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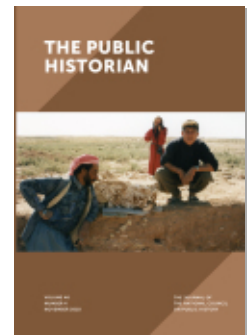
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*Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at  
Stanford University* (review)

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(Review)

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*Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at Stanford University.* Gordon Chang, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Co-Directors. <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/>. Accessed June 9, 2018.

2015 marked the 150th anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad. The *Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project* highlights the role Chinese immigrants played in the building of the railroad. Drawing on numerous historical archives and from the work of scholars in the fields of Chinese immigration, Asian American history, modern US history, historical archaeology, and American Studies, the site provides a good foundation for understanding the central role Chinese immigrants played in building what was, at the time, the most ambitious of industrial engineering projects.

The multilingual digital archive is one of three components of a multiyear research project established at Stanford University. Co-directed by well-known scholars of Asian American history, including Gordon Chang, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, among others, the archive collects diverse historical materials including oral histories, visual images and photographs, and material objects. Through strategic partnerships with regional archives, universities, and state historical societies as well as careful curation, the digital archive presents compelling documentation of the grueling work Chinese immigrants carried out, the communities in which they lived, and the legacies they left on the landscape of the US West. Although Chinese immigrants made up only a small percentage of the overall immigrant community, they came to embody a particular place in the imaginations of white Americans. Links to regional and national periodicals are arranged roughly chronologically and provide insights into these varied and ever-shifting perceptions.

In addition to historical artifacts, the project also includes a number of contemporary artistic representations, plays and performance pieces, and multimedia productions. Short clips of these performances can be accessed under the “Fiction and Drama” link or via YouTube and Vimeo links. The “Multimedia” section gives the viewer access to short video excerpts summarizing the history of Chinese immigration. These will be especially useful to nonexperts and educators looking to introduce this history to students.

As an ongoing project, the site is still under construction and in many cases historical essays, maps, and various artifacts are missing or include just one image, photograph, or oral history. The historiography and bibliographies are likewise sparse on resources. The introductory essay suggests the project intended to portray the transnational nature of Chinese immigration history. However, in its current state, the majority of the collections focus on Chinese immigration to the United States and the experiences of immigrants who settled in the US West either temporarily or long term. We see less representation of the back and forth that shaped migration to and from the US and China in this period. The FAQ’s section and

timeline are more fully developed and provide a useful overview of the building of the transcontinental railroad as it relates to Chinese immigration. These sections will be particularly useful for those viewers who have little background on the Chinese immigrant experience or their contributions to the transcontinental railroad. The “Photographs” section is perhaps the most robust with three full pages of digitized images and brief captions. The functionality of the website as a whole is somewhat burdensome. Links to contemporary films and artistic works send the viewer to external links, some of which won’t function without applications already downloaded onto one’s computer. The last link on the site highlights the need for financial contributions, which made this reviewer wonder whether or not the online component of this larger project will continue.

Although the digital archive does include some distracting technological quirks and methodological gaps, *Chinese Railroad Workers* has helped to encourage both historical understanding of an immigrant group who helped shape the US West as well as contemporary dialogue that spans geographic and international boundaries. As mentioned at the beginning of this review, the digital archive represents one piece of a larger project. Chinese immigrants who worked on the transcontinental railroad tended to move around a lot, spoke little to no English, and lived in segregated communities. These realities discouraged the collection of consistent historical records and archives. Photographs, artistic works, and English-language periodicals presented in the digital archive offer opportunities to see, firsthand, some of the geographic, social, and economic features that shaped the lives of immigrants in the mid- to late-nineteenth century West.

Another goal of *Chinese Railroad Workers* was to encourage international dialogue about the history of Chinese immigration. To this end, the co-directors of the project partnered with scholars, educators, and students in US and Asian institutions to host a series of conferences. Documentation of these conferences can be seen on the digital archive site. Finally, the creators of the online archive worked alongside scholars in China to produce a Chinese-language book titled *Chinese Railroad Workers in North America: Recovery and Representations*. Released in December 2017 the book includes a preface written by co-directors Chang and Fisher Fishkin followed by seventeen chapters arranged in sections dedicated to recovery, home, memories, labor, and representation. The book is currently offered online through the Bookman store and through online booksellers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China.

Taken together, *Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project* offers the sort of multidimensional and multiplatform historical representation that is often lacking in strictly scholarly publications. The archives presented online offer experts and nonexperts alike access to a well-curated ensemble of historical and contemporary works while the relationships built from the project will continue to encourage international dialogue on a subject that remains as entirely relevant today as it was 150 years ago.

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