) and many more.

And then there are the travelogues and accounts of personal journeys to the West, which often contain glimpses of the Chinese pioneers: *A California Tramp* by T. S. Kenderdine (Globe Printing House, Philadelphia, no date), *Across the Continent* by S. Bowles (Hurd and Houghton, 1866), *Across the Rocky Mountains* by L. Boyer (Wells-Sackett, 1878), *Beyond the Mississippi* by A. D. Richardson (Bliss, 1867), *California and the West* by L. V. Briggs (Wright and Potter, no date), *California* by M. P. Wilder (Wright and Potter, 1871) . . . The list goes on and on. It was my good fortune to discover many of these books, and many more, in the bibliography of Charles Dobie's *San Francisco Chinatown* (Appleton, 1936).

And for books on the Chinese railroadmen there are *The Great Iron Rail* by R. W. Howard (Putnam, 1962), *A Work of Giants: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* by W. G. Griswold (McGraw-Hill, 1962), *The Chinese Role in Building the Central Pacific* (Southern Pacific, 1966), *The Big Four* by Oscar Lewis (New York, 1938) and *A World on Wheels* by B. H. Taylor (S. C. Griggs, 1874).

And for the agricultural endeavor of the Chinese there are *California: A Book for Travellers and Settlers* by C. Nordhoff (New York, 1873) and *Factories in the Field* by Carey McWilliams (Boston, 1959).

Though it deals only with California, by far the widest-ranging book on the subject of these pioneers of the West is *Chinese Labor in California* by

Ping Chin (University of Wisconsin, 1967). It is a singular book. Nothing equals it except perhaps the collection of historical reprints and comments contained in that thin Bulletin of the Chinese Historical Society of America, under the direction and editorship of Thomas Chinn, the dean of all Chinese American historians.

One valuable and interesting addition to this sparse literature is the California Historical Society's quarterly for Spring 1978. They compiled a special edition on "The Chinese in California," featuring an overview by Thomas Chinn and some worthwhile articles, including "Chinese Sailors" by Robert Schwendinger and the "Diplomacy of Discrimination" by David Anderson.

But for the most part, as I have said, the history of the Chinese pioneers and builders of the West is still bidden in an occasional sentence and obscure paragraph in the dusty and forgotten old books of the last century. These bits of the past can be found only by an endless search through these lost books. Having searched through hundreds, perhaps thousands, I know.

Sometimes I dream that the whole story is told in books hidden in an archive in China. it is a comforting and recurring dream.

Most recently there has been a renewed stream, small but steady, of books on the problems the Chinese pioneers to the West faced once they arrived and on the attempt to eliminate them from American history. For reasons that would make an interesting book in itself many of these books portray not the achievement of the Chinese but the persecution they suffered, and many of them are written not from the point of view of the Chinese but from that of their persecutors.

Of these books, within the limitations of their approach, I was deeply impressed by *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* by Alexander Saxton (University of California, 1971), a sympathetic study of the human ironies involved in so inhuman a struggle. The

Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882 by Stuart Creighton Miller (University of California, 1969) is another excellent study, not of the Chinese pioneers but of their opponents. Less satisfying, to me, was *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* by Elmer C. Sandmeyer (University of Illinois, 1973), its most striking feature being a magnificent bibliography. *The Chinese Americans* by Stanford M. Lyman (Random House, 1974) seems to be written in a social science shorthand. Most disturbing to me, however, was *The Bitter Struggle* by Gunther Barth (Harvard University, 1964), a work I found wanting in both the author's attitudes and research, with a too easy acceptance of historical stereotypes.

And speaking of stereotypes, there is a wonderful conglomeration of these in Reverend Arthur Smith's nineteenth-century tome *Chinese Characteristics* (reprinted by Kennikat Press, 1970). The good reverend's naive racism may either amuse or anger, but in any case it is instructive. Perhaps as an antidote one may read the summary of prejudice and discrimination suffered by the Chinese in *Chink!* edited by Cheng-Tsu (World, 1972).

Naturally, the best histories will be those told by the people themselves. But they have just begun to tell them. One of these beginnings is *Longtime Californ'* by Victor G. and Betty de Barry Nee (Houghton Mifflin, 1974), a fine collection of first-person reminiscences and commentaries. Then there are local and regional collections, such as *Chinese Argonauts: An Anthology of Chinese Contributions to the Historical Development of Santa Clara County* edited by Gloria Sun Hom (Foothill Community College, 1971) and *Chinese American Workers: Past and Present* by the Getting Together Group of I Wor Kuen (San Francisco, no date). And those old photographs and prints in *The Chinese Working People in America* by the Wei Min She Labor Committee (United Front Press, San Francisco, no date) give a dramatic, if opinionated, panorama of the Chinese builders of the West.

Still, I feel, these books are but the barest of beginnings.

To me the story of the Chinese in the West is the proper subject for great novels, heroic dramas, epic poems and grandiose operas. As far as I know, these have not yet been written.

[Top](#)

Copyright © 1999-2006, CPRR.org. All rights reserved. [Last updated 8/1/2006]

Use of this Web site constitutes acceptance of the [User Agreement](#).
Click any image or link to accept.

[HOME](#) | [CHINESE RR WORKERS](#)

Customers who viewed this item also viewed. Page 1 of 1 Start overPage 1 of 1. This shopping feature will continue to load items. In order to navigate out of this carousel please use your heading shortcut key to navigate to the next or previous heading. Back. Fusang, the Chinese who built America. Stan Steiner. 4.6 out of 5 stars 3. "Fusang is a book of marvels" which we Chinese Americans performed as we built this country. America, our country all along. We are an integral, heroic part of her history, and Stan Steiner gives the facts, the history, the research to confirm what we should not have forgotten during Exclusion. At last" a book that recognizes and celebrates our discovery and building of America. We will embrace this book as part of our arsenal of citizenship papers." "maxine hong kingston. And it remained for a stranger from Europe to perceive the blindness of those white men who could not see the Chinese as humans. On his tour of America in 1879, the Scottish novelist Robert Louis Stevenson traveled to California in a third-class "immigrant car" on the Union Pacific Railroad. Fusang's wiki: Fusang (Chinese: 扶桑 ; pinyin: Fú Sāng) refers to several different entities in ancient Chinese literature, often either a mythological tree or a mysterious land to the East. In the Classic of Mountains and Seas and several cont... This legend has similarities with the Chinese tale of the fictional hero Houyi, sometimes referred to as the Archer, who is credited with saving the world by shooting down nine of the suns when one day all ten took to the air simultaneously. Some scholars have identified the bronze trees found at the archaeological site Sanxingdui with these Fusang trees. The term Fusang would later designate 'Japan' in Chinese poetry. Since Japanese Nihon (日本), lit.

Before the Chinese arrive to start building America (as Mexican Chinos), Steiner recaps (1) the legend of a fifth-century voyager who "may have" crossed the Pacific (but most likely didn't); (2) pioneering Chinese "explorations" of the West (i.e., they discovered us, not we them); (3) signs of possible early transoceanic contact, plus substantiated feats. of ancient Chinese mariners; (4) the origin and development of "myths" about China from Marco Polo (who saw the luxuries he expected to see, and missed the magnetic compass "Fusang is a book of marvels" which we Chinese Americans performed as we built this country. America, our country all along. We are an integral, heroic part of her history, and Stan Steiner gives the facts, the history, the research to confirm what we should not have forgotten during Exclusion. At last—a book that recognizes and celebrates our discovery and building of America. These bones of about twelve hundred Chinese who died in the building of the transcontinental line were eventually shipped home. But many others lie to this day in unmarked graves in every western state. The ghosts of these Chinese railroad men hovered over the mountains and lingered beside the roadbeds and haunted the whistle-stop depots long after they had gone. Start by marking "Fusang, the Chinese Who Built America" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving; Want to Read. We love your help. Let us know what's wrong with this preview of Fusang, the Chinese Who Built America by Stan Steiner. Problem: It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel. Thanks for telling us about the problem. Return to Book Page. Not the book you're looking for? Preview "Fusang, the Chinese Who Built America" by Stan Steiner. Fusang, the Chinese Who Built America. by. Stan Steiner.