The Chinese experience in Nevada began as early as 1855. In that year, Colonel John Reese, the Mormon founder of the town of Genoa, hired fifty Chinese workers from San Francisco to dig the Rose Ditch, a canal intended to carry water from the Carson River to the placer mines in Gold Canyon. Work on the ditch made the men aware of mining opportunities, and between 1856 and 1858 as many as 180 Chinese miners worked placer deposits at the mouth of Gold Canyon and established a settlement the non-Chinese residents of the area referred to as “Chinatown.” By 1859, however, the placer deposits had played out, and when Captain James H. Simpson traveled through the area he found only fifty Chinese residents with twelve houses and two stores remaining. Somewhat later, the name of the settlement changed to Dayton, but it remained an important stopover place for Chinese travelers on their way to other western mining camps from the 1860s into the 1880s.

In the next few decades, the Chinese population expanded throughout much of the state of Nevada. They lived in towns as well as in the countryside and engaged in a wide variety of occupations, including construction, service occupations, mining, lumbering, medicine, and

2. De Quille, Big Bonanza, p. 11.
business. During the past twenty-five years, several archaeological studies have contributed to our understanding of the Chinese who lived and worked in Nevada. Among the earliest was the Nevada State Museum's excavation of the Lovelock Chinatown in the mid-1970s. Another was the excavation of Shoshone Wells in the Cortez district in north-central Nevada, conducted in the early 1980s by the University of Nevada, Reno, and sponsored by the United States Bureau of Land Management. Yet another was Judy Knokey Thompson's archaeological study of one block (90-H) of the Virginia City Chinatown in 1984. More recently, archaeological studies have proliferated, offering new opportunities to explore various aspects of the lives of the Chinese in Nevada and compare them with the experiences of Chinese elsewhere in the West.

What appears to be the first urban "Chinatown" in Nevada sprang up in Virginia City shortly after the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859, although other Chinatowns emerged at the mining towns of Tuscarora, Pioche, Belmont, Austin, Treasure City, Hamilton, Candelaria, and Eureka, and the railroad towns of Winnemucca, Elko, Lovelock, and Reno. At its peak, the Chinese settlement in Virginia City numbered somewhat more than seven hundred. The 1860 federal census reported only fourteen Chinese residents, all males, out of a total population of 2,345 on the Comstock. Most of these men worked in the laundry business. Ten years later, the federal census listed 744 Chinese residents in all of Storey County, which includes both Gold Hill and Virginia City. Of these, 539 appear to have lived in Virginia City, all but sixty-two in the Chinatown enclave. The 1870 census reported the Comstock Chinese were engaged in a great variety of occupations. They included doctors, merchants, druggists, speculators,

laundry operators and workers, restaurant keepers, cooks and waiters, servants, wood peddlers, wood choppers, wood packers, carpenters, gamblers, laborers, a jeweler, and a cigar maker. The Chinese community in 1870 included 103 women, making up about 14 percent of the population. Of these, the census enumerator identified all but nine as prostitutes; the others appeared as physicians' wives, house-

8. Ibid., p. 96.
keepers, or laundry workers. Historian Sue Fawn Chung, however, noted that as many as twenty-three of the Chinese women identified as prostitutes appear to have been "secondary wives" or concubines. By the time of the 1880 federal census, the Chinese population in Virginia City and Gold Hill had declined slightly to 619, but several new occupations appeared, including teachers, a tea merchant, joss-house keeper, banker, opium-den keeper, and butchers. Only forty-four remained at the time of the 1910 federal census, of which only one was a woman, but not until the 1940s did the last Chinese resident leave.

The Chinese experience in the Nevada countryside took place within the same time period, mostly from the 1860s until the early twentieth century, and involved working in specific extractive industries rather than in the broad service-oriented industries of the urban Chinese communities. They included, among other things, mining of minerals (such as borax and salt) and precious metals, lumbering, charcoal manufacture, and the construction of railroads, roads, and water systems. Large Chinese placer-mining communities, for example, emerged in Osceola, Tuscarora, and Spring Valley. The Pacific Borax Company employed large numbers of Chinese workers in Columbus Marsh and Fish Lake Valley Marsh in the late nineteenth century. The Nevada Chinese community also worked extensively in the Comstock-era wood industry in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin.

9. Ibid.
Comstock Women: The Making of a Mining Community, ed. Ronald M. James and C. Elizabeth 
11. Ibid., pp. 219.
Montana, the Magazine of Western History 32 (Autumn 1982): 18.
Ethnicity and Race in Nevada, ed. Elmer Rusco and Sue Fawn Chung (Reno: Senator 
Alan Bible Center for Applied Research, University of Nevada, 1987), p. 44.
14. Leslie Hill, "The Historical Archaeology of Ethnic Woodcutters in the Carson Range" 
(master's thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1987); Ana Koval, "The Chinese in the Lake Ta-
hoe Basin," report prepared for the U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, South Lake Tahoe, Calif., 1991; Susan Lindstrom and Jeffrey Hall, "Cultural Resources 
Inventory and Evaluation Report for the Proposed Spooner Summit and East Shore Project 
Big Gulp Timber Sales," prepared by BioSystems Analysis, Inc., Santa Cruz, Calif., for the 
Toiyabe National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, South Lake Tahoe, Calif.,
The Comstock silver strike in 1859 first stimulated the development of the wood industry in the forests of the nearby Sierra Nevada Mountains. In the mid- to late 1860s, the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad through the area further expanded timber harvesting.

French-Canadian and Chinese immigrants made up the vast majority of the labor force in the wood industry. By the early 1860s, for example, the Marlette and Folsom Company of Washoe City, Nevada, hired 225 Chinese and 150 French-Canadian woodcutters. The Chinese woodcutters in the Carson Range of the Sierra Nevada Mountains increased rapidly during the 1860s, leading to the conflict with the French-Canadians in 1867–1868 known as the “Woodchopper’s War.” In 1870, the same two groups engaged in a similar conflict in Clear Creek Canyon over a reported massacre of French residents in China. Chinese lumbermen increased dramatically in the 1870s. While French-Canadians made up 45 percent of the wood-industry employees working in the Carson Range in 1870, Chinese made up an estimated 82 percent of the labor force ten years later. On 16 October 1880, the Virginia Evening Chronicle reported that three thousand Chinese woodcutters worked the slopes above Lake Tahoe.

In general, Chinese lumbermen worked as cordwood cutters, flume builders and tenders, loaders, splitters, packers, road and railroad construction and maintenance workers, and cooks in wood camps. A few also worked as independent wood dealers. Cordwood accounts in 1889, for instance, list a number of wood camps in the Lake Tahoe Basin that appear to have been run by independent Chinese contractors or companies. Federal census manuscripts and other documentary sources suggest that the Chinese lumbermen in the Carson Range of the Sierra Nevada Mountains lived primarily in small households of three to ten persons in 1870. An exception to this arrangement was at Glenbrook on the shores of Lake Tahoe, where twenty of the settlement’s thirty-eight Chinese lumbermen lived together in a boarding-

The 1880 census records suggest a significant change to this pattern of larger households of ten to twenty persons. Virtually all were males between the ages of twenty and fifty. Many of these individuals were married but not living with their wives, who presumably remained in China.

What can archaeology contribute to our understanding of the Chinese who labored in Nevada's wood camps, placer mines, and Chinatowns? The archaeological record of Nevada's Chinese community consists of physical remains, such as household furnishings, clothing, food residue, and house foundations and the geological matrix in which they occur. These material things and their archaeological context are a source of information about the past that is independent of written accounts and oral testimony about the Chinese experience. A number of research pathways present themselves for taking advantage of the strength of the Chinese archaeological record in Nevada.

Clearly, the study of technological innovation, transfer, and adaptation within the Chinese community is one such pathway. Many years ago anthropologist Robert Spier recognized this fact in his classic study of "tool acculturation" in the nineteenth-century Chinese community in California. More recent examples include studies of mining technology, such as Jeffrey LaLande's and Randall Rohe's work on the hydraulic mining technology of Chinese placer miners. The technology of domestic architecture is another example. Consider, for example, Neville Ritchie's study of the domestic and landscape architecture of Chinese settlements in the gold fields of southern New Zealand. He found that the structures typically followed preexisting west-

ern models and reflected adaptation to local environmental conditions but also retained some traditional Chinese elements. Their builders used locally available construction materials, such as turf, mud bricks and puddled mud, forest trees, canvas, corrugated iron sheets, and cobblestones; they chose available places, such as rock shelters; and they often took advantage of abandoned buildings. These structures did not have the typical “high culture” Chinese architectural elements of upturned eaves, decorative eave brackets, tile roofing, and fretwork patterns on fascia boards. Often, however, they retained some elements of traditional Chinese rural architecture, such as being windowless and having hut shrines, door inscriptions, and a chopping block just outside the door.21

Studies of variability and change in Chinese households provide another key pathway to using the archaeological record to understand the Chinese experience in Nevada. Household variability and change is one expression of the process of adaptation to new social, cultural, and physical environments. Household activities and morphology reflect underlying rules and strategies that stipulate how people and things can be combined to form a household and the way in which households can work in order to achieve goals.22 Identification of the rules and strategies for Chinese households in Nevada depend upon good documentation of household activities and morphology, such as membership size and composition. Documents such as federal census records provide fleeting and scattered glimpses of the activities, membership, and morphology of Chinese households in Nevada. The archaeological record of households has the potential to provide detailed information about domestic architecture, spatial organization, population size and composition, consumerism, and other vital household characteristics.

The documentation and interpretation of Chinese foodways is another key research area to which archaeology can contribute. Step-


anie Livingston’s recent analysis of the vertebrate fauna excavated from the archaeological deposits in a Chinese dugout residence at the site of Placerville in northeastern Nevada is a good example. Placerville grew up following the discovery of silver-gold lode deposits at Cope in 1869, which started a silver rush and led to the founding of the town of Mountain City. Chinese placer miners worked the gravel deposits along the Owyhee River downstream from Mountain City in the 1870s and established the settlement of Placerville (HM-1215) in 1871. The settlement reached a population of 160, including 123 Chinese residents, all men, before failing in the early 1870s. Documentary accounts suggest that the town had a store, a blacksmith shop, and fifty-two domestic residences. The Chinese residents lived in thirty-seven dwellings, some of which were dugouts, with typical household sizes of two to four but with a range of one to eight persons.

In 1992, archaeologists from the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest excavated two of the Placerville dugouts. The final report is not yet finished, but Livingston has completed an analysis of the sites’ vertebrate faunal remains. She found that the Placerville assemblage included “several kinds of fish, chicken, turkey, sheep, pigs, and cows; all of which were clearly butchered for table use.” Ducks, rabbits, hares, and ground squirrels also occurred in the assemblage but without evidence of table use. Livingston found evidence of both Anglo-American and Chinese butchering patterns. Almost all cow bones, for example, had been cut with a saw, an Anglo-American pattern. She found that “vertebrae and ribs of the domestic mammals (cows, pigs, sheep) and most of the chicken bones . . . have been chopped into small segments, suggestive of preparation in the traditional Chinese pattern.” Whether the cleaver used for chopping was an Anglo-American wide-
bladed cleaver or a Chinese narrow-bladed cleaver, however, could not be determined. The Placerville fauna assemblage also suggested on-site butchering of sheep but the importing of cow and pig as market cuts. Pig crania and feet in the assemblage appear to represent pork packed in barrels and preserved by salting or pickling.

Chinese archaeological sites also offer the opportunity to explore "glocalization," the interplay between the local and the global. Certainly archaeology is well equipped to document a global presence at localities in the form of globally distributed commodities and to say something about geographical origins. Archaeologists too often stop there, however, failing to construct models of how the global is locally interpreted or transformed. Anthropologist Daniel Miller's studies of Coca-Cola in Trinidad, for example, show that the homogenization of commodities so often assumed as a consequence of globalization is counteracted quite effectively by local social and cultural traditions.26 Our understanding of the Chinese community would benefit from a more in-depth look at how they used and reinterpreted the material things of global origins or how they used and reinterpreted the ideas and social traditions of indigenous cultures. Under what conditions did local Chinese communities accept or reject the global or institutional or the familiar? Did the communities participate in local or regional redistribution and exchange networks? What commodities and other goods were available at the Chinese settlements and where did they originate? How were they acquired? How were they used? What meaning did they have to the community?

How members of the Chinese community in Nevada actively used material things to negotiate class relations and cultural identities is an interesting and significant scholarly question that can be answered with archaeological data. Leland Ferguson found that both slaves and planters on antebellum plantations in the American South actively used material things as "symbols" of their cultural autonomy. He shows how slaves actively manipulated material things associated with architecture, foodways, and ritual to create their cultural iden-

Similarly, the identification of material symbols such as food, architectural decoration, and clothing the Chinese residents of Nevada used to create a distinctive cultural identity is a key potential contribution of archaeological research.

Another important research topic involves the interplay between cultural identities and social class. The concept of social class is best viewed not as a static descriptive category but as a dynamic relationship among individuals and social groups competing “over the exercise of social power.” Class relations must be negotiated. Following this perspective, LuAnn Wurst and Robert Fitts argue for a locally contextualized and situational approach to the study of class relations. Local social groups and individuals often developed strategies of domination and resistance to be used in the negotiation of class relations. Thus, Mary C. Beaudry and others found that nineteenth-century textile-mill workers living at the Boott Boardinghouse in Lowell, Massachusetts, manipulated material things as symbols of their rejection, acceptance, or modification of class ideologies. An example is the company’s imposition of restrictions on the workers’ consumption of alcoholic beverages and the archaeological evidence of continued, if secret, use of such beverages. The multiple ethnic populations in Chinese communities in Nevada suggests the potential for the continuous negotiation of class relations among individuals and social groups that may have a material expression in distinctive patterns of architecture or artifacts.

The archaeological record of Nevada’s Chinese community is also well suited to study the formation of cultural landscapes. Consider,

for instance, the urban landscape of the Virginia City Chinatown. Newspaper accounts suggest that urban gardening was a distinctive landscape feature between 1863 and 1880.31 Residents cultivated gardens along the outskirts of the town and fenced them with scrapwood, flattened tin cans, and other materials. An observation in Mary McNair Mathews’s diary from the 1870s suggests how the Chinese maintained their gardens: “All the drainage of Virginia City is allowed to pass through their place in streams . . . over the surface, and is conducted in ditches to their gardens, to irrigate them, instead of buying water.”32 The Chinese gardens in Virginia City produced a wide variety of vegetables, which were sold to hotels, restaurants, saloons, and private houses throughout the town; Chinese households also used the garden produce for traditional meals.

Another key component of the cultural landscapes created by Nevada's Chinese community is settlement patterning. The Cortez Mining District in central Nevada provides a good example of a Chinese regional settlement system in the countryside. Sometime between 1869 and 1873, Simeon Wenban, the district's principal mine owner, dismissed his entire work force of Cornish miners for being "turbulent and riotous" and hired Chinese who had most recently worked on the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad. His company, the Tenabo Mill and Mines Company, may have employed as many as several hundred Chinese miners and millworkers in the 1870s and 1880s.

Documentary and archaeological records identify at least three Chinese settlements in the Cortez district. Probably the earliest is at the Garrison Mine, operated by the Tenabo Mill and Mines Company beginning in the late 1860s. The 1900 federal population census lists forty-five Chinese residents, of whom thirty-eight are identified as adult male "mine laborers." The Garrison Mine settlement includes six households: five domestic residences and one store. A preliminary field survey suggests that the settlement is next to the lower adit of the mine and is arranged on a series of terraces. Another Chinese settlement is situated between the site of the Tenabo Lixiviation Mill, constructed in 1886, and the town of Upper Cortez, which grew up next to the mill. The 1900 federal population census tabulates thirty-two Chinese residents in the mill district. Of these, seventeen were mill workers. In contrast to the single Chinese woman living at the Garrison Mine settlement, the Tenabo Mill settlement included several women, making up 19 percent of the population. The settlement is organized into eleven households of which two are stores.

The third Chinese settlement in the Cortez district grew up at Shoshone Wells or Lower Cortez, about a mile below the town of Upper Cortez and the Tenabo Mill. Established by 1864, Shoshone Wells was one of the earliest settlements in the district. There is no documentary

evidence of Chinese residents until 1885, when the county tax-assessment rolls list “Ah Ho” as owning a “Chinese cabin.” No Chinese residents are listed after 1902, and Shoshone Wells appears to have been abandoned by 1910. Cornish miners probably lived there until dismissed by the mining company in the early 1870s. The later Chinese residents of the settlement appear to have reoccupied some of the abandoned buildings in the “main street” part of the town, including some adobe structures. County tax-assessment records between 1885 and 1902 suggest that they used at least two of the reoccupied buildings as stores. In addition, a new settlement grew up next to “old town” Shoshone Wells. The new settlement included wooden frame houses encircling what appears to have been a deep dugout-type structure that may have been a joss house. A third locus of Chinese occupation at the site is a group of several dugout structures arranged along the banks of a ravine running just below “old town” and “new town” Shoshone Wells.
Finally, the meaning of landscapes associated with Nevada’s Chinese community needs to be considered. The archaeological record, for example, is well suited to document variability and change in the traditional Chinese practice of geomancy, or feng shui. Landscape expressions include orienting buildings to face south, placing structures with calm water in front or at the confluence of streams (but not at branching streams), square town plans and dwellings, and alignment of buildings on a north-south axis. The extent to which the principles of geomancy were applied in practice, however, probably varied enormously and depended upon local conditions and expediency. Existing buildings often were reused, for example, and their placement often depended as much upon economic and political or social constraints and opportunities as feng shui. Roberta Greenwood, for instance, found that Chinese settlements in nineteenth-century California, for example, were often found either in areas with low land prices or on the outskirts of towns where the dominant white population forced them to reside.  

A recent project is exploring a number of these various research pathways and bringing new insight into the experience of Nevada’s Chinese. Between 1999 and 2001, the University of Nevada, Reno, and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest cooperated in a three-year archaeological and historical study of the Island Mountain town site in the Island Mountain Mining District. Several other individuals and groups contributed to the project, including Priscilla Wegars, director of the Asian American Comparative Collection at the University of Idaho, and volunteers from Seattle’s Wing Luke Asian Museum. Sue Fawn Chung served as the project historian, and Patricia Hunt-Jones, a graduate student from the University of Nevada, Reno, supervised the archaeological field work for the last two years of the project. Documentary and oral histories suggest that the settlement played a significant role in the history of the Island Mountain district. Prospectors developed hardrock mines in the area along Martin Creek as early as

1864. Miners established both the Bruno district, which later merged with the Island Mountain district, and the town of Bruno City (Bruneu City) in 1869. In 1873, Emanuel ("Manny") Penrod, C. T. Russell, and W. Newton discovered gold-bearing placer deposits along Gold Creek and its tributaries about three miles from Bruno City and organized the Island Mountain district. Shortly thereafter, placer miners established the town of Island Mountain, consisting of a few houses, hotel, blacksmith shop, and a Chinese store. The 1880 federal census for Island Mountain tallies seventy-one residents, of which fifty-four, including one woman, came from China. Thirty-nine of the Chinese residents listed their occupations as miners; the others included four cooks, two wood choppers, two merchants, one laborer, one wash man, one "loafer," and one prostitute. The other residents of the town included six American Indians and eleven Euro-Americans.

By 1878, placer mining in the district had declined. Little is known about the period from 1880 until 1896, when a second boom began with the organization of the Gold Creek Mining Company. At that time, the new town of Gold Creek was platted over the ridge and about three miles away from the original settlement of Island Mountain. Mostly Euro-Americans lived at Gold Creek, and Island Mountain became known as Gold Creek’s Chinatown. Around 1897, the Gold Creek Mining Company hired the Corey brothers of Salt Lake City to construct the immense Sunflower Reservoir and a large ten-mile-long ditch. Chinese laborers constructed the reservoir. According to the Gold Creek News of 28 January 1897, the Corey brothers had 289 men on the payroll working on the ditch, which was never completed. Even so, historic photographs of placer miners using hydraulic giants to wash the soils down to the placer operation attest that major placering took place at Gold Creek. Lack of water and the costs of transporting what little water there was to the placer deposits, however, doomed the operation from its beginning. Following the collapse of placer mining in 1898, Gold Creek remained a sleepy little hamlet for twenty years, providing services to cattle and sheep ranchers. A fire destroyed most of the town in 1921, and the last of its buildings were torn down and removed to Mountain City, fifteen miles away, in the late 1920s.

The archaeological project at Island Mountain focused on the store, which appears to have been the social center of the community. Documentary and oral histories suggest that two brothers, Hung Li and Hong Lee, both known as Lem, operated a small general store between 1878 and 1918 at the forks of Gold Creek. Former local resident Della Johns remembered the Island Mountain Chinatown where she occasionally went with her parents to the store. She stated that the proprietor always had sweets for the children but that she detested the horehound candy (which may have been ginger) offered to

her but took it anyway. Her father was always given crackers and sardines. The store sold candy, sardines and other canned fish, soy sauce, oysters, dried tomatoes, mushrooms, canned meat, rice flour, and sugar. Canned goods from China were shipped in barrels. Also in the room were carrying bags, similar to backpacks and made of rice straw, according to Johns. Another resident also recalled Chinese rice wine and brandies in little black jars.

The archaeological excavation, data from which are still in the process of being analyzed, essentially supports this oral testimony. Artifacts recovered from the dig included a wide variety of objects from diverse origins, as expected in a mining-frontier store. They included Chinese medicines, food and drink containers, opium equipment (such as pipe stems and bowls, spirit lamps, opium tweezers, and opium tins with tax stamps), Chinese coins, and gambling paraphernalia. The artifact assemblage also included a commercial scale, an abacus, a harness, unfired handgun ammunition, a cut-crystal perfume bottle, and a commercial coffee grinder. In addition, the excavation of one of the privies behind the store recovered a large amount of plant and animal remains, which is still being analyzed. As with past projects and those yet to come, the archaeological record of this store promises to shed new light on a key social institution, giving scholars insight into a community on the remote mining frontier of northeastern Nevada and adding to our knowledge of the Chinese experience throughout the American West.

41. Wendy Ispisua, "Island Mountain District Chinese Settlement" (typescript, 1993), Asian American File, Special Collections Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
42. Murbarger, "Only the Sidewalk Remains."