

CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF EARLY CHINESE AMERICANS  
IN IDAHO AND MONTANA, 1865-1900

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Chinese contribution to the development of the American West is far greater than most people suspect. This is especially true for the early years of Idaho and Montana. The Idaho and Montana Chinese were active in assimilating themselves into mainstream society and contributed greatly to the placer mining of the region. Some of them also owned their own businesses, such as laundries, and interacted regularly with locals. This thesis uses census data, newspaper accounts, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, and a city directory to uncover these Chinese contributions.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
List of Maps	vi
List of Tables	viii
List of Photos	ix
1. Background, Methodology, and Sources of Information	1
2. Motivation and Migration	9
3. Cultural Practices, 1865-1882	25
4. Cultural Practices, 1882-1900	44
5. Conclusion	63
Bibliography	65

## LIST OF MAPS

1. Territorial Establishment in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region.	2
2. Physical Features of Idaho and Montana.	3
3. Early Gold Strikes in Idaho and Montana.	5
4. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1870.	12
5. Chinese Migration to Idaho and Montana.	17
6. White Migration to Idaho.	17
7. White Migration to Montana.	18
8. African-American Migration to Idaho.	18
9. African-American Migration to Montana.	19
10. Native-American Migration to Idaho and Montana.	19
11. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1880.	28
12. Early Boise.	30
13. Chinese Concentrated Area in Early Boise.	31
14. Chinese Businesses in White Settlements in Early Boise.	32
15. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1900.	51
16. Japanese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1900.	52
17. Boise, 1903.	56
18. Chinese Concentrated Area in Boise, 1893.	57
19. Chinese Concentrated Area in Boise, 1903.	58
20. Chinese Laundries in Butte, Montana, 1899.	60
21. Chinese Dry Goods Stores in Butte, Montana, 1899.	61
22. Chinese Restaurants in Butte, Montana, 1899.	61

23. Chinese Tailor Shops in Butte, Montana, 1899.	62
24. Chinese Doctor's Offices in Butte, Montana, 1899.	62

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Population in Idaho and Montana Counties by Race in 1870.	11
2. Nativity in Idaho and Montana by Race in 1870.	13
3. Idaho and Montana Chinese Birthplace in 1870.	14
4. Idaho and Montana Chinese Birthplace in 1880.	14
5. Idaho and Montana Chinese Birthplace in 1900.	15
6. Idahoan and Montanan Birthplaces by Race in 1870.	16
7. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1870.	21
8. Idahoan and Montanan Occupations by Race in 1870.	22
9. Gender Ratio by Race in Idaho and Montana in 1870.	23
10. Age Distribution in Idaho and Montana by Race in 1870.	24
11. Population in Idaho and Montana Counties by Race in 1880.	27
12. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1880.	34
13. Population in Idaho and Montana Counties by Race in 1900.	49
14. Population Percentage of Race in Idaho and Montana Counties in 1900.	50
15. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1900.	54
16. Japanese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1900.	55

## LIST OF PHOTOS

1. A Chinese in Idaho City's Chinese Quarter, circa 1880.	28
2. A Chinese Placer Miner in Freedom (Slate Creek), Idaho County, circa 1880.	29
3. A Chinese Vegetable Farmer on the Idaho City Streets in the 1870s.	35
4. C. K. Ah Fong, a Chinese Doctor in Idaho, circa 1890.	35
5. The Chinese Gambling House on Idaho Street, Boise in the 1880s.	35
6. Loke Kee's Family Photo, circa 1900.	36
7. Three Chinese Children Posed with Classmates and Teachers in Front of the Idaho City School in 1882.	39
8. A Chinese New Year's Day Parade in Boise, circa 1900.	40
9. A Chinese New Year's Day Celebration in Boise, circa 1900.	41
10. A Chinese Temple in Boise, circa 1890.	42
11. Chinese Workers Posed at the Mullan Tunnel Dedication in 1883.	46
12. A Chinese Laundry in Delamar, Owyhee County, circa 1890.	46
13. Wah Chong Tai Co., a Chinese Dry Goods Store on Galena Street, Butte, circa 1895.	47
14. Chinese Members of an Americanization Class sponsored by Boise's First Methodist Episcopal Church in 1904.	48
15. Chinese Placer Miners in Rocky Bar, Elmore County, circa 1900.	53
16. Zee Tai Chung Co., a Chinese Dry Goods Store on Idaho Street, Boise, in 1900.	59

# **Chapter 1**

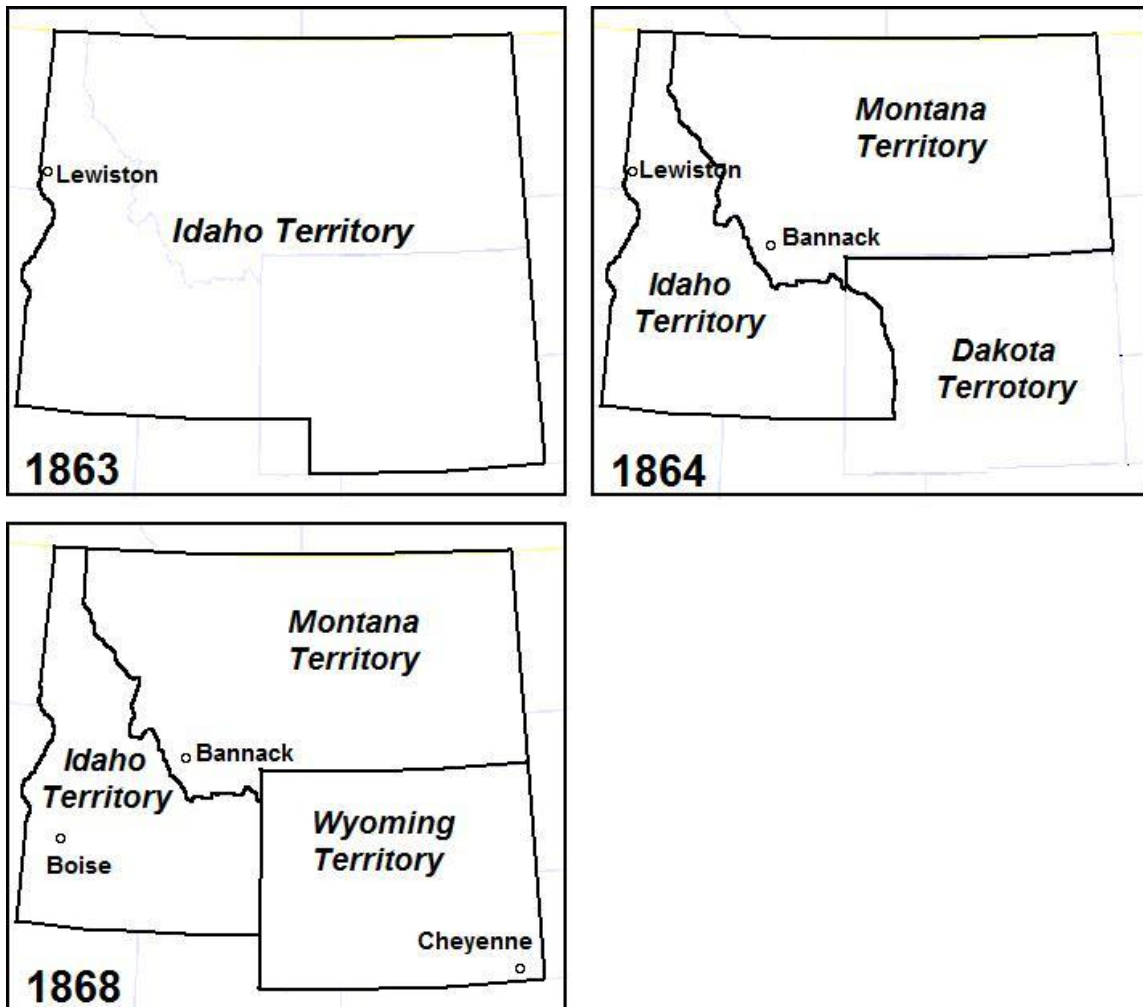
## **Background, Methodology, and Sources of Information**

Just as westward expansion is central to American history, so westward expansion cannot be discussed without consideration of the Gold Rush. Therefore, we can say that the Gold Rush is one of the important events that happened in this country. Although most Americans are aware of mining's historical importance, they often associate it only with California and do not realize that several other rushes followed it throughout the western states after production diminished at the original sites. This thesis focuses on one of these secondary rushes, in Idaho and adjacent Montana, and the role of Chinese immigrants in the process.

Just like the California Gold Rush, the several smaller bonanzas throughout the West greatly contributed to the nineteenth-century settlement process. Gold created numerous economic opportunities, including new towns and markets for agricultural products. At the earliest years of a mining boom, most settlers were working-age males. Soon, though, family members and many others came as the economy diversified (Spude 1996).

Migrations associated with the big gold discoveries in the West created sizeable populations where few people had lived before. New townships and counties had to be created, and even new territories and states. One such locale was the northern Rocky Mountain region, present-day Idaho and western Montana. Gold discoveries there starting in 1860 produced enough population growth to merit territorial status for the region, so on March 3, 1863, Idaho Territory was created with Lewiston as its first capital (Map 1). This Idaho Territory, carved from the existing Oregon, Washington, and

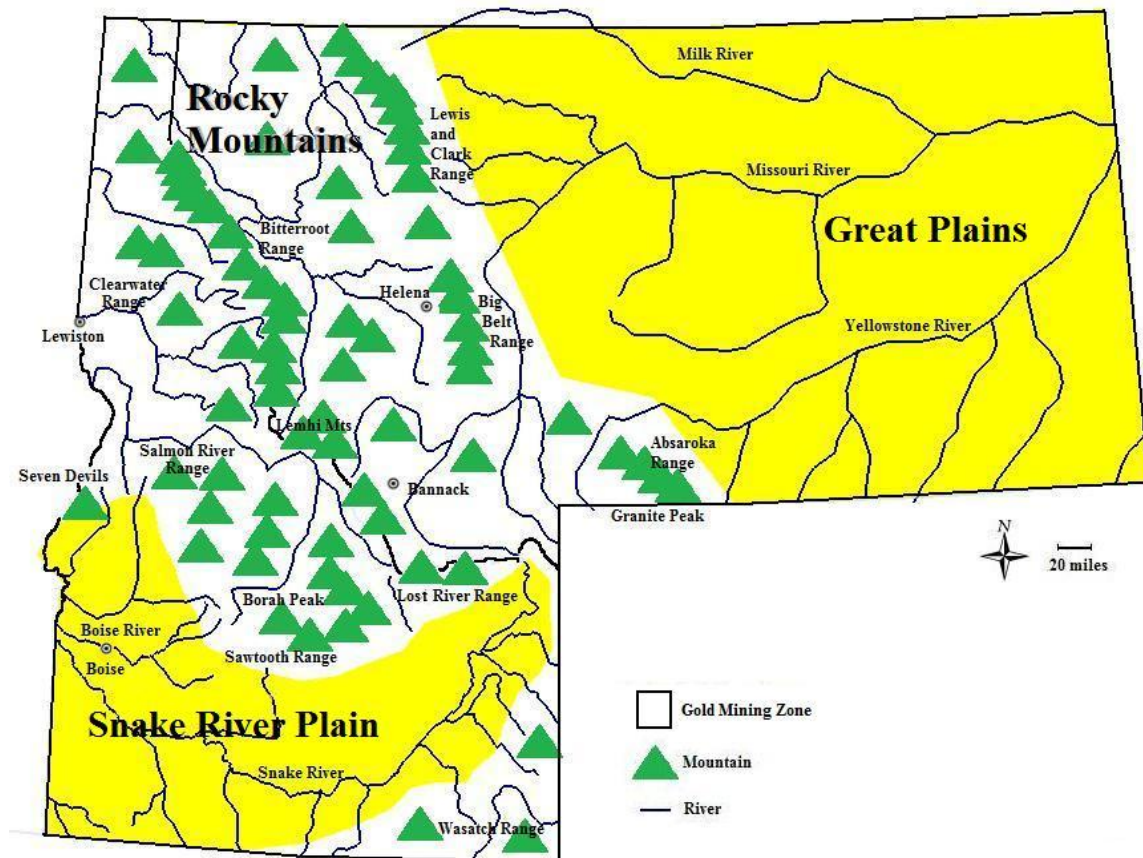
Dakota territories, was much larger than the eventual state. Its population was nearly all confined near the Rocky Mountain mining sites.



**Map 1. Territorial Establishment in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. Source: Hailey 1910.**

As the mines of Idaho Territory grew, so did the population, and Montana Territory was formed from its northeastern section east of the rugged Bitterroot Range on May 17, 1864. Bannock was its first capital (Map 1). From the remaining part of Idaho Territory, the area east of the 111th Meridian was incorporated into the newly created Wyoming Territory on July 25, 1868. With this, the boundaries of modern Idaho and Montana were fully shaped (Hailey 1910, 26).

Gold deposits in Idaho and Montana are largely confined to the mountains, so the early mining sites and settlements of the states were concentrated in those sections (Map 2). The Bitterroot Range, the crest of Rocky Mountain chain, is the center of mineral deposits in the region. This range splits Idaho and Montana along most of their common border. Other important chains in northern and central Idaho include the Salmon River, Clearwater, Lemhi, Seven Devils, Sawtooth, and Lost River ranges. Western Montana ranges include the Big Belt, Lewis and Clark, and Absaroka. Western Montana ranges include the Big Belt, Lewis and Clark, and Absaroka.



**Map 2. Physical Features of Idaho and Montana.**

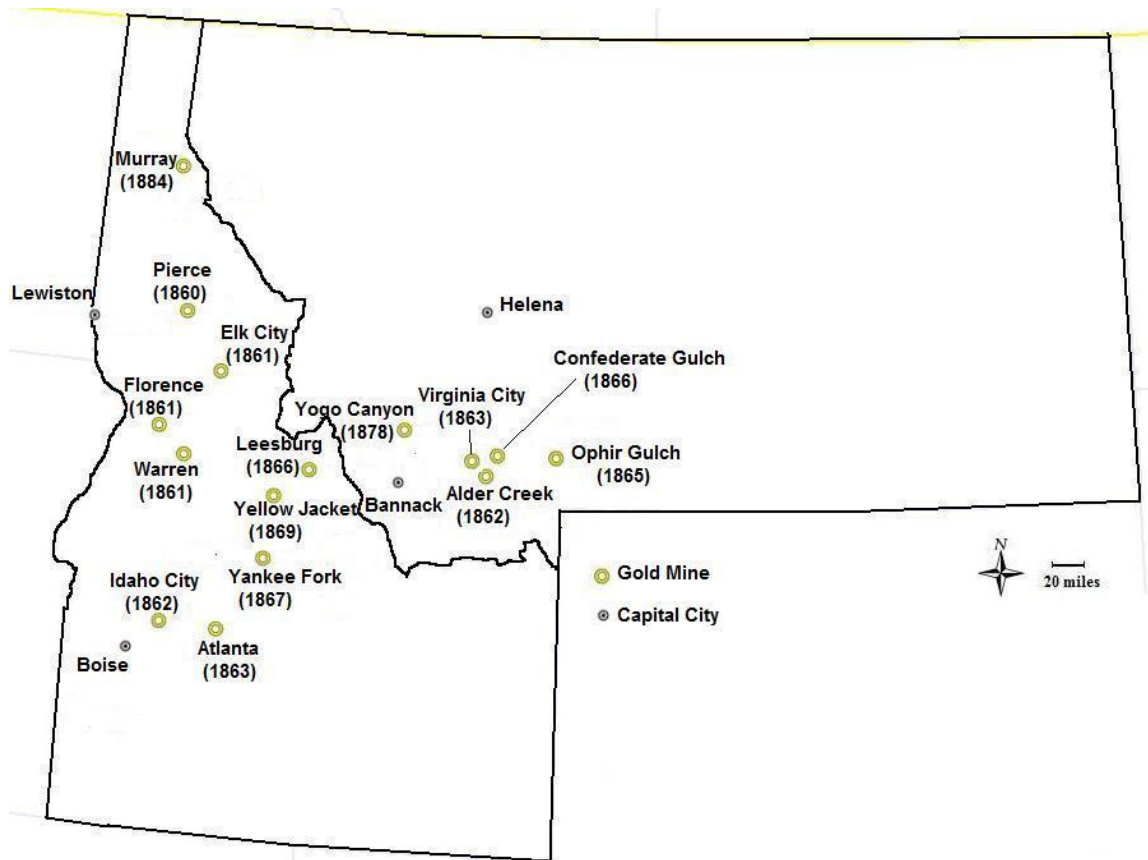
Beyond then the Rocky Mountains, the Snake River Plain is the only other major physical province of Idaho. This region became a center for irrigation in the twentieth century and is the location of the state's larger cities, including Boise. In Montana, the



Great Plains is the major physical feature other than the mountains. These flatlands constitute eastern three-fifths of the state, but the population there has always been sparse (Hudson 2002, 313-325).

As the California gold rush was beginning to decline in the late 1850s, miners sought ore in other places in the West. They first found success in adjacent Nevada, but soon were looking as far afield as today's Idaho and Montana. There the winters were extremely cold, but the lure of wealth was strong enough to overcome any hesitation. Initial strikes in the area occurred in the 1850s, but the first major one was by Elias Pierce in 1860 on Orofino Creek in the Clearwater River watershed (Map 3). This site was located on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation, so it was initially forbidden land to non-Native Americans. However, the resultant stream of miners was soon great enough to force a reconfiguration of the reservation boundaries. The following year, 1861, three more gold sites--Elk City, Florence, and Warren--were discovered near the original, and the town of Pierce emerged as a service center (Bancroft and Victor 1890, 234).

In 1862, the first significant gold was discovered in neighboring Montana. John Bozeman did so along Alder Creek what is now Montana's southwestern corner. Soon after, the strikes became numerous. Those in Idaho included Idaho City (1862), Atlanta (1863), Leesburg (1866), Yankee Fork (1867), Yellow Jacket (1869), and Murray (1884). In southwestern Montana, the big ones were Virginia City (1863), Ophir Gulch (1865), Confederate Gulch (1866), and Yogo Canyon (1878). All these strikes brought in a steady stream of placer throughout the late nineteenth century (Idaho Public Television 2010).



**Map 3. Early Gold Strikes in Idaho and Montana. Source: Bancroft and Victor 1890.**

Miners and would-be miners in the western states responded quickly to rumors of new strikes, and so quickly moved around as sites rose and declined. Although their dreams were big, reality was harsh for most of them. The mining work was tough, with the chances for success low and the dangers of illness, loneliness, and homesickness high. Still, people came from everywhere, including foreign countries.

Among those immigrants attracted the mines, the Chinese were significant. This fact has been largely overlooked since today the states of Idaho and Montana are not commonly associated with Asian culture. Chinese people constituted 9.5 percent of Montanans in 1870, however, and an amazing 28.5 percent of Idahoans (U. S. Census Bureau 1870, Volume 1, Table 7). These early Asians had a culture very different from

the settlers of European background whether one measured by food, music, or religious customs (Newkirk 2006). Just as their distinctiveness was being implanted on the new land, however, changing social and economic conditions during the 1880s and 1890s resulted in their decline. By the early 1900s, the Chinese and their contributions to the region's history were almost forgotten (James 1995).

In this thesis, I want to revisit the late-nineteenth-century West to map and otherwise understand the Chinese presence in the region. Although much Chinese history has been lost in Idaho and Montana, I suspect that some of their cultural influences remain. Wilbur Zelinsky's "Doctrine of First Effective Settlement" explains that "Whenever an empty territory undergoes settlement, or an earlier population is dislodged by invaders, the specific characteristics of the first group able to affect a viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area" (quoted in Limerick 1987, 99-100). To explore this possible legacy as well as to study the nineteenth century cultural geography for its own sake, I will reconstruct the migration, settlement patterns, and culture of the early-day Chinese in this isolated section of the American West.

My interest in the historical geography of the Chinese derives, in part, because I am Asian myself. At the same time, however, I am not Chinese. This perspective should prove valuable, yielding insights often ignored in current historical texts. I may even see things that Western geographers might not be able to understand. In some ways, the Chinese were victims for sure. At the same time, they also had dreams, and likely made impacts on the Idaho and Montana landscape. A Chinese geographer might be prone to

overstress such achievements, like I think was done in a study of Chinese laundries (Lee 1949). As a Korean, I will endeavor to give a sympathetic yet detached account.

I divide the thesis into five principal chapters: 1) background, methodology, and sources of information, 2) motivation and migration, 3) cultural practices, 1865-1882, 4) cultural practices, 1882-1900, and 5) conclusion. It is a study rich in maps, including ones on the diffusion of the Chinese into Idaho and Montana, and detailed locational studies for 1870, 1880, 1890, and 1900 made from primary data. Federal census records are critical here, and the website HeritageQuest Online provides access to the actual manuscript census sheets. These provide personal information for everyone who participated, including for most years, address, age, birthplace, job, personal estate, real estate, and literacy. I have created my own Chinese data sheets using information from this website and performed several statistical analyses. These include the numbers of people for different occupations, age, gender, and birthplaces, and how these measures vary for each county in Idaho and Montana.

The U. S. Census Bureau provides Chinese population data for every county of Idaho and Montana in 1870, 1880, 1890, and 1900. More specifically, the 1870 census provides the Chinese population for each census district (an arbitrary geographic region that is a subdivision of a county) across the country. Also, the 1900 Census provides the Chinese population for every county from 1880 to 1900.

To supplement and help to understand the census data, I also undertake research on Chinese cultural adaptation and influence in Idaho and Montana using scholarly works and newspapers that covered the district and its individual mining towns. Many such

newspapers are available through the [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) website and the 19th Century U. S. Newspapers database. The former site includes (and indexes) all major nineteenth-century Idaho and Montana newspapers, including the Idaho Statesman (1864-1897), Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman (1864-1882), and Idaho Daily Statesman (1888-1902) of Boise; the Butte Miner (1876-1880), Butte Daily Miner (1880-1881), and Daily Miner (1879-1885) of Butte; and the Helena Independent (1875-1954) and Daily Independent (1874-1895) of Helena. These newspapers were the ones most widely read in the region at the time.

The 19th Century U. S. Newspapers database contains major newspapers from all over the U. S. It also is searchable. Using the two databases and keywords such as Chinese, Chinaman, and China Woman in conjunction with state and city names, I have found some thirty relevant articles.

The next chapter talks about the motivations of the Chinese that induced them to move into and within Idaho and Montana. It also analyzes their migration using the birthplace data taken from HeritageQuest Online. Such information, especially the birthplaces of children, is key to mapping and understanding the migration process. Missing, of course, is information for 1890, since records for that census were nearly completely destroyed in a fire at the National Archives. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters are based mostly on occupational data from the censuses, newspaper accounts, and historical photographs available from the Idaho State Historical Society, Montana State Historical Society, and other sources. Here I assess the assimilation and cultural influence by two time periods, before and after the Chinese Exclusion Act, and legacy of the Chinese people from this frontier.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Motivation and Migration**

Idaho and Montana were not desirable destinations during their territorial years. Living conditions were poor and danger omnipresent. Doctors and nurses were in short supply, and so were teachers. In addition, only a few women were present, so families were few and prostitution common. These reasons caused many white miners to avoid Idaho and Montana, and consequently opened the way for others, particularly the Chinese (Hart 1986, 10).

As is well known, the Chinese roles in previous mining sites had been largely supportive. They worked as laborers, helpers, servants, and cooks for the white miners. Their exclusion from mining itself was partly social, but this custom was reinforced by law at most locations until 1864. Such laws and customs gradually declined after the California boom, and the result most obvious in the harsh northern Rockies. White miners there opened camps to the Chinese because the Chinese were willing to excavate placers, sifting through gravel and sand with the aid of cold water. This was hard work, but potentially lucrative, and the Chinese saw it as a way to advance economically. As a result, the major occupations of Idahoan and Montanan Chinese changed to actual miners (Rohe 1982).

The Chinese experience in Idaho and Montana, though marked by many of the same prejudices and discriminations found elsewhere in the West, was made somewhat easier by the mining opportunities (Rohe 1982). The 1870 census identifies 153 Chinese miners in Idaho and Montana who had each accumulated personal estates of several

hundred dollars or more, a marked change from the previous census where poverty was the rule.

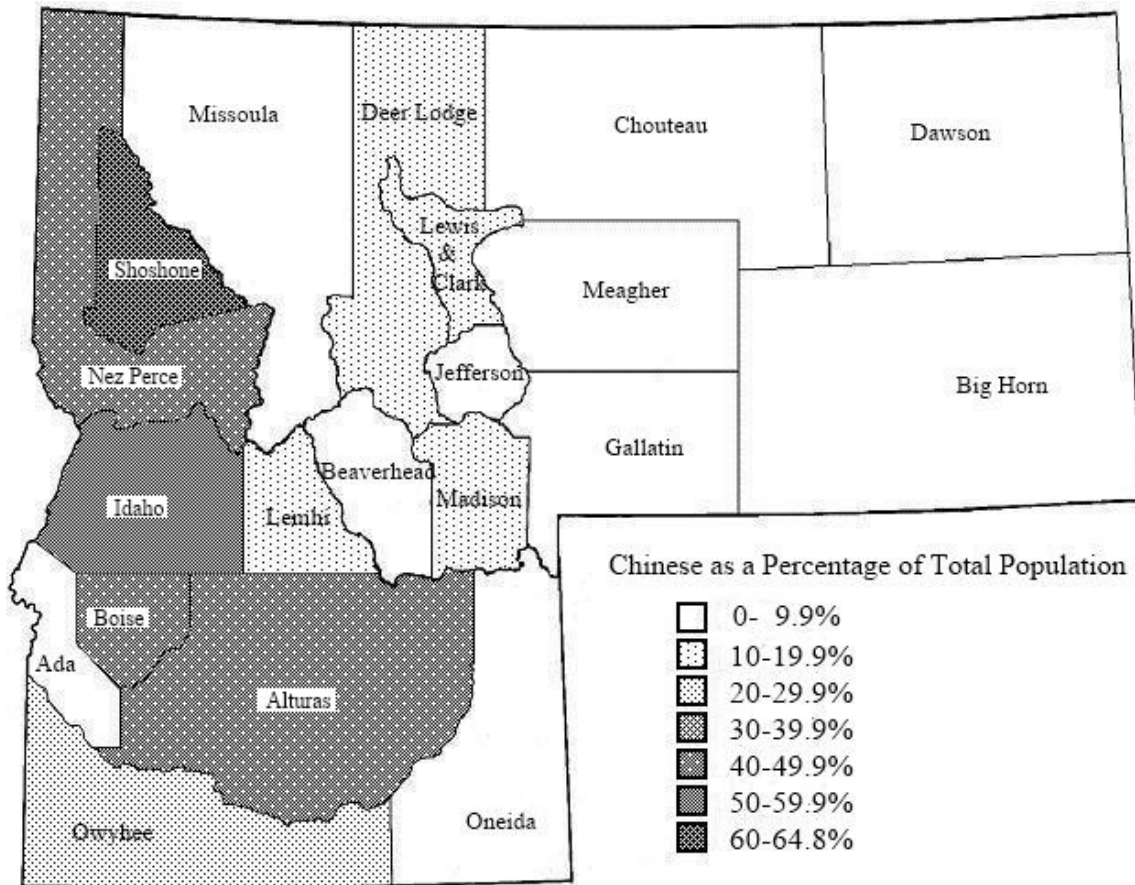
In 1860, all 34,933 Chinese natives in the United States lived in California (U. S. Census Bureau 1870, Volume 2, Table 30). The earliest mention I find of them in Idaho is September, 1865, when two newspaper articles note their arrival to the Boise basin. The *Idaho Tri-Weekly Stateman* on September 14 reported “That interesting sight so familiar to old Californians, of long trains of celestials on the move in single file, supporting the middle of their long-handled shovels or a bamboo stick with pendant sacks of rice, chop sticks, rockers, and gum boots, filed along Idaho Street yesterday morning.” Calling the Chinese celestials conveys both mysterious and insulting images. The *Idaho World* on September 30 said that “the Chinamen are coming among us. Lord deliver us from the ‘Locusts of Egypt!’ They devour all before them. If destiny has so shaped it, let them come.”

Over six thousand Chinese had moved to Idaho and Montana by 1870, about a fifth of the total population for the two territories (Table 1). These Chinese were heavily concentrated, however, and were the most numerous group in Shoshone and Idaho counties, Idaho (Map 4). Their numbers were significant in several other locations as well, mostly in mountainous sections. Other racial groups--African Americans and Native Americans--are almost totally absent in the territorial censuses that year, although significant number of uncounted Blackfeet, Crow, Nez Perce, and other Indians were certainly present.

	County	Chinese	White	Black	Native	Total
Population	Ada	78	2,569	20	8	2,675
	Alturas	314	369	5	1	689
	Boise	1,754	2,057	15	8	3,834
	Idaho	425	415	2	7	849
	Lemhi	120	864	2	2	988
	Nez Perce	747	837	4	19	1,607
	Oneida		1,921	1		1,922
	Owyhee	368	1,334	9	2	1,713
	Shoshone	468	252	2		722
	<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>4,274</b>	<b>10,618</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>14,999</b>
	Beaverhead	6	714	2		722
	Big Horn		38			38
	Chouteau	3	476	20	18	517
	Dawson		161	4	12	177
	Deer Lodge	776	3,551	15	25	4,367
	Gallatin	4	1,554	13	7	1,578
	Jefferson	122	1,406	2	1	1,531
	Lewis & Clark	666	4,279	92	3	5,040
	Madison	299	2,361	20	4	2,684
	Meagher	29	1,346	4	8	1,387
	Missoula	44	2,420	11	79	2,554
	<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>1,949</b>	<b>18,306</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>20,595</b>
	<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>6,223</b>	<b>28,924</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>35,594</b>
Percentage	Ada	2.9%	96.0%	0.8%	0.3%	100.0%
	Alturas	45.6%	53.6%	0.7%	0.1%	100.0%
	Boise	45.7%	53.7%	0.4%	0.2%	100.0%
	Idaho	50.1%	48.9%	0.2%	0.8%	100.0%
	Lemhi	12.1%	87.5%	0.2%	0.2%	100.0%
	Nez Perce	46.5%	52.1%	0.2%	1.2%	100.0%
	Oneida	0.0%	99.9%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
	Owyhee	21.5%	77.9%	0.5%	0.1%	100.0%
	Shoshone	64.8%	34.9%	0.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>70.8%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	Beaverhead	0.8%	98.9%	0.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	Big Horn	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Chouteau	0.6%	92.1%	3.8%	3.5%	100.0%
	Dawson	0.0%	90.9%	2.3%	6.8%	100.0%
	Deer Lodge	17.8%	81.3%	0.3%	0.6%	100.0%
	Gallatin	0.3%	98.5%	0.8%	0.4%	100.0%
	Jefferson	8.0%	91.8%	0.1%	0.1%	100.0%
	Lewis & Clark	13.2%	84.9%	1.8%	0.1%	100.0%
	Madison	11.1%	88.0%	0.8%	0.1%	100.0%
	Meagher	2.1%	97.0%	0.3%	0.6%	100.0%
	Missoula	1.7%	94.8%	0.4%	3.1%	100.0%
	<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	<b>88.9%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>81.2%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 1. Population in Idaho and Montana Counties by Race in 1870. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 2.





**Map 4. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1870.** Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 2.

During the territorial years, the Chinese population in Idaho and Montana was heavily concentrated in the gold-mining counties (especially Boise, Idaho, Nez Perce, Shoshone, and Lewis & Clark), plus smaller groupings in the silver-mining county of Owyhee and copper-mining counties, such as Deer Lodge. They were mostly absent in the agricultural counties of the Snake River Plain (Ada and Oneida) and the Great Plains (Big Horn, Chouteau, Dawson, Gallatin, and Meagher) (Map 4). Among the mining counties, more Chinese settled on the Idaho side because Idaho was closer to their source area of California. Getting to Montana also required crossing the high continental divide. Such difficulties probably explain the absence of a Chinese population in two Montana mining counties: Beaverhead and Missoula.

The same harsh conditions in the northern Rockies that discouraged old-stock Americans and gave opportunity to the Chinese aided other foreign-born miners as well (Table 2). In 1870, the foreign-born population constituted 38.7 percent of Idahoans, and 44.6 percent of Montanans. The majority of these came from European countries, British America (the present-day Canada), and of course, China. The majority of the Chinese people in Idaho and Montana were actually born in China while only about one-third of the white population in the territories was foreign born.

	Territory	Nativity	Chinese	White	Black	Indian	Total
Population	Idaho	Native	5	7,018	47	44	7,114
		Foreign	4,269	3,600	13	3	7,885
		Total	4,274	10,618	60	47	14,999
	Montana	Native	6	12,288	175	147	12,616
		Foreign	1,943	6,018	8	10	7,979
		Total	1,949	18,306	183	157	20,595
	Idaho + Montana	Native	11	19,306	222	191	19,730
		Foreign	6,212	9,618	21	13	15,864
		Total	6,223	28,924	243	204	35,594
Percentage	Idaho	Native	0.1%	66.1%	78.3%	93.6%	47.4%
		Foreign	99.9%	33.9%	21.7%	6.4%	52.6%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Montana	Native	0.3%	67.1%	95.6%	93.6%	61.3%
		Foreign	99.7%	32.9%	4.4%	6.4%	38.7%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Idaho + Montana	Native	0.2%	66.7%	91.4%	93.6%	55.4%
		Foreign	99.8%	33.3%	8.6%	6.4%	44.6%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2. Nativity in Idaho and Montana by Race in 1870. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 22.**

Even among the American-born population in the territories, not many native Idahoans and Montanans existed. The paths these settlers took to the region after the gold strikes of 1860 can be determined by birthplace information given in the census. For the Chinese, such data are not overly abundant since only a few of these people were U. S.-born at the time and not everyone's birthplace was recorded. Still, the information

available clearly shows California as the major source area (Tables 3, 4, and 5). Oregon and Washington are secondary sources (Map 5).

In contrast to the Chinese, birthplace information from the 1870 census reveals that white, black, and Native Americans each travelled different routes to the territories (Table 6). White migrants came from all around the United States and Europe, moving mostly from east to west (Maps 6 and 7). Their pattern of origin is similar to that in Oregon for 1850, with New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri being major contributors (Bowen 1979). In addition, large numbers of white migrants came to Idaho from adjacent Utah and Oregon. On the other hand, most African Americans migrated to the northern Rockies from the southern and eastern states (Maps 8 and 9) while most Native Americans were born in Idaho and Montana and the adjacent states (Map 10).

County	Birthplace		
	China	ID	CA
Ada	77	1	
Alturas	312		
Boise	1725		3
Idaho	425		
Lemhi	120		
Nez Perce	734	1	
Oneida	4		
Owyhee	367		
Shoshone	465		
<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>4229</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Beaverhead	2		
Chouteau	3		
Deer Lodge	461		
Gallatin	4		
Jefferson	122		
Lewis & Clark	659		
Madison	299		
Meagher	29		
Missoula	44		
<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>1623</b>		
<b>ID + MT</b>	<b>5852</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 3. Idaho and Montana Chinese Birthplace in 1870. Source: HeritageQuest Online.**

County	Birthplace				
	China	ID	MT	CA	OR
Ada	202	1			
Alturas	128				
Boise	1202	13		1	
Cassia	22				
Idaho	610			1	
Kootenai	7				
Lemhi	261	1			
Nez Perce	198				
Oneida	61				
Owyhee	158	2		1	
Shoshone	296				
<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>3145</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>3</b>	
Beaverhead	130			1	
Chouteau	18				
Custer	2				
Deer Lodge	710				
Gallatin	27				
Jefferson	52				
Lewis & Clark	353		2	3	1
Madison	265		2	1	
Meagher	52				
Missoula	148		1		
<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>1754</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ID + MT</b>	<b>4899</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

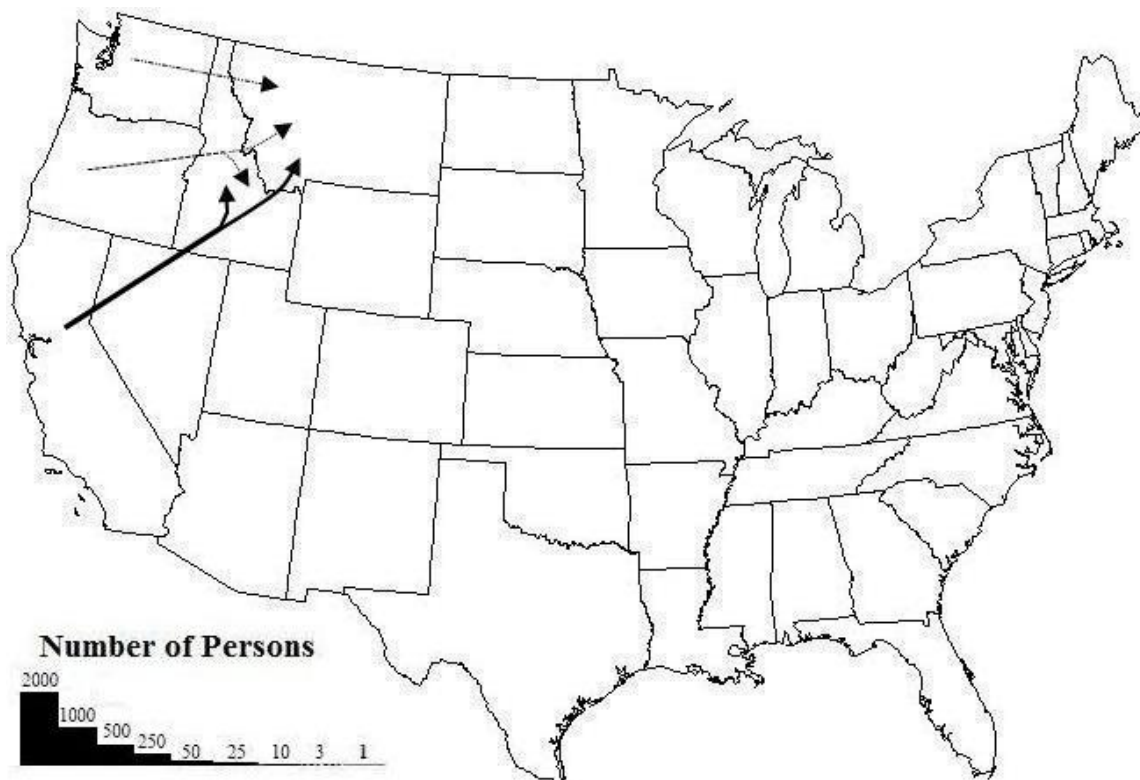
**Table 4. Idaho and Montana Chinese Birthplace in 1880. Source: HeritageQuest Online.**

County	Chinese Population	Birthplace						
		China	ID	MT	CA	OR	WA	MA
Ada	161	154			6	1		
Bannock	46	43			3			
Bingham	10	10						
Blaine	69	69						
Boise	273	255	14		4			
Canyon	43	41			2			
Cassia	3	3						
Custer	38	38						
Elmore	47	47						
Idaho	99	99						
Kootenai	56	56						
Latah	26	26						
Lemhi	55	54			1			
Lincoln	14	14						
Nez Perce	67	67						
Owyhee	146	142	2		2			
Shoshone	68	66	2					
Washington	46	43			2	1		
<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>1267</b>	<b>1227</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2</b>		
Beaverhead	72	71			1			
Broadwater	14	14						
Carbon	2	2						
Cascade	4	4						
Chouteau	81	76			5			
Custer	16	16						
Dawson	2	2						
Deer Lodge	77	75		1	1			
Fergus	13	13						
Flathead	43	43						
Gallatin	54	51		3				
Granite	62	62						
Jefferson	57	56		1				
Lewis & Clark	309	304			5			
Madison	78	78						
Meagher	9	7			2			
Missoula	181	174		7				
Park	39	37			1		1	
Ravalli	30	30						
Silver Bow	347	334		2	11			
Sweet Grass	17	17						
Teton	15	15						
Yellowstone	89	82			5	1		1
<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>1611</b>	<b>1563</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>2878</b>	<b>2790</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

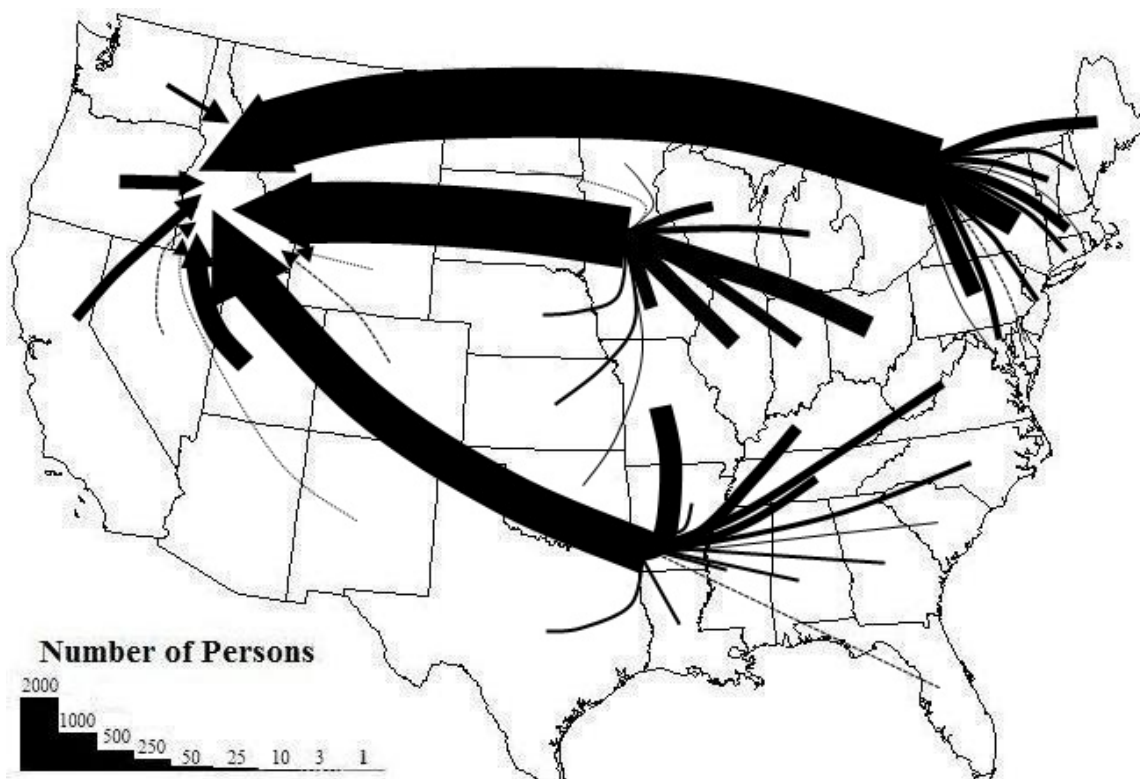
Table 5. Idaho and Montana Chinese Birthplace in 1900. Source: HeritageQuest Online.

Birthplace	Idaho				Montana			
	Chinese	White	Black	Native	Chinese	White	Black	Native
<b>Idaho</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>921</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Montana</b>		<b>13</b>			<b>6</b>	<b>1,588</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>East</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,988</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,978</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>
Connecticut		59				130	1	
Delaware		5				23		
Maine		242				331	2	
Maryland		65	4			137	5	
Massachusetts		196	3			293	2	
New Hampshire		54				100	1	
New Jersey		49				118		
New York		800	4			1,676	7	
Pennsylvania		415	1			897	14	
Rhode Island		16				30		
Vermont		75				185		
Washington, D.C.		12	2			58	4	
<b>Midwest</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,756</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,567</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>
Dakota Territory		1				6		
Illinois		399	1			797		
Indian Territory		1				1		1
Indiana		252				471	2	
Iowa		311	1			466	2	
Kansas		22				61	2	
Michigan		69				218		
Minnesota		8				111		13
Nebraska		27				55	1	
Ohio		549	1			1,125	2	
Wisconsin		117	1			256		
<b>South</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,253</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,606</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>4</b>
Alabama		26				34	1	
Arkansas		24				27		1
Florida		5				12	2	
Georgia		23				71	1	
Kentucky		236	7			503	25	
Louisiana		26	1			44	7	
Mississippi		18				33		1
Missouri		533	3			1,252	52	1
North Carolina		44	1			54	2	
South Carolina		17	1			33	3	
Tennessee		109				171	5	
Texas		26	1			13		
Virginia & West Virginia		166	9			359	16	1
<b>Interior West</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>
Colorado		6				98		1
Nevada		3				13		1
New Mexico		1				7		
Utah		478		1		185		9
Wyoming		1				17		1
<b>West Coast</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>
California	3	204	3	15		78		3
Oregon		346	1	1		83		14
Washington		47		6		23		5
<b>Other</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>U. S. Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7,018</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12,288</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Foreign Total</b>	<b>4,269</b>	<b>3,600</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1,943</b>	<b>6,018</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,274</b>	<b>10,618</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>1,949</b>	<b>18,306</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>157</b>

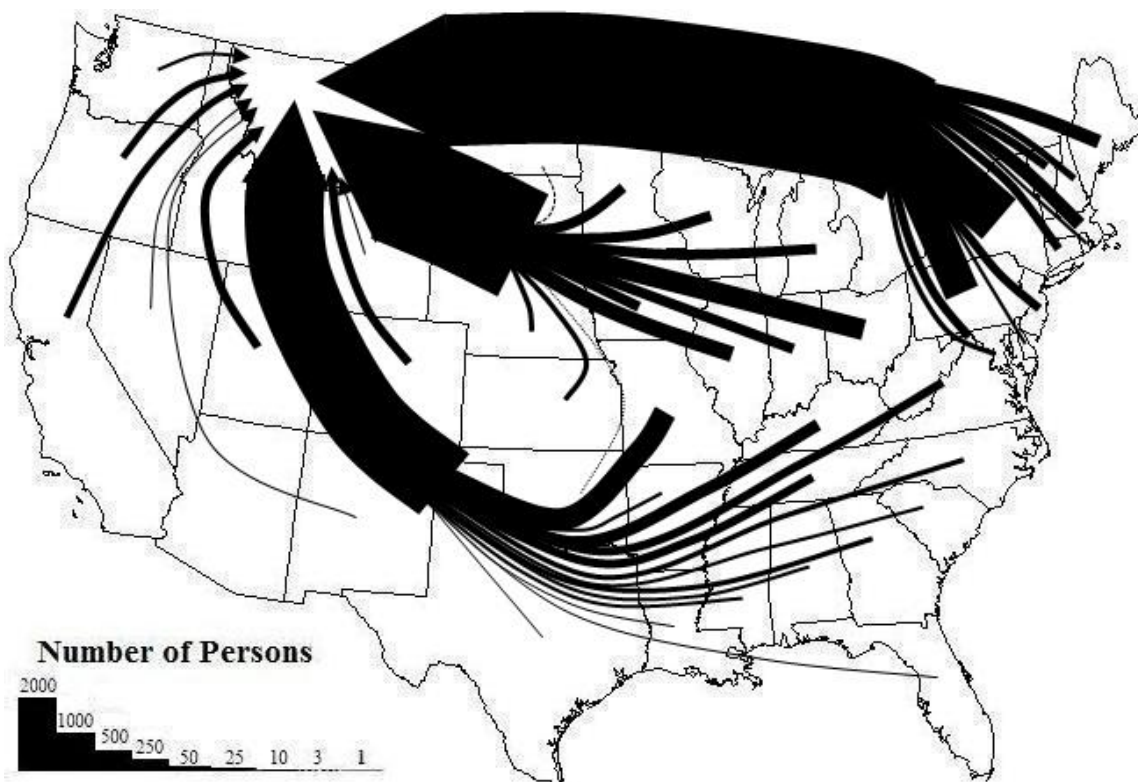
Table 6. Idahoan and Montanan Birthplaces by Race in 1870. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.



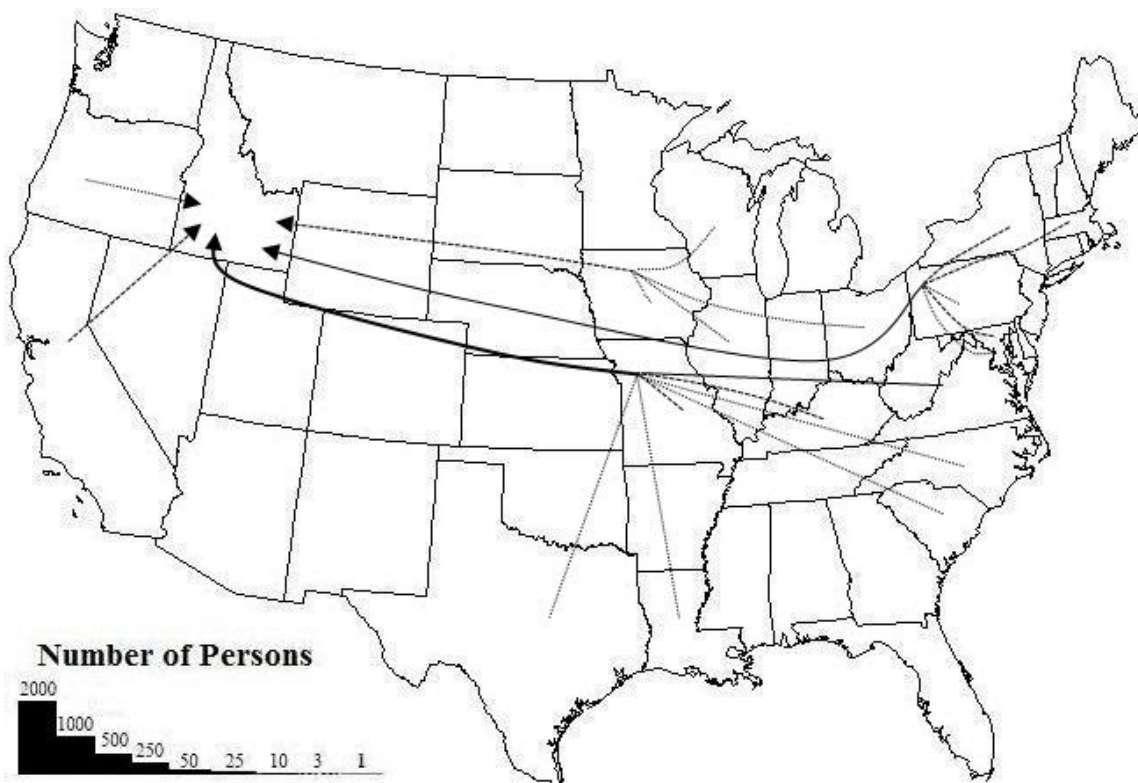
**Map 5. Chinese Migration to Idaho and Montana. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.**



**Map 6. White Migration to Idaho. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.**

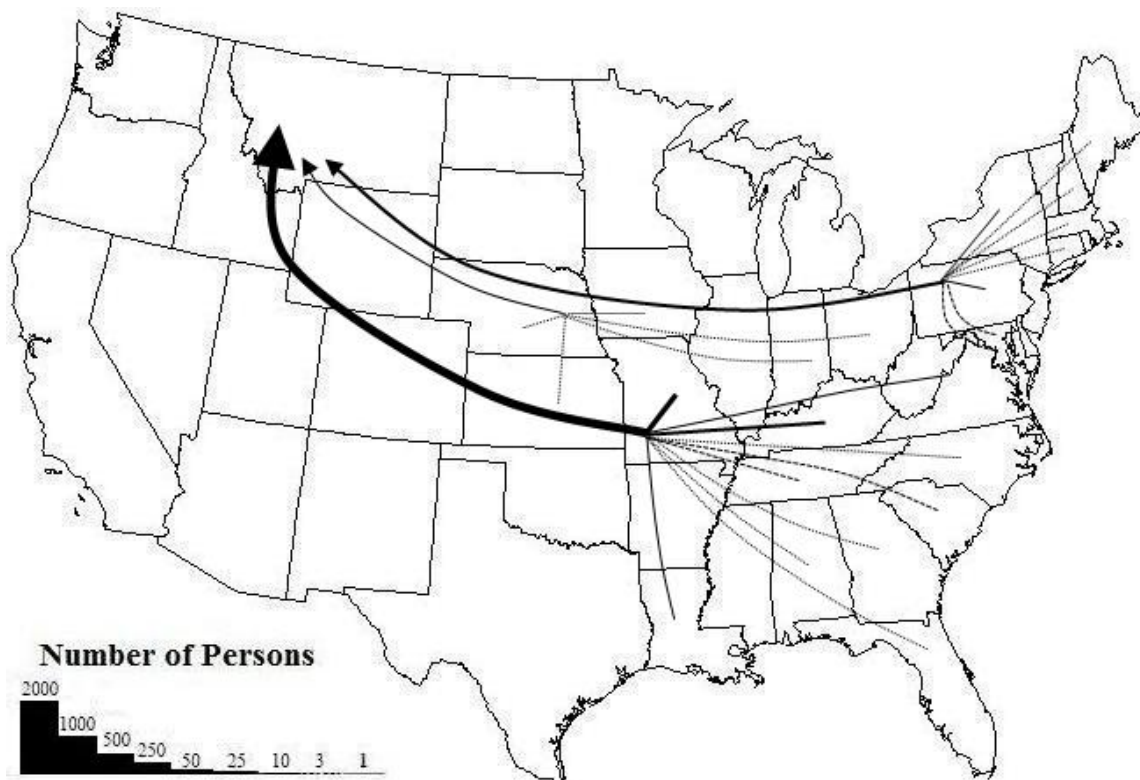


Map 7. White Migration to Montana. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.

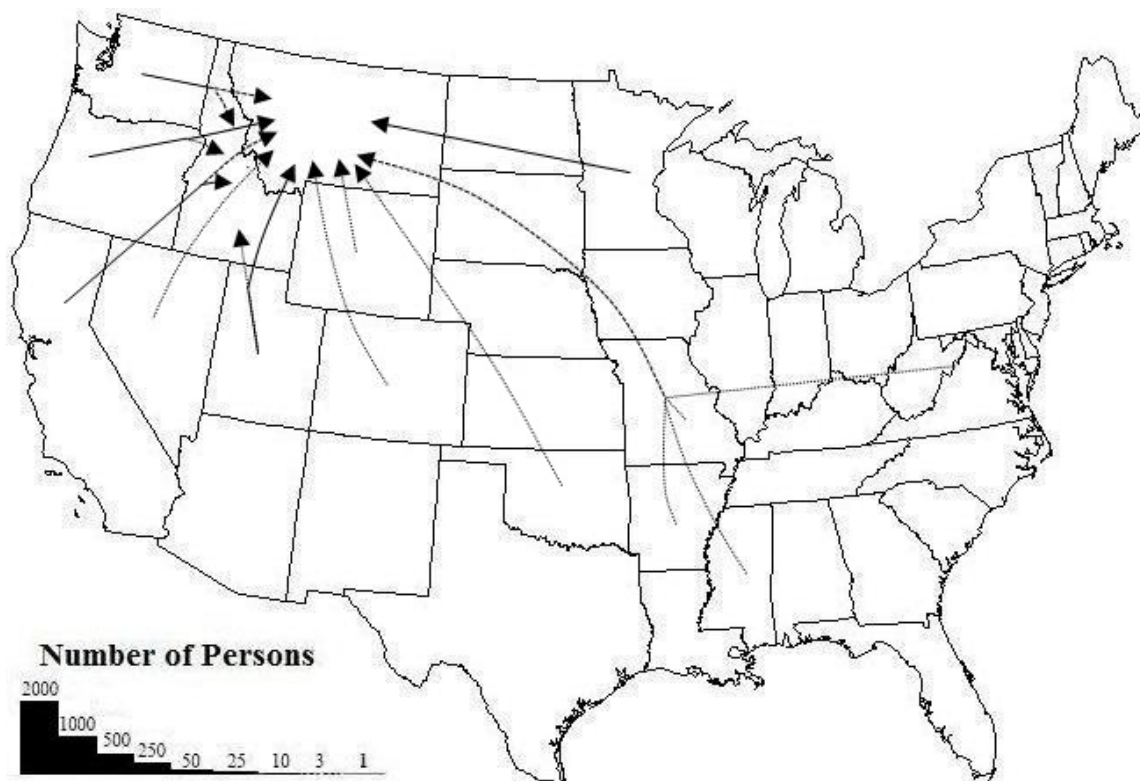


Map 8. African-American Migration to Idaho. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.





**Map 9. African-American Migration to Montana. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.**



**Map 10. Native-American Migration to Idaho and Montana. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Vol. 1, Table 6.**



My earlier assertion that gold mining was the primary reason for the large Chinese migration to Idaho and Montana is borne out by occupation data (Table 7). Most of their population, at least in the early years, worked as miners. In fact, the percentage was close to ninety percent for Chinese Idahoans in 1870 and almost eighty percent for Chinese Montanans. This single-mindedness of the Chinese is even more visible if we look at occupation data for all races (Table 8). Although fewer Chinese were present than whites in the territory, the Chinese mining population was larger.

Other than mining, some Chinese men in the region took jobs as launderers, cooks, domestic servants, gardeners, and gamblers (Tables 7 and 8). Gambling, of course, was a big leisure activity in all mining towns, and over a hundred Chinese found employment in this way. The Chinese numerically dominated the other three professions, just as they did mining. Menial service jobs were the first opportunities open Chinese immigrants in the American West (Hart 2002, 38). Of those, washing and ironing clothes for whites allowed the most independence, and the Chinese stuck with this profession. In fact, by 1881, they were so dominant in this business that even the *Idaho Statesman* argued that the: “Chinese are taking too much money back to ‘the Flowery Kingdom.’” In almost every mining settlement, the hotels, restaurants, and boarding houses had Chinese cooks (Hart 2002, 57). Keeping with the service role limitations, a majority of the married Chinese women in Idaho and Montana were housekeepers while single women were prostitutes.

An important spatial distinction is linked to the professions. The census shows that majority of the Chinese miners lived in separate houses from other miners while most of the Chinese with other occupations did not. This is an indication that Chinese

miners operated separately from other miners, and thereby enjoyed a measure of freedom.

Chinese laundrymen, cooks and domestic servants in contrast, often lived with white people where not many other Chinese existed.

County	Male													Female							T O T A L			
	Miner	Laborer	Blacksmith	Launderer	Cook	Gardener	Merchant	Clerk	Doctor	Gambler	Servant	Other	None	Male Total	Launderer	House Keeper	Prostitute	Cook	Miners	Gambler		None	Female Total	
Ada	5	17		15	23	1					2	1		64	4	9						1	14	78
Alturas	300		2		5							2		309			3						3	312
Boise	1551	14	1	16	18	2	6	1	2	25		11	22	1669		1	35		13		10	59	1728	
Idaho	412			2	5		2	1				1		423		1	1					2	425	
Lemhi	108			5	4		1							118					2			2	120	
Nez Perce	645	10	2	12	14	2	6	6		10	8	6	1	722		1	11				1	13	735	
Oneida					4									4								0	4	
Owyhee	266	1		9	19		2				16	4	24	341		10					16	26	367	
Shoshone	419		3	2	5	3	2	1	1	15		5		456			9					9	465	
ID Total	3706	42	8	61	97	8	19	9	3	50	26	30	47	4106	4	22	59	0	15	0	28	128	4234	
Beaverhead														0	1	1						2	2	
Chouteau				3										3								0	3	
Deer Lodge	403			21	5		3				1		2	435			26					26	461	
Gallatin				2										2		2						2	4	
Jefferson	117			1	3									121	1							1	122	
Lewis & Clark	448	2	1	69	22		6	5	3	4	13	17	9	599	1	52		2		2	3	60	659	
Madison	289				3									292			7					7	299	
Meagher	26			2									1	29								0	29	
Missoula	14	4		14	6							3	1	42		2						2	44	
MT Total	1297	6	1	112	39	0	9	5	3	4	14	20	13	1523	3	57	33	2	0	2	3	100	1623	
ID + MT	5003	48	9	173	136	8	28	14	6	54	40	50	60	5629	7	79	92	2	15	2	31	228	5857	

Table 7. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1870. Source: HeritageQuest Online.

Occupation	Chinese	White	Black	Native	Total
Agricultural Laborers	3	710	5	2	720
Dairymen		17		1	18
Farmers and Planters		629			629
Gardeners, Nurserymen, and vine growers	7	1			8
Stock Raisers		52			52
Stock Herders		31		2	33
Other Agricultural Workers		2			2
<b>Total Agricultural Workers</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1,442</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1,462</b>
Barbers	1	10	5		16
Billiard & Bowling Saloon Workers		4			4
Boarding and Lodging House Keepers		12			12
Clergymen		6			6
Domestic Servants	109	52			161
Hotel and Restaurant Workers	27	166	8		201
Journalists		3			3
Laborers	41	313	6		360
Launderers	61	15	2		78
Lawyers		42			42
Livery-Stable Keepers and Hostlers		41			41
Officials and Employ of Government		82			82
Physicians and Surgeons	6	27			33
Soldiers		278			278
Teachers		21			21
Other Service Workers	2	83			85
<b>Total Professional &amp; Personal Service Workers</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,423</b>
Traders and Dealers	17	267	1	3	288
Hucksters, Peddlers, and Commercial Travelers		8			8
Clerks, Salesmen, and Accountants	7	88			95
In Banking and Brokerage of Money and Stocks		6			6
Officials and Employees of Express Companies		13			13
Carmen, Draymen, and Teamsters	1	126			127
Other Traders and Transportation Workers	5	170	6	3	184
<b>Total Trader and Transportation Workers</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>721</b>
Bankers		16			16
Blacksmiths	8	105			113
Boot and Shoemakers		34			34
Brewers		28			28
Brick & Stone Masons		28			28
Butchers	1	66			67
Cabinetmakers		6			6
Car, Carriage, and Wagon Makers		6			6
Carpenters and Joiners		107			107
Clerks and Book Keepers		3			3
Cotton and Woolen Mill Operatives		14			14
Curriers, Tanners, and leather-finisher		3			3
Distillers and Rectifiers of Liquors		2			2
Harness and Saddle Makers		7			7
Iron and Steel Workers		2			2
Lumbermen and Woodchoppers	1	44			45
Machinists		2			2
Millers		8			8
Milliners and Dress Makers		9			9
Miners	3,853	2,716	7	3	6,579
Painters		11			11
Printers		13			13
Saw Mill Operatives		36			36
Tailors		7			7
Wheelwrights		9			9
Other Manufacturers		105			105
<b>Total Manufacturers and Miners</b>	<b>3,863</b>	<b>3,413</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7,286</b>
<b>All Occupations</b>	<b>4,150</b>	<b>6,675</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10,879</b>

Table 8. Idahoan and Montanan Occupations by Race in 1870. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Volume 1, Table 30.

Unlike the Chinese, the other races in early-day Idaho and Montana had highly varied occupations. About twenty percent of the white population in 1870 had agriculture-related jobs, for example, while at the same time, only ten Chinese worked in agriculture, three as agricultural laborers and seven as gardeners (Table 8). Even the small groups, African and Native American, both had five people working in that field.

All the races, except Native Americans, show a heavy male bias in the early histories of the territories (Table 9). This ratio is most unequal for Chinese, where the male population was twenty-four times larger than the female. Males constituted 78.6 percent of the white population and 71.6 percent of the African-American population. In contrast, Native-American women outnumbered the males.

	Territory	Gender	Chinese	White	Black	Native	Total
Population	Idaho	Male	4,148	7,973	42	21	12,184
		Female	126	2,645	18	26	2,815
		Total	4,274	10,618	60	47	14,999
	Montana	Male	1,826	14,760	132	53	16,771
		Female	123	3,546	51	104	3,824
		Total	1,949	18,306	183	157	20,595
	Idaho + Montana	Male	5,974	22,733	174	74	28,955
		Female	249	6,191	69	130	6,639
		Total	6,223	28,924	243	204	35,594
Percentage	Idaho	Male	97.1%	75.1%	70.0%	44.7%	81.2%
		Female	2.9%	24.9%	30.0%	55.3%	18.8%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Montana	Male	93.7%	80.6%	72.1%	33.8%	81.4%
		Female	6.3%	19.4%	27.9%	66.2%	18.6%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Idaho + Montana	Male	96.0%	78.6%	71.6%	36.3%	81.3%
		Female	4.0%	21.4%	28.4%	63.7%	18.7%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 9. Gender Ratio by Race in Idaho and Montana in 1870. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Volume 1, Table 22.**

Most of the Chinese in Idaho and Montana in the early years were working-age people mostly in their twenties, thirties, and early forties (Table 10). This pattern was similar to that of whites and African Americans in the territories. However, unlike the Chinese, the whites and African Americans added sizeable youth populations. Native

Americans were extreme on this measure.

	Territory	Age	Chinese	White	Black	Native	Total
Population	Idaho	0-9	9	1,779	5	17	1,810
		10-19	219	1,000	3	11	1,233
		20-29	1,620	2,377	15	13	4,025
		30-39	1,626	3,228	25	3	4,882
		40-49	653	1,565	8	2	2,228
		50-59	100	516	3	0	619
		60-69	38	122	1	0	161
		70+	2	27	0	1	30
		Unknown	7	4	0	0	11
		Total	4,274	10,618	60	47	14,999
	Montana	0-9	1	2,381	25	18	2,425
		10-19	59	1,377	15	31	1,482
		20-29	372	5,731	57	64	6,224
		30-39	325	5,688	57	22	6,092
		40-49	123	2,297	21	14	2,455
		50-59	15	666	4	5	690
		60-69	5	140	3	3	151
		70+	0	19	1	0	20
		Unknown	1,049	7	0	0	1,056
		Total	1,949	18,306	183	157	20,595
	Idaho + Montana	0-9	10	4,160	30	35	4,235
		10-19	278	2,377	18	42	2,715
		20-29	1,992	8,108	72	77	10,249
		30-39	1,951	8,916	82	25	10,974
		40-49	776	3,862	29	16	4,683
		50-59	115	1,182	7	5	1,309
		60-69	43	262	4	3	312
		70+	2	46	1	1	50
		Unknown	1,056	11	0	0	1,067
		Total	6,223	28,924	243	204	35,594
Percentage	Idaho	0-9	0.2%	16.8%	8.3%	36.2%	12.1%
		10-19	5.1%	9.4%	5.0%	23.4%	8.2%
		20-29	37.9%	22.4%	25.0%	27.7%	26.8%
		30-39	38.0%	30.4%	41.7%	6.4%	32.6%
		40-49	15.3%	14.7%	13.3%	4.2%	14.9%
		50-59	2.3%	4.9%	5.0%	0.0%	4.1%
		60-69	0.9%	1.2%	1.7%	0.0%	1.1%
		70+	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	2.1%	0.2%
		Unknown	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Montana	0-9	0.1%	13.0%	13.7%	11.5%	11.8%
		10-19	3.0%	7.5%	8.2%	19.7%	7.2%
		20-29	19.1%	31.3%	31.1%	40.8%	30.2%
		30-39	16.7%	31.1%	31.1%	14.0%	29.6%
		40-49	6.3%	12.6%	11.5%	8.9%	11.9%
		50-59	0.8%	3.6%	2.2%	3.2%	3.4%
		60-69	0.2%	0.8%	1.6%	1.9%	0.7%
		70+	0.0%	0.1%	0.6%	0.0%	0.1%
		Unknown	53.8%	0.0%	0.00%	0.0%	5.1%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Idaho + Montana	0-9	0.2%	14.4%	12.4%	17.2%	11.9%
		10-19	4.5%	8.2%	7.4%	20.6%	7.6%
		20-29	32.0%	28.0%	29.6%	37.7%	28.8%
		30-39	31.3%	30.8%	33.7%	12.3%	30.8%
		40-49	12.5%	13.4%	11.9%	7.8%	13.2%
		50-59	1.8%	4.1%	2.9%	2.4%	3.7%
		60-69	0.7%	0.9%	1.7%	1.5%	0.9%
		70+	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%	0.5%	0.1%
		Unknown	17.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%
		Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 10. Age Distribution in Idaho and Montana by Race in 1870. Source: U. S. Census 1870, Volume 2, Table 26, 29, and 30.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Cultural Practices, 1865-1882**

According to geographer Randall E. Rohe, Chinese participation in nineteenth century western mining falls into three time-space periods: California and Oregon in the 1850s, Idaho and Montana (with smaller concentrations in Nevada) in the 1860s and 1870s, and Washington and Colorado in later years. During the first period, the Chinese were allowed to operate only in support roles, so the real starting point of their mining was the second period. The Chinese also participated in mining during the third period, but their numbers were smaller because, after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, new immigration stopped and open hostility forced many others to leave (Rohe 1982). Therefore, the second period, the 1860s and 1870s in Idaho and Montana, represents the peak of Chinese participation in American mining.

The Idaho and Montana mining boom, although a significant incident in Western American history, was fairly short-lived. It continued only about a decade after the first significant gold strike at Pierce in 1860. Only a few new mines opened in the two territories after 1869, and most of the active sites after 1870 were placer mines that the majority of white miners avoided because of the intensive physicality of this work. In addition, mining profits were hurt by the national Panic of 1873, and as a result, most mines across the West started to decline. This combination of harder work and smaller profits changed the ethnic makeup of miners. White people, who had more economic alternatives, tended to leave the business. Chinese took up the slack. This state of affairs ended abruptly in 1882 when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. A massive withdrawal of Chinese population then occurred throughout the northern Rockies, and

without miners, the placer mining productions also declined (Idaho State Historical Society 1966). Clearly, the Chinese Exclusion Act changed life in territorial Idaho and Montana and I therefore use its date--1882--to separate my analysis into two chapters. Here I look at the rise of Chinese presence and its peak years. Chapter four will cover the post-1882 decline.

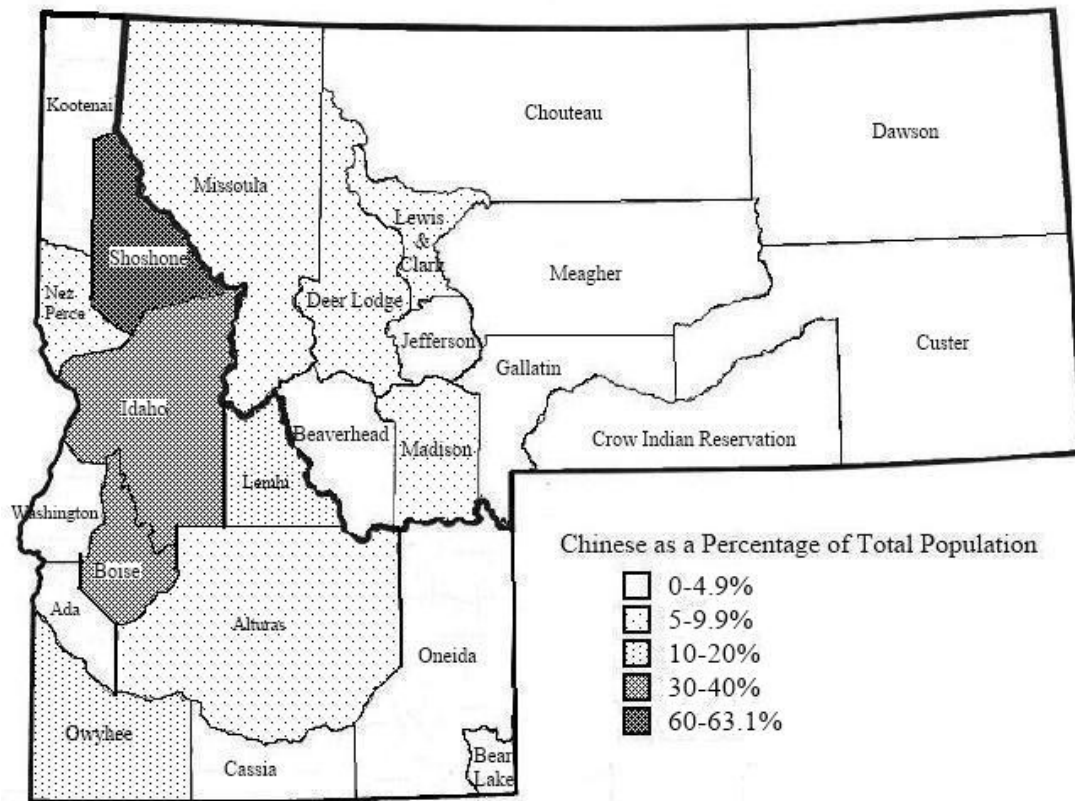
Prior to 1882, the Chinese were important contributors to the populations of Idaho and Montana. Although their numbers dropped slightly in 1880 from the previous census year, they still dominated the three most important gold-mining counties (Table 11 and Map 11). Chinese people constituted over one-third of the population in Boise and Idaho counties and an amazing two-thirds in Shoshone County. They also formed a significant minority in the other gold counties (Lemhi, Alturas, Madison, and Lewis & Clark) and in the copper county of Deer Lodge and the silver county of Owyhee. In all these places, Chinese males with long, pigtailed hair and traditional, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A. D.) peasant clothing were common sights (Photos 1 and 2).

The Chinese were probably laughed at by others because of their hairstyle and clothing, and the retention of these customs was also impractical for mining and other physical work. Still, the surviving photographs suggest that the Chinese kept those traditions at least into the 1880s. Changing hairstyles must have been one of the toughest sacrifices they made in the new world, because a basic Confucian idea is the sanctity of the human body, including hair. Because one's body comes from one's parents, any harm to this body dishonors the parents.

	County	Chinese	White	Black	Native	Total
Population	Ada	203	4,447	16	8	4,674
	Alturas	128	1,554	1	10	1,693
	Bear Lake		3,234		1	3,235
	Boise	1,225	1,970	10	9	3,214
	Cassia	22	1,289		1	1,312
	Idaho	738	1,271		22	2,031
	Kootenai	7	493	3	15	518
	Lemhi	262	1,950	5	13	2,230
	Nez Perce	198	3,684	6	77	3,965
	Oneida	61	6,892	3	8	6,964
	Owyhee	239	1,179	7	1	1,426
	Shoshone	296	171	2		469
	Washington		879			879
	<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>3,379</b>	<b>29,013</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>32,610</b>
	Beaverhead	131	2,574	6	1	2,712
	Chouteau	18	2,448	71	521	3,058
	Custer	2	2,461	33	14	2,510
	Dawson		162	3	15	180
	Deer Lodge	710	8,075	60	31	8,876
	Gallatin	27	3,570	31	15	3,643
	Jefferson	52	2,389	14	9	2,464
	Lewis & Clark	359	5,710	86	366	6,521
	Madison	265	3,612	20	18	3,915
	Meagher	52	2,458	18	215	2,743
	Missoula	149	1,926	4	458	2,537
	<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>1,765</b>	<b>35,385</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>1,663</b>	<b>39,159</b>
	<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>5,144</b>	<b>64,398</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>1,828</b>	<b>71,769</b>
Percentage	Ada	4.3%	95.1%	0.4%	0.2%	100.0%
	Alturas	7.5%	91.8%	0.1%	0.6%	100.0%
	Bear Lake	0.0%	99.9%	0.0%	0.1%	100.0%
	Boise	38.1%	61.3%	0.3%	0.3%	100.0%
	Cassia	1.7%	98.2%	0.0%	0.1%	100.0%
	Idaho	36.3%	62.6%	0.0%	1.1%	100.0%
	Kootenai	1.4%	95.2%	0.5%	2.9%	100.0%
	Lemhi	11.8%	87.4%	0.2%	0.6%	100.0%
	Nez Perce	5.0%	92.9%	0.2%	1.9%	100.0%
	Oneida	0.9%	99.0%	0.0%	0.1%	100.0%
	Owyhee	16.7%	82.7%	0.5%	0.1%	100.0%
	Shoshone	63.1%	36.5%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	Washington	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>88.9%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	Beaverhead	4.9%	94.9%	0.2%	0.0%	100.0%
	Chouteau	0.6%	80.1%	2.3%	17.0%	100.0%
	Custer	0.1%	98.0%	1.3%	0.6%	100.0%
	Dawson	0.0%	90.0%	1.7%	8.3%	100.0%
	Deer Lodge	8.0%	91.0%	0.7%	0.3%	100.0%
	Gallatin	0.7%	98.0%	0.9%	0.4%	100.0%
	Jefferson	2.1%	96.9%	0.6%	0.4%	100.0%
	Lewis & Clark	5.5%	87.6%	1.3%	5.6%	100.0%
	Madison	6.8%	92.3%	0.5%	0.4%	100.0%
	Meagher	1.9%	89.6%	0.7%	7.8%	100.0%
	Missoula	5.9%	75.9%	0.2%	18.0%	100.0%
	<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>90.4%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>89.7%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 11. Population in Idaho and Montana Counties by Race in 1880. Source: U. S. Census 1880, Vol. 1, Table 5.





Map 11. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1880. Source: U. S. Census 1880. Vol. 1, Table 5.

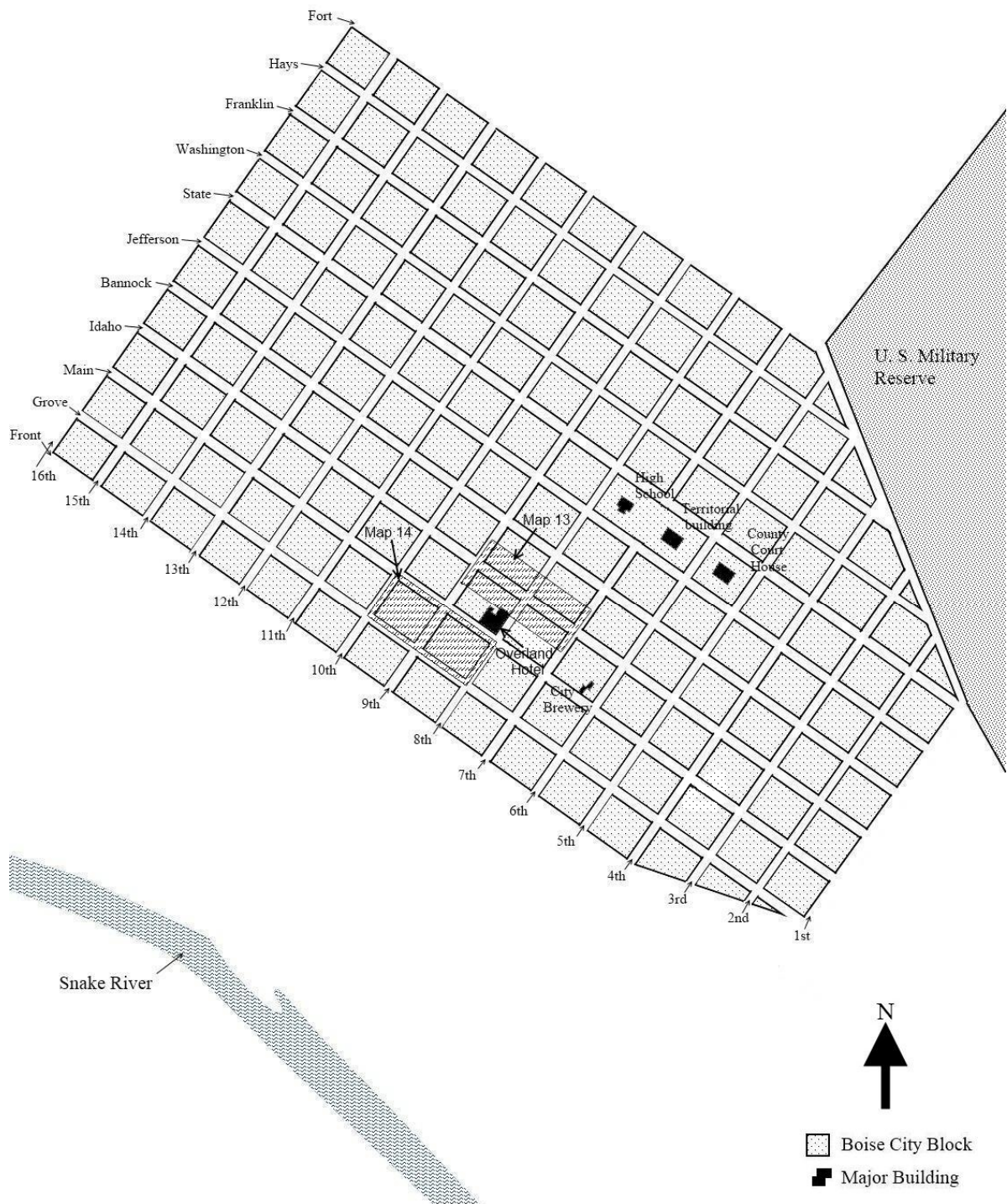


Photo 1. A Chinese in Idaho City's Chinese Quarter, circa 1880. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 76-138.48 (used with permission).

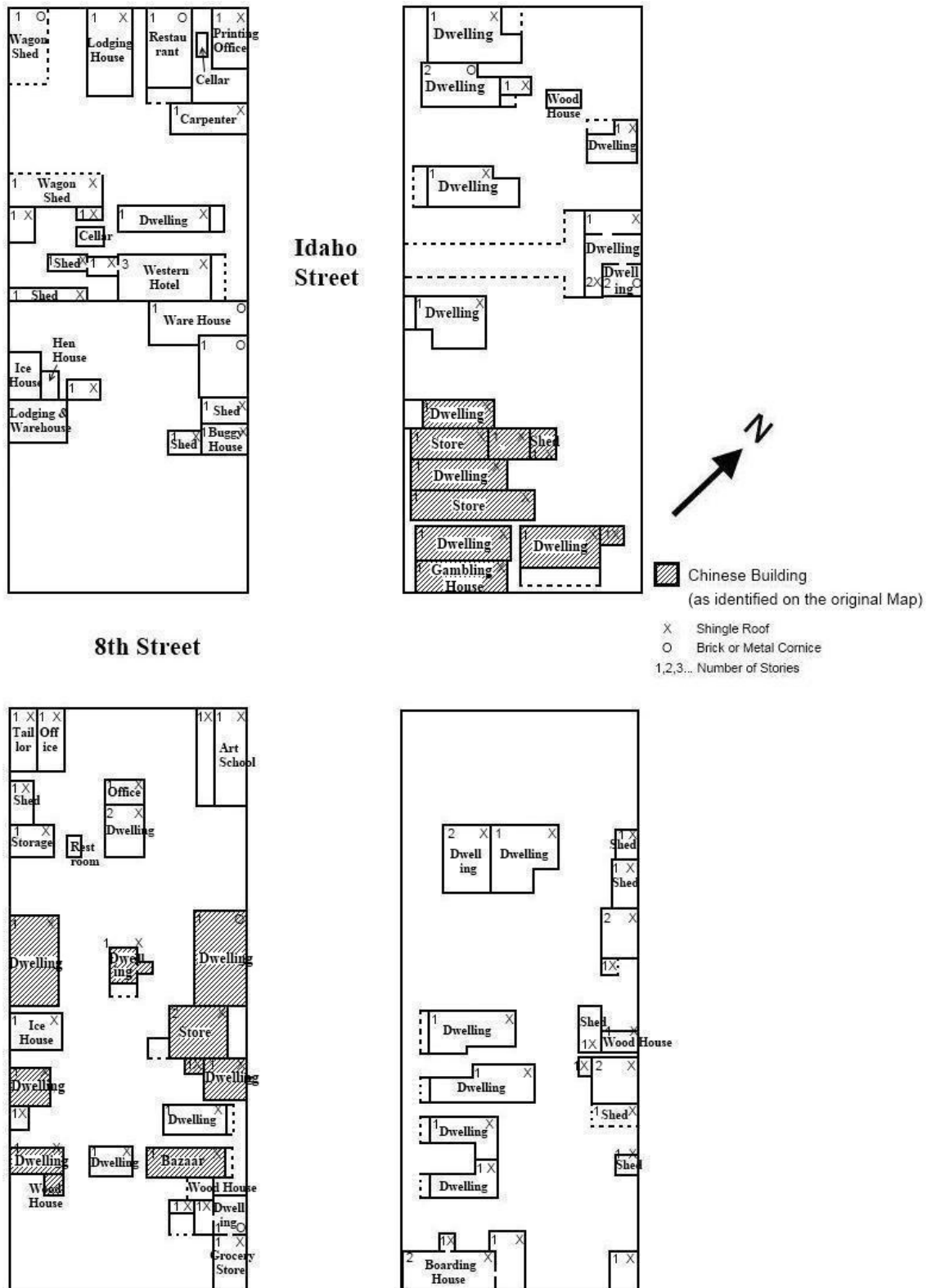


**Photo 2. A Chinese Placer Miner in Freedom (Slate Creek), Idaho County, circa 1880. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 1268-A (used with permission).**

Within the mining towns, Chinese people tended to keep to themselves, but they were not completely segregated from white settlers. This pattern was true in the relatively large city of Boise as well (Map 12). There most Chinese lived near the intersection of Idaho and Eighth streets (Map 13), an area Arthur A. Hart (2002) calls “Chinatown.” Beyond this cluster, Chinese laundries and similar service businesses could be found among white businesses and dwellings (Map 14). Clearly the Chinese did business with the whites.



Map 12. Early Boise. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Boise, Idaho, 1884.



Map 13. Chinese Concentrated Area in Early Boise. Source: Library of Congress. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Boise, Idaho, 1884.



As mining declined in the northern Rockies after the middle 1870s, the Chinese there made occupational changes. Their roles became more diverse. In 1880, the majority of Chinese males were still placer miners, although their numbers in this work had visibly declined from 1870 (compare Table 12 with Table 7). Over the same time period, the numbers of Chinese cooks, launderers, gamblers, gardeners, laborers, and barbers doubled or more. Although such change is probably a result of former Chinese miners losing their original jobs, the new diversity probably improved their quality of life. For example, they could now obtain fresh vegetables from countrymen who grew and delivered produce door to door, often using traditional wooden carrier rods (Photo 3). The Chinese presence in skilled jobs also increased. The 1880 census identifies eleven Chinese doctors in Idaho and Montana, for example, including C. K. Ah Fong (Photo 4). Fong had migrated to Atlanta (Alturas County), Idaho, in 1866 and then spent time in Rocky Bar (Alturas County) before moved to Boise in 1889 (Hart 2002, 68). His short hair, well-groomed mustache, and western clothing indicate that at least some of the wealthier Chinese had started to make changes on their appearances by 1890 or so.

With economic gain, more Chinese could afford to play their traditional gambling game of fan-tan (Hart 2002, 83 and Photo 5). In the photograph, the middle sign on the wall (大 ▪ 三方) explains the basic rule: “four people play and winner takes all.” The left (白璧 ▪ 来) and right (青蚨飛入) signs are essentially advertisements, asserting that the money you spend will eventually come back to you. A pair of scales sits on the back table. They probably were used to weigh gold and/or the traditional copper money the Chinese used.



County	Male														Female				Total		
	Placer Miner	Laborer	Wood Chopper	Launderer	Cook	Gardener	Merchant	Clerk	Doctor	Barber	Gambler	Servant	None	Other	Total	House Keeper	Prostitute	None		Other	Total
Ada	1	87	2	22	38	15	5			1	12	1		6	190	12		1		13	203
Alturas	70	3	14	13	12	2	1		3			2		2	122	6				6	128
Boise	956	23	2	5	48	9	13	5	2	4	40	10	10	35	1162	19	28	7		54	1216
Cassia	16				4		1					1			22					0	22
Idaho	493	13	2	7	32	3	5	4	2	1	14			30	606	2	3			5	611
Kootenai					7										7					0	7
Lemhi	181	11		17	23		1					4	2	3	242	5	10	5		20	262
Nez Perce	117	4	1	24	28	2	6			4			1	8	195	1	2			3	198
Oneida	55			1	3		1							1	61					0	61
Owyhee	49	2	11	11	24			2			6	4	1	32	142	1	17	1		19	161
Shoshone	253	11		1	7		1	2	1	1	4	3		6	290	4		1		5	295
Idaho Total Percentage (%)	2191 72.1	154 5.1	32 1.1	101 3.3	226 7.4	31 1.0	34 1.1	13 0.4	8 0.3	11 0.4	76 2.5	25 0.8	14 0.5	123 4.0	3039 100	50 40.0	60 48.0	15 12.0	0 0.0	125 100	3164 100
Beaverhead	61	2		22	34		1				1		1	3	125		4		2	6	131
Chouteau				8	9								1		18					0	18
Custer					1								1		2					0	2
Deer Lodge	457	13	1	51	84	4	6			2	25	8	10	17	678	6	23	3		32	710
Gallatin		5		8	3							8	2		26		1			1	27
Jefferson	30	1		8	10							2		1	52					0	52
Lewis & Clark	122	13	3	50	52	14			2	3	4	8	6	52	329	1	24	4	1	30	359
Madison	182	3		5	34	3		1	1	2	9	2		15	257		5	2	1	8	265
Meagher	38			6	5									1	50		2			2	52
Missoula	121	1		8	9							4	1		144	3	2			5	149
Montana Total Percentage (%)	1011 60.1	38 2.3	4 0.2	166 9.9	241 14.3	21 1.3	7 0.4	1 0.1	3 0.2	7 0.4	39 2.3	32 1.9	22 1.3	89 5.3	1681 100	10 11.9	61 72.6	9 10.7	4 4.8	84 100	1765 100
Idaho + Montana Percentage (%)	3202 67.8	192 4.1	36 0.8	267 5.6	467 9.9	52 1.1	41 0.9	14 0.3	11 0.2	18 0.4	115 2.4	57 1.2	36 0.8	212 4.5	4720 100	60 28.7	121 57.9	24 11.5	4 1.9	209 100	4929 100

Table 12. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1880. Source: HeritageQuest Online.



**Photo 3. A Chinese Vegetable Farmer on the Idaho City Streets in the 1870s. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 3796 (used with permission).**



**Photo 4. C. K. Ah Fong, a Chinese Doctor in Idaho, circa 1890. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 81-2.32 (used with permission).**



**Photo 5. The Chinese Gambling House on Idaho Street, Boise in the 1880s (see Map 13). Source: Jan Lee, Sinotique, New York City (used with permission).**



As we can easily assume, most Idaho and Montana Chinese were not rich. A few did made fortunes, however. The most successful and well-known of these was Loke Kee (Photo 6). He worked as a gold miner near Boise during the 1860s, but opened a general store in town in 1870. There he eventually acquired a fortune worth between sixty and ninety thousand dollars. In the photograph, this wealth is indicated by the silk fabric and the elaborate decoration of the children's hats. Even white people envied his lifestyle and wealth (Zhu 1995). Kee seems to be unique, but other indications of relative Chinese prosperity can be on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for the region. The map of Boise from 1884, for example, shows several quality Chinese dwellings including one on Idaho Street with a brick and metal cornice (Map 13). Most other buildings in the city lacked this ornate feature.



**Photo 6. Loke Kee's Family Photo, circa 1900. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 75-189.3 (used with permission).**

After at least a few of the Idaho Chinese became prosperous, they established their own bank. The *Idaho Signal* on June 1872 reported that: “the Chinese in this

hemisphere show a remarkable aptitude for adopting the practices of western civilization. In Idaho City, they have a bank of their own, and no sooner had this bank been running on a sound basis, long enough to accumulate a good pile of dollars, than its most responsible officer proved to be a defaulter in a large amount, and at last accounts the depositors were threatening to lynch him.” This report has a mixed message, of course. The Chinese as a group were certainly adaptable, but this adaptation included good and bad aspects, just like that of other people in the West.

With improving economic situations, the Idaho and Montana Chinese could eat better than before, and according to Liping Zhu (1995), their diets were superior to those of other Chinese in the West. In the territories, space was abundant and so animal protein was fairly inexpensive. Beef was readily available, and a few Boise Chinese raised pigs. Interestingly, however, most Chinese still relied on beans as their main protein source out of habit. Conditions for obtaining vegetables also were decent. The northern Rockies were close enough to the West Coast to import a number of delicacies from China. Additionally, sizeable numbers of local Chinese gardeners grew and supplied native produce (Zhu 1995). The 1880 census identifies fifty-two Chinese gardeners in the two territories, up from eight in 1870 (Photo 3, Table 12).

Even though the Chinese in the northern Rockies made remarkable improvements in their economy and health during the 1870s, they still did not mix much with mainstream society. Just like the Chinese in other parts of the West, the general public saw them more as nuisance than neighbors. The *Idaho Daily Avalanche* even used “The Chinese Problem” as a title for one of their articles in January 1876, saying: “If there is any one subject more prominent than another to which the Pacific Coast members of

Congress ought to give earnest and immediate attention it is that presented in the overwhelming dangers that threaten this section of the country by the continued accession of Mongolians to the population and its probable results as affecting our future welfare.” The basic fear was that American wages might drop in the face of immigrants willing to work for less. Although not many visible hate crimes are reported against the Chinese in Idaho and Montana prior to the Exclusion Act, this news story is an indication that racial tensions were present even in the early territorial years.

Despite (and because of) the prejudices and racism, the Idaho and Montana Chinese continuously tried to maintain good relations with the mainstream society and actively fight for their social rights. They regularly employed the legal system as a tool to fight discrimination, for example, and before the Exclusion Act, the courts generally listened to those complaints, recognized their issues, and judged them equitably. However, such judicial monitoring broke down after the act was passed (Wunder 1980 and 1981).

Although court usage was common among the Chinese throughout the West, those in the northern Rockies accomplished more than most (Zhu 2006). The biggest social achievement, perhaps, was the right to attend the same public schools as Euroamerican children. This process began in 1869 when the Chinese in Boise requested nonseparated education opportunities for their children, saying that they had paid property taxes. A year later, the Boise public schools began to admit Chinese children. This was a definite victory for the local Chinese society, and started a trend. Chinese children were admitted to Idaho City schools in 1882 (Photo 7), and soon interracial schools were common throughout the northern Rockies (unlike other parts of this

country). Why this happened remains unclear. Perhaps it was a result of economic clout since the local Chinese did indeed pay a lot of tax dollars as from their mining. Perhaps it was also because the numbers of Chinese children were too small to be threatening or to make separate schools viable economically (Zhu 1995).



**Photo 7. Three Chinese Children Posed with Classmates and Teachers in Front of the Idaho City School in 1882.** Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 78-129.6/a (used with permission). The three are indicated by arrows.

Although the Idaho and Montana Chinese accepted new ideas from the other residents of the territorial society, they also retained most of their traditional holidays, religious practices, and foods. Their celebration of the Lunar Chinese New Year's Day, for example, was reported on as follows in the *Idaho Statesman* for February 13, 1877: "The celebration consists mainly in having a big time, lots of good things to eat, drink, and smoke." All this activity probably was entertaining for the non-Chinese settlers to watch. Firecracker usage, for example, that Chinese believe scares away evil spirits,

undoubtedly made whites curious, and perhaps somewhat annoyed. This is implied by the *Idaho Statesman* writer when he added that: “an incessant roar will be kept up nightly during the week so that Josh<sup>1</sup> may know that his children are properly worshipping him.” By sharing their parade, I suspect the Chinese were trying reduce this misunderstanding. They staged a new year’s day parade every year in Boise, for example, from about 1880 to the early twentieth century (Photo 8). It always featured dragon (the China national symbol) made from silk-covered sticks. Leading this dragon would be men dressed as traditional Chinese soldiers and carrying long stick “knives.” These parades were augmented by traditional plays, also performed on the street for the general public (Photo 9).



**Photo 8. A Chinese New Year’s Day Parade in Boise, circa 1900. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 68-14.1 (used with permission).**

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<sup>1</sup> “Josh” is a corrupted form of “Joss,” which is the Pidgin English word for God. The source is the Portuguese word “Deus.” Pidgin is a trade jargon used on the south China coast in the nineteenth century, and still employed in some Pacific islands. It was the standard form of communication between whites and Chinese in America’s Chinatowns.



**Photo 9. A Chinese New Year's Day Celebration in Boise, circa 1900. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 60-52.404 (used with permission).**

Most Idaho and Montana Chinese kept their traditional religions. They set up temples everywhere they went, including Boise, where in the early years of settlement, a temple appeared “in one of the small wooden buildings on Idaho Street that made up the city’s first Chinatown. An early resident remembered it as ‘a tiny lean-to.’ Such places of worship were always called ‘Joss Houses’ by the white community” (Hart 2002, 22 and Photo 10). Chinese temples were poorly understood by white residents, who sometimes equated their non-Christian nature as evil or devil worship. A reporter from the *Owyhee Avalanche* who observed activity at the temple in Ruby City in December 1871, for example, wrote that: “We have arrived at the conclusion that their religion is mainly a dim fear of ill-luck from the vengeance of some gloomy deity. Of worship, in the proper sense of the word, they appear to know nothing.” Despite such misinterpretations, the Chinese never swayed from their traditional beliefs and continued to practice them openly.





**Photo 10.** A Chinese Temple in Boise, circa 1890. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, MS511-315 (used with permission).

Traditional funerals are another example of Chinese religious practice. The *Idaho Signal* in November 1872 reported that the group employed “a very flat coffin, which was hermetically sealed, and on Thursday at noon carried the body in the coffin out on the street opposite the Chinese quarter and laid it on a table, and placed a banner, with Chinese characters, at the head.” Funerals may have been one of the most interesting Chinese sights to watch for early white settlers. Following tradition, a body would be kept on the table for two days so friends and relatives who lived far away could visit and wish the best for the dead man’s afterlife. Then, on the third day after death, the body would be buried.

In contrast to the separateness of Chinese religion, traditional foodways became something to share with the white community. This sharing likely began via the practice of rich white families hiring Chinese as private, live-in cooks (Hart 2002, 57-58). The 1880 census indicates 467 Chinese cooks, some in white households and some in restaurants (Table 12). Although no clear evidence exists about regional eating habits for this period, the Chinese cooks and foods probably influenced regional cooking styles and diet greatly. Certainly this is known to be the case for black cooks in Southern white households (Edgerton 1993).



## Chapter 4

### Cultural Practices, 1882-1900

During the period 1882-1900, a pair of anti-Chinese acts prohibited new immigration to the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was in effect for ten years, and then the Geary Act of 1892 extended this exclusion another decade. Although these acts did not force the Chinese who immigrated before 1882 to leave, the new policies definitely changed the face of Chinese-American society. Without new young immigrants, the group progressively became older. Already gender unbalanced in favor of males, it became even more distorted. Together, these forces led to population decline (Daniels 1988, 17).

As an additional problem for the Chinese, racial tensions with whites became more serious and violent after 1882. The first serious race riot broke out in Rock Springs, Wyoming, on September 2, 1885, when white miners (mostly European immigrants) got angry because Chinese laborers who worked for low wages were monopolizing local jobs. According to an account in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco: “Every Chinaman, over 500 in number, has been driven out of town. Fifteen dead Chinamen have thus far been discovered and as many more dead bodies are probably in the ruins. Fifty houses belonging to the railroad company and fifty more owned by the Chinamen were burned.” After this riot was finally stopped by the military, the remaining Chinese were taken for their own safety to California. The Rock Springs incident was a catalyst for other anti-Chinese movements. These gradually became more physical and violent, and soon similar incidents happened across the West.

Less than three weeks after the Wyoming riot, a similar incident happened in the mining town of Pierce, Idaho. On September 22, civilians in that city hanged five Chinese suspects for killing Daniel Fraser, a white merchant (*The Milwaukee Sentinel* 1885). These five men had been in jail awaiting trial. Similar Chinese murders occurred elsewhere in the territory, and as tensions rose: “an anti-Chinese league [that had] formed in Boise in 1885 passed resolutions favoring expulsion of the city’s Chinese” (Hart 2002, 94). This mood was general. Even the chief executive of the territory, Governor Edward A. Stevenson, advocated prohibiting Chinese from Idaho in 1885-1888 (McCunn 1979, 84).

Anti-Chinese movements in Montana peaked later than in Idaho, probably because of lower Asian numbers there before the mid-1880s. Tensions did build, however, leading to Chinese boycott movements in immigrant-concentrated cities such as Butte and Helena. In Butte, residents posted signs as early as 1884 ordering Chinese to leave the city. The idea grew pervasive in 1891-1892 when organized labor unions attempted to boycott local Chinese businesses. A boycott was officially announced on January 13, 1897 (Flaherty 1987).

As the anti-Chinese movements became serious, the Chinese themselves worked harder to assimilate themselves into mainstream society. The most visible change was appearance. They started to wear western clothes and cut their hair short (Photo 11). Such changes probably helped them to find jobs and do business with whites. In addition, the changes were practical for them when they did tough physical work such as tunnel construction. The Chinese even wore western-style hats (Photo 12).



**Photo 11. Chinese Workers Posed at the Mullan Tunnel Dedication in 1883. Source: Montana State Historical Society, 950-124 (used with permission)**



**Photo 12. A Chinese Laundry in Delamar, Owyhee County, circa 1890. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 83-37.22 (used with permission)**

The Chinese assimilation efforts were not limited to physical appearance. They made changes in business style as well. Some people created unique western-sounding business names and advertised using English signboards (Photo 12). Some even owned western-looking stores (Photo 13). The particular Butte pictured store even has glass shelves and electric lightings. The Chinese changes were not limited to these visible stuffs. Scattered evidence exists that some Chinese even went so far as to change their religion (Photo 14). Although proselytization by American churches probably was a factor in such movements, religious assimilation would not have been possible without at least some desire by the Chinese.



**Photo 13. Wah Chong Tai Co., a Chinese Dry Goods Store on Galena Street, Butte, circa 1895. Source: Montana State Historical Society, 946-143 (used with permission)**



**Photo 14. Chinese Members of an Americanization Class sponsored by Boise's First Methodist Episcopal Church in 1904. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 72-56.4 (used with permission)**

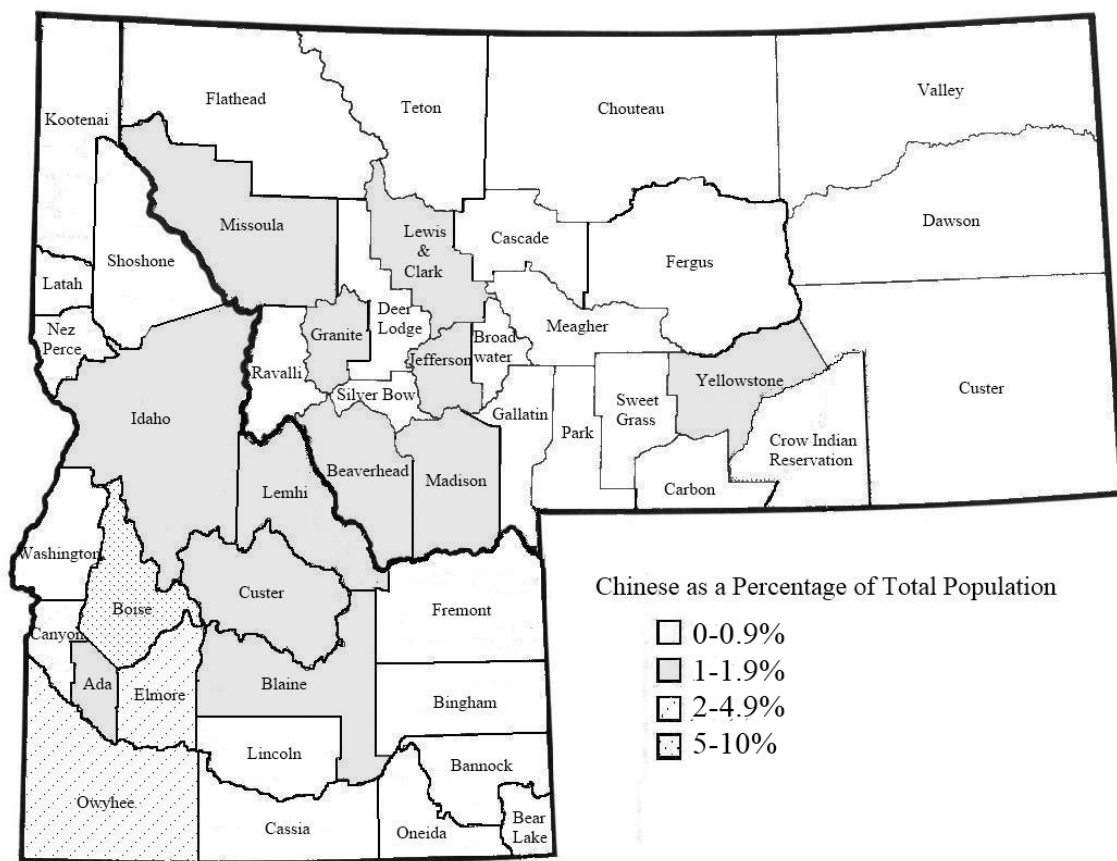
While both Idaho and Montana Chinese were making efforts to assimilate into American society, their population numbers and distribution patterns within the two territories began to change (compare Table 13 to Table 11). The Chinese population in Idaho fell by half between 1880 and 1900. Montana saw a decline as well, but not as much. A possible reason for this difference might be the timing of anti-Chinese movements in the two places. Whereas the population of Idaho Chinese dropped greatly in 1880s and 1890s, the significant drop in Montana came after 1900. Altogether the Chinese population declined from 5,144 to 3,206. This drop, significant in absolute terms, is even greater when compared with the big gains made by the local white populations over this same period. The Chinese constituted seven percent of the total Idaho and Montana population in 1880, but less than one percent in 1900 (Table 14 and Map 15).

County	Chinese	Japanese	White	Black	Native	Total
Ada	225	260	11,023	48	3	11,559
Bannock	52	360	10,812	39	439	11,702
Bear Lake		38	7,013			7,051
Bingham	12	18	9,523	34	860	10,447
Blaine	78	20	4,772	8	22	4,900
Boise	323	5	3,842	4		4,174
Canyon	45	30	7,379	42	1	7,497
Cassia	3		3,947		1	3,951
Custer	39		2,009	1		2,049
Elmore	50	55	2,169	2	10	2,286
Fremont		79	12,726	4	12	12,821
Idaho	114		8,565	8	434	9,121
Kootenai	56	296	9,141	26	697	10,216
Latah	26	5	13,400	17	3	13,451
Lemhi	59	1	2,918	2	466	3,446
Lincoln	15	63	1,698	1	7	1,784
Nez Perce	76	9	12,525	10	1,128	13,748
Oneida	1	6	8,926			8,933
Owyhee	171	3	3,564	2	64	3,804
Shoshone	73		11,762	36	79	11,950
Washington	49	43	6,781	9		6,882
<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>1,467</b>	<b>1,291</b>	<b>154,495</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>4,226</b>	<b>161,772</b>
Beaverhead	73	89	5,440	12	1	5,615
Broadwater	15		2,610	16		2,641
Carbon	2	26	7,485	4	16	7,533
Cascade	5	24	25,143	162	443	25,777
Choteau	86	628	8,667	156	1,429	10,966
Custer	16		6,470	48	1,357	7,891
Dawson	2		2,436	4	1	2,443
Deer Lodge	78	124	17,018	171	2	17,393
Fergus	14		6,528	30	365	6,937
Flathead	47	303	8,954	36	35	9,375
Gallatin	55	1	9,462	35		9,553
Granite	71		4,253	4		4,328
Jefferson	57		5,258	15		5,330
Lewis & Clark	333	45	18,418	313	62	19,171
Madison	80		7,584	28	3	7,695
Meagher	9		2,493	24		2,526
Missoula	208	398	11,502	54	1,802	13,964
Park	42	321	6,961	15	2	7,341
Ravalli	30	31	7,730	17	14	7,822
Silver Bow	391	63	46,905	262	14	47,635
Sweet Grass	18		2,986	8	74	3,086
Teton	17	66	2,931	6	2,060	5,080
Valley		307	2,253	2	1,793	4,355
Yellowstone	90	11	6,001	97	13	6,212
Crow Indian Reservation		4	795	4	1,857	2,660
<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>1,739</b>	<b>2,441</b>	<b>226,283</b>	<b>1,523</b>	<b>11,343</b>	<b>243,329</b>
<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>3,206</b>	<b>3,732</b>	<b>380,778</b>	<b>1,816</b>	<b>15,569</b>	<b>405,101</b>

Table 13. Population in Idaho and Montana Counties by Race in 1900. Source: U. S. Census 1900, Vol. 1, Tables 4, 19, 20, and 21.

County	Chinese	Japanese	White	Black	Native	Total
Ada	1.9%	2.3%	95.4%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%
Bannock	0.4%	3.1%	92.4%	0.3%	3.8%	100.0%
Bear Lake	0.0%	0.5%	99.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Bingham	0.1%	0.2%	91.2%	0.3%	8.2%	100.0%
Blaine	1.6%	0.4%	97.4%	0.2%	0.4%	100.0%
Boise	7.8%	0.1%	92.0%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Canyon	0.6%	0.4%	98.4%	0.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Cassia	0.1%	0.0%	99.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Custer	1.9%	0.0%	98.0%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Elmore	2.2%	2.4%	94.9%	0.1%	0.4%	100.0%
Fremont	0.0%	0.6%	99.3%	0.0%	0.1%	100.0%
Idaho	1.2%	0.0%	93.9%	0.1%	4.8%	100.0%
Kootenai	0.5%	2.9%	89.5%	0.3%	6.8%	100.0%
Latah	0.2%	0.1%	99.6%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Lemhi	1.7%	0.0%	84.7%	0.1%	13.5%	100.0%
Lincoln	0.8%	3.5%	95.2%	0.1%	0.4%	100.0%
Nez Perce	0.6%	0.0%	91.1%	0.1%	8.2%	100.0%
Oneida	0.0%	0.1%	99.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Owyhee	4.5%	0.1%	93.7%	0.0%	1.7%	100.0%
Shoshone	0.6%	0.0%	98.4%	0.3%	0.7%	100.0%
Washington	0.7%	0.6%	98.6%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Idaho Total</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>95.5%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Beaverhead	1.3%	1.6%	96.9%	0.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Broadwater	0.6%	0.0%	98.8%	0.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Carbon	0.0%	0.3%	99.4%	0.1%	0.2%	100.0%
Cascade	0.0%	0.1%	97.6%	0.6%	1.7%	100.0%
Choteau	0.8%	5.7%	79.0%	1.4%	13.1%	100.0%
Custer	0.2%	0.0%	82.0%	0.6%	17.2%	100.0%
Dawson	0.1%	0.0%	99.7%	0.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Deer Lodge	0.4%	0.7%	97.9%	1.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Fergus	0.2%	0.0%	94.1%	0.4%	5.3%	100.0%
Flathead	0.5%	3.2%	95.5%	0.4%	0.4%	100.0%
Gallatin	0.6%	0.0%	99.0%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%
Granite	1.6%	0.0%	98.3%	0.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Jefferson	1.1%	0.0%	98.6%	0.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Lewis & Clark	1.7%	0.2%	96.1%	1.7%	0.3%	100.0%
Madison	1.0%	0.0%	98.6%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%
Meagher	0.4%	0.0%	98.7%	0.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Missoula	1.5%	2.8%	82.4%	0.4%	12.9%	100.0%
Park	0.6%	4.4%	94.8%	0.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Ravalli	0.4%	0.4%	98.8%	0.2%	0.2%	100.0%
Silver Bow	0.8%	0.1%	98.5%	0.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweet Grass	0.6%	0.0%	96.8%	0.2%	2.4%	100.0%
Teton	0.3%	1.3%	57.7%	0.1%	40.6%	100.0%
Valley	0.0%	7.0%	51.7%	0.1%	41.2%	100.0%
Yellowstone	1.4%	0.2%	96.6%	1.6%	0.2%	100.0%
Crow Indian Reservation	0.0%	0.2%	29.8%	0.2%	69.8%	100.0%
<b>Montana Total</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>93.0%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Idaho + Montana</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>94.0%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 14. Population Percentage of Race in Idaho and Montana Counties in 1900. Source: U. S. Census 1900, Vol. 1, Tables 4, 19, 20, and 21.

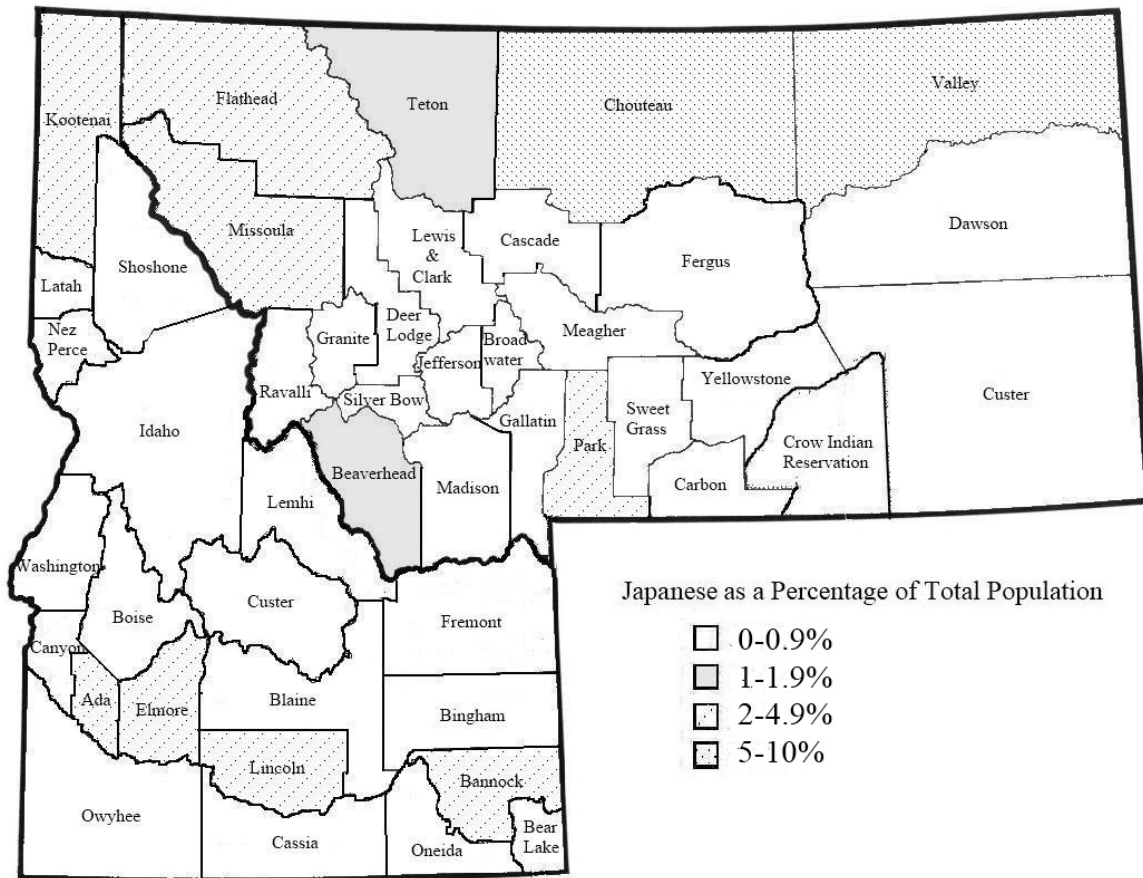


**Map 15. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1900.** Source: U. S. Census 1900, Vol. 1, Tables 4, 19, 20, and 21.

By 1900, both Idaho and Montana had become overwhelmingly white-dominated societies. From an Asian perspective, however, it is interesting to note a significant new Japanese migration to the region. Japanese people arrived to the United States much later than the Chinese. Only fifty-five were counted in the 1870 census nationwide, and only 148 in 1880 (U. S. Census Bureau 1880, Volume 1, Table 4). This population grew dramatically between 1880 and 1890, but still no Japanese lived in Idaho that latter year and only six in Montana (U. S. Census Bureau 1890, Volume 1, Table 10). By 1900, however, this group outnumbered the Chinese in Montana, settling in areas where the Chinese were scarce (Map 16). The Japanese population was significant in farming



counties, both near Canadian border and on Snake River Plain. Very few came to the mountain mining counties.



**Map 16. Japanese Idahoan and Montanan Population by County in 1900.** Source: U. S. Census 1900, Vol. 1, Tables 4, 19, 20, and 21.

As mining was declining in the northern Rockies in the 1880s and 1890s, local Chinese dependency on this profession also dropped significantly, although it still remained a favorite job for them. One interesting aspect of mining retrenchment was greater cooperation of workers. Chinese and white miners at least sometimes labored together (Photo 15). Of necessity, the occupations of the Chinese were more diverse in 1900 compared with 1880 (compare Table 15 to Table 12). Whereas most of the newly arrived Japanese were farm laborers (Table 16), the Chinese found varied economic

successes. Take the case in Boise (Map 17). The Sanborn Fire Insurance map from 1893 shows an increased number of quality Chinese dwellings and stores with brick and metal cornices from the decade before (compare Map 18 to Map 13). Still, as the Chinese population gradually declined, Chinese-owned dwellings and stores receded as well. By 1893, the Chinese gambling house plus stores and dwellings had disappeared from this section of the city. The decline was even more dramatic in the decade after 1893. By 1903, most Chinese-owned dwellings and stores were gone (Map 19).



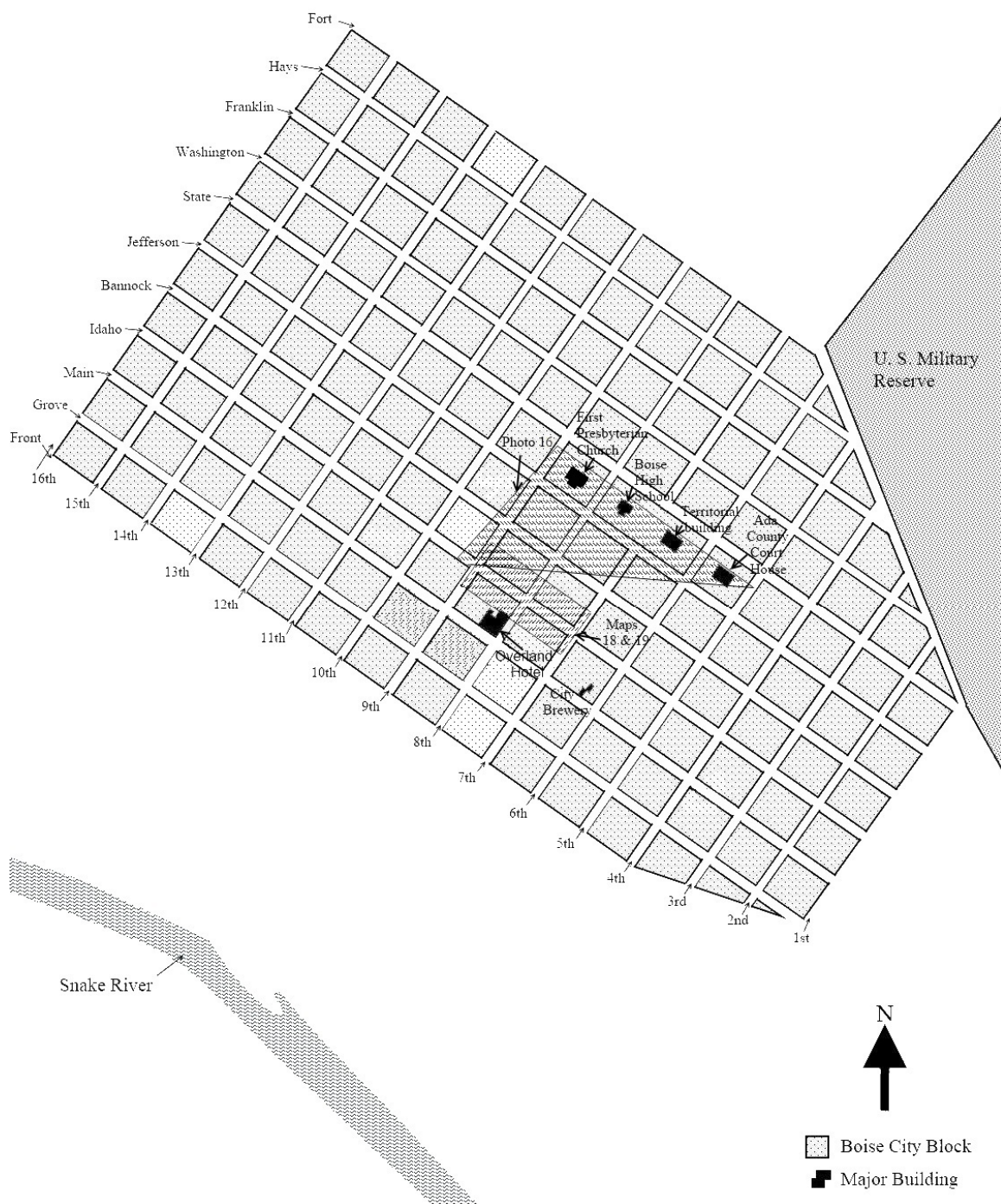
**Photo 15. Chinese Placer Miners in Rocky Bar, Elmore County, circa 1900. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, 76-119.2/b (used with permission).**

County	Male													Female				Total			
	Placer Miner	Laborer	Laundry Keeper	Launderer	Restaurant Keeper	Restaurant Worker	Cook	Merchant	Farmer & Gardener	Domestic Servant	Doctor	Student	Other	None	House Keeper	Student	Other		None	Total	
Ada	2	8	19	24	6	6	18	38	74	1	4	1	10		211	3	1	1	1	6	217
Bannock	2	5	1	10		6	9	1	4				4	10	52					0	52
Bingham			3				3						1	4	11					0	11
Blaine		3	5	1		3	26		6	1		1	11	11	68			1	1	1	69
Boise	206	17	6	1			16	23	1			3	19	11	303	5	1	2	7	15	318
Canyon	3	1		13			13		10				4	1	45					0	45
Cassia			1				1			1					3					0	3
Custer			4	7			18	6					1		36	2				2	38
Elmore	10	2	5	1	1		15	2	4				5	4	49	1				1	50
Idaho	53	14	1	7			13		3	3			12	2	108					0	108
Kootenai		16	6	5			13	3	1				3	7	54		2			2	56
Latah	1	7	2	2		2	5	4	1				2		26					0	26
Lemhi	28	2	1	2	1	1	17		1				1		54	4		1		5	59
Lincoln		3	1	1			6	1	1				1	1	15					0	15
Nez Perce	2	13		23			4	28					5		75					0	75
Oneida								1							1					0	1
Owyhee	10	27		12			3	47	9	2	1		34	6	151	4		5	9	160	
Shoshone	64													2	66	1		1	2	68	
Washington		3		15			6	2	2	2			8	2	40					0	40
Idaho Total	381	121	55	124	8	18	186	156	117	10	5	5	121	61	1368	20	2	6	15	43	1411
Percentage (%)	27.9	8.8	4.0	9.1	0.6	1.3	13.6	11.4	8.6	0.7	0.4	0.4	8.8	4.4	100	46.5	4.7	13.9	34.9	100	100

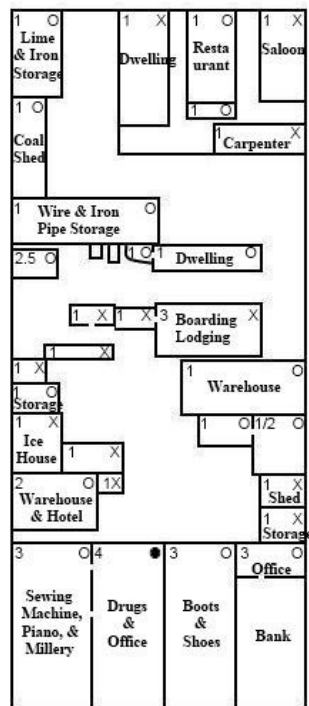
Table 15. Chinese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1900. Source: HeritageQuest Online.

County	Male														Female				Total		
	Placer Miner	Laborer	Laundry Keeper	Launderer	Restaurant Keeper	Restaurant Worker	Cook	Merchant	Farmer & Gardener	Domestic Servant	Doctor	Student	Other	None	Total	House Keeper	Student	Other		None	Total
Ada		244				1	2		1				5	2	255	3		1		4	259
Bannock		323						2		1			25	1	352						352
Bear Lake		35					1						1	1	38						38
Bingham		18													18						18
Blaine		19							1						20						20
Boise							3	1						1	5						5
Canyon		15						1	2					12	30						30
Elmore		23			1	1	3			1			1		30						30
Fremont		68												11	79						79
Kootenai		283						1					3		287						287
Latah		5													5						5
Lincoln		58											4		62						62
Nez Perce		1					1	1	1						4	2				2	6
Oneida		6					1								7						7
Owyhee					1									1	2	1				1	3
Washington		23					2							18	43						43
Idaho Total Percentage (%)	0 0.0	1121 90.6	0 0.0	0 0.0	2 0.2	2 0.2	13 1.0	6 0.5	5 0.4	2 0.2	0 0.0	0 0.0	39 3.1	47 3.8	1237 100	6 85.7	0 0.0	1 14.3	0 0.0	7 100	1244 100

Table 16. Japanese Idahoan and Montanan Occupations in 1900. Source: HeritageQuest Online.

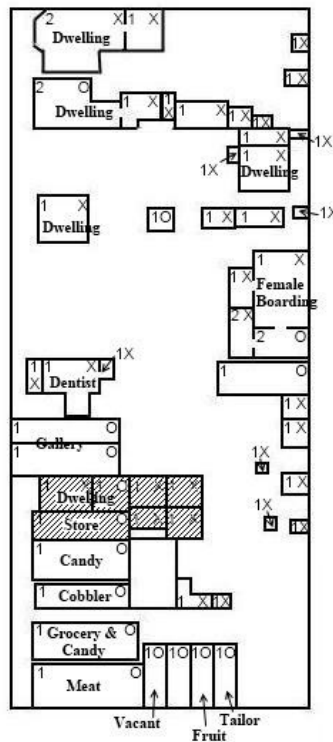


Map 17. Boise, 1903. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Boise, Idaho, 1903.

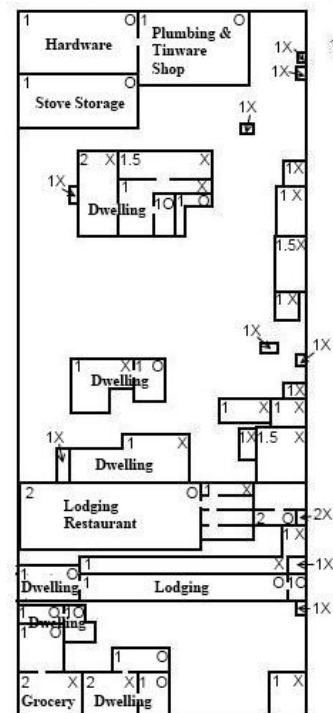
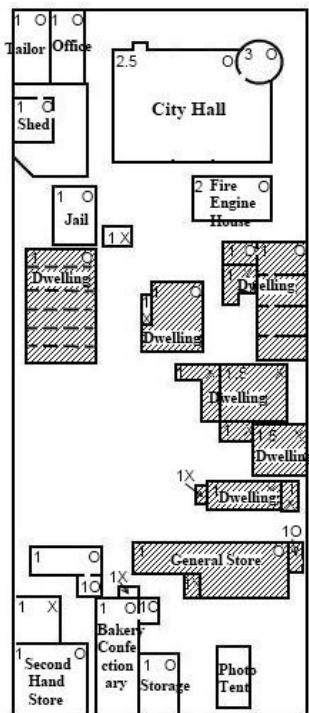


Idaho Street

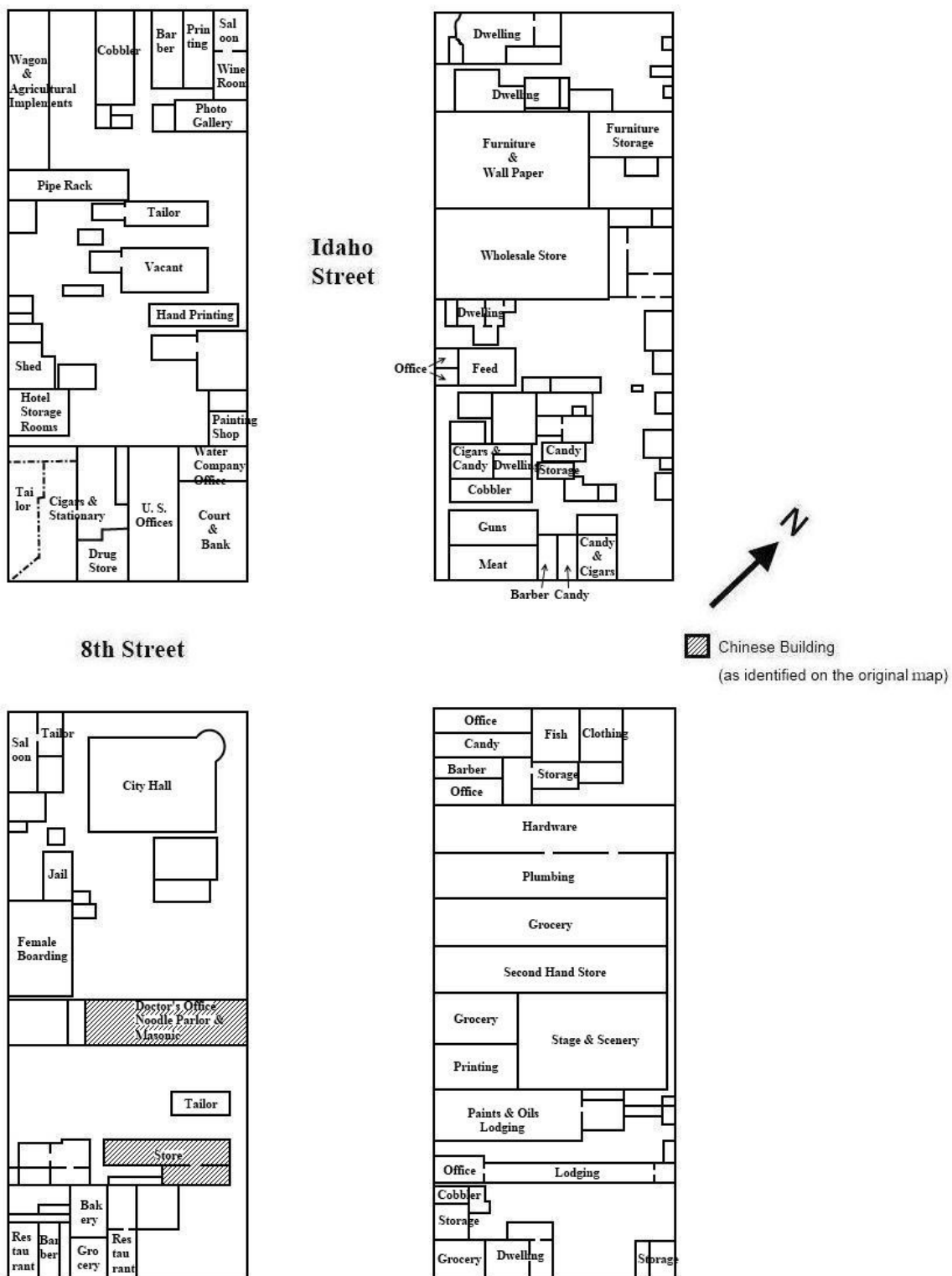
8th Street



-  Chinese Building  
(as identified on the original map)
- X Shingle Roof
- O Brick or Metal Cornice
- Composition Roof
- 1,2,3... Number of Stories



Map 18. Chinese Concentrated Area in Boise, 1893. Source: Library of Congress. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Boise, Idaho, 1893.



Map 19. Chinese Concentrated Area in Boise, 1903. Source: Library of Congress. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Boise, Idaho, 1903.

The few Chinese who remained in Boise after 1900 seemed to have assimilated well with white residents. For example, their settlements are not clustered as they had been previously. Zee Tai Chung Co., a Chinese dry goods store on Idaho Street, even shared a brick building with the white-owned Pacific Hotel and a few other non-Chinese stores (Photo 16). The panoramic view of this photograph shows how close the Chinese settlement was to the main business district of the city. This further supports the idea that the Chinese were making continuous efforts to mix with mainstream society even as they were still facing discrimination and hate crime.

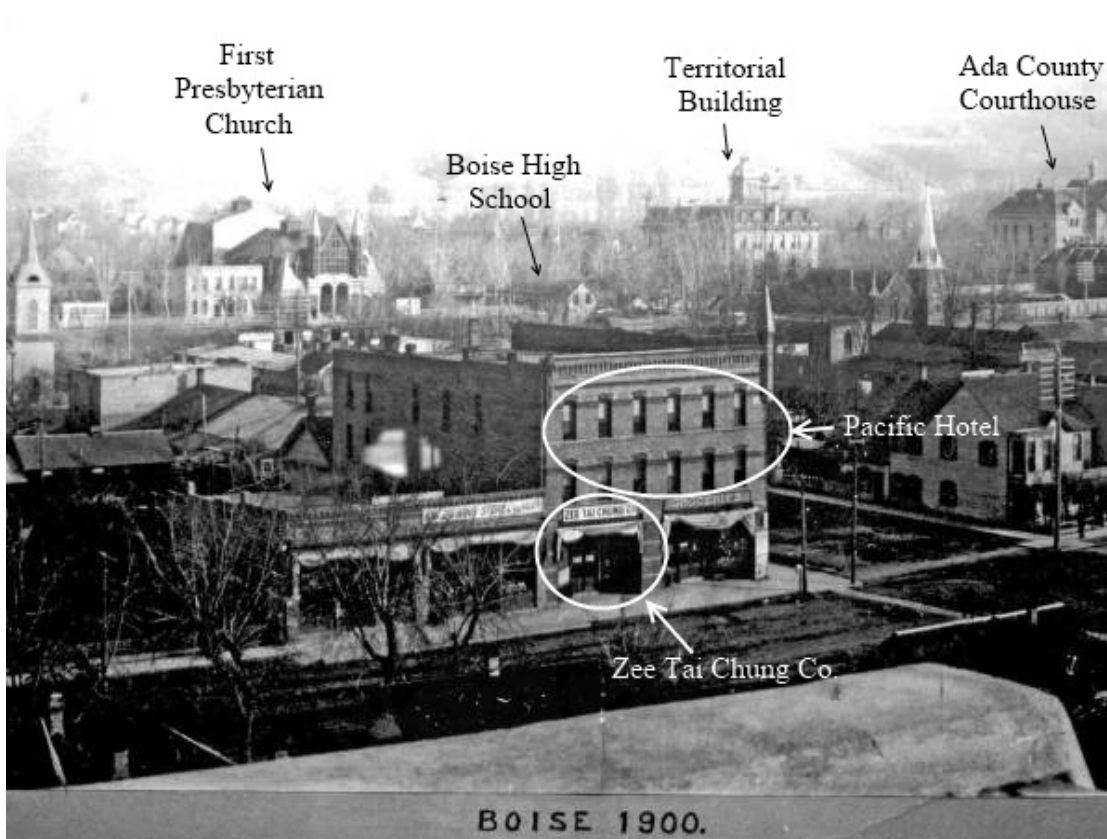
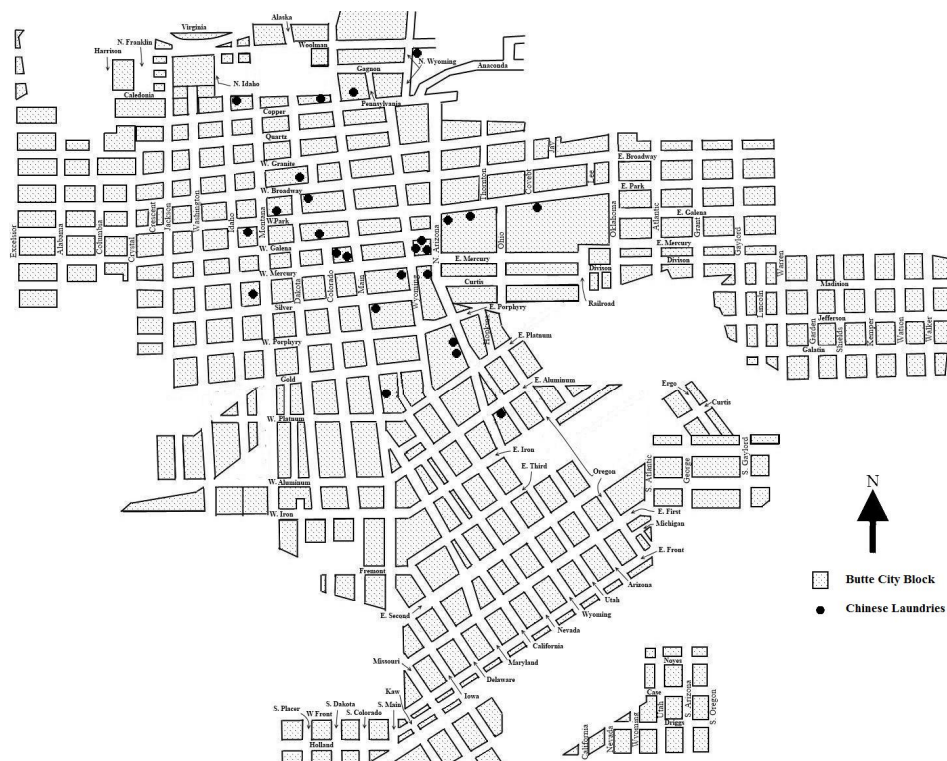


Photo 16. Zee Tai Chung Co., a Chinese Dry Goods Store on Idaho Street, Boise, in 1900. Source: Idaho State Historical Society, MS511-74 (used with permission).

While at least some Boise Chinese were successful at mixing with the white society, their kinsmen elsewhere in the territory still struggled (James 1995). In Montana, the economic situation was better. According to sociologist Rose Hum Lee, Chinese

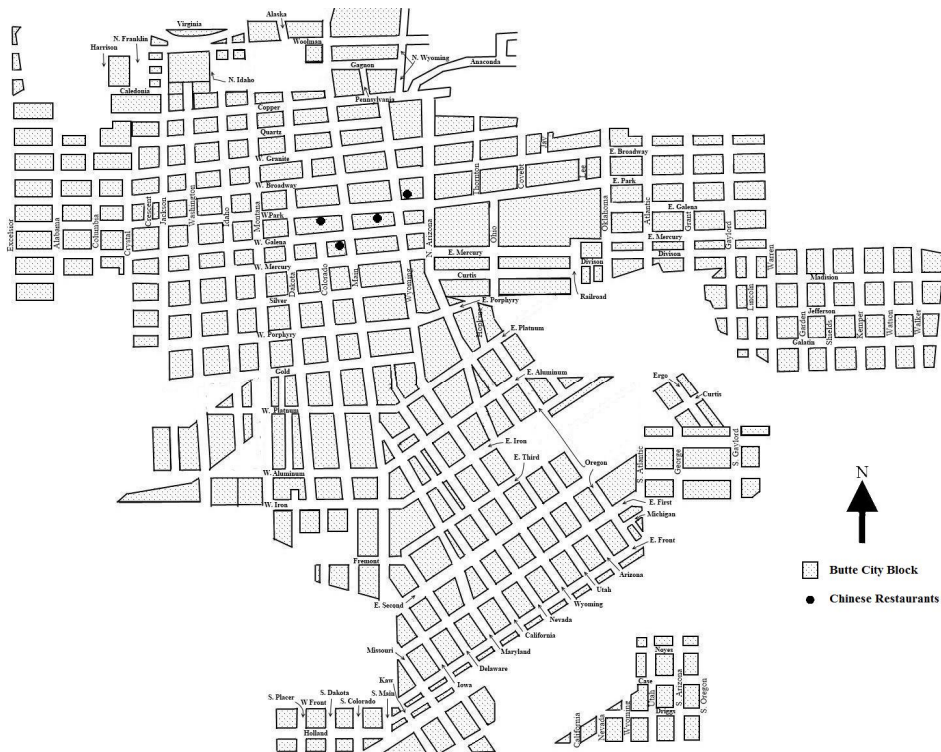


businesses in Butte grew continuously in the 1890s and 1900s to a peak around 1905. The Butte Chinese owned 13 businesses in 1890, 40 in 1895, 67 in 1900, and 69 in 1905 (Lee 1949). An 1899 Butte City Directory shows the locations of these Chinese businesses (R. L. Polk and Company's Butte City Directory 1899). Not unexpectedly, laundries were the most numerous of these (Map 20). The Butte Chinese also owned several dry goods stores, restaurants, tailor shops, grocery stores, and even three doctor's offices (Maps 21, 22, 23, and 24). The laundries were spread throughout the core areas of the city, but the others cluster together. This pattern suggests that, although the Chinese were successful at attracting white customers to their laundry businesses, they otherwise traded mostly within their own community. Interestingly, the city directory included advertisements for three Chinese businesses: a dry goods store, a restaurant, and a doctor's office.





**Map 21. Chinese Dry Goods Stores in Butte, Montana, 1899. Source: R. L. Polk and Company's Butte City Directory 1899.**



**Map 22. Chinese Restaurants in Butte, Montana, 1899. Source: R. L. Polk and Company's Butte City Directory 1899.**



**Map 23. Chinese Tailor Shops in Butte, Montana, 1899. Source: R. L. Polk and Company's Butte City Directory 1899.**



**Map 24. Chinese Doctor's Offices in Butte, Montana, 1899. Source: R. L. Polk and Company's Butte City Directory 1899.**

## Chapter 5

### Legacy

The Chinese contribution to the development of the American West is far greater than most people suspect (Renner 1930). This is especially true for the early years of Idaho and Montana. Today, Chinese Americans are reclaiming and celebrating their own heritage, partly by becoming involved in its documentation, writing, and interpretation. By discarding outdated concepts that label Asian pioneers as passive victims of racist aggression, they are increasingly demanding that American history portray the Chinese immigrant experience in a positive, sensitive, appropriate, and accurate manner (Wegars 2004).

Existing literature, such as Elsensohn's *Idaho Chinese Lore* (1970), addresses early Chinese settlement in Idaho and Montana from a Eurocentric point of view, which means that the author talks about the Chinese as outsiders. This perspective tends to be either overly harsh or overly sympathetic: We need more evenhanded studies. Certainly, the lives of these pioneers were tough, but they continuously kept their culture. Even Elsensohn has acknowledged this, saying that "not all the history of the early Chinese is sad or sordid" (Elsensohn 1970, 15). These pioneers often made good wages, for example, and they retained many aspects of their culture. They celebrated the Chinese New Year's Day by having parades in Boise, and they regularly enjoyed gambling at fan-tan (Hart 2002).

Working against the image of passivity, the Idaho and Montana Chinese also were active in assimilating themselves into mainstream society. Although this process was

more difficult for the Chinese than many other peoples because of physical distinctiveness and long histories of cultural prejudice, my study shows that some of the Chinese were quite successful adaptors.

Even though Wilbur Zelinsky's "Doctrine of First Effective Settlement" explains that "whenever an empty territory undergoes settlement, or an earlier population is dislodged by invaders, the specific characteristics of the first group able to affect a viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance of the later social and cultural geography of the area" (quoted in Limerick 1987, 99-100), the experience of the nineteenth-century Chinese in Idaho and Montana is not much appreciated. The histories of the Chinese in California, Oregon, and Washington are much better known, for example. This lack of attention probably is because Idaho and Montana currently lack a sizeable Chinese population. Still, current demography is not a good excuse for inattention to the past, and so I have tried to show here that the Chinese did indeed make significant contributions on the development of the northern Rockies.

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