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Article

Mortal Mobilities: The Six Companies and the Transnational Repatriation of Chinese Remains from San Francisco, 1842-1900

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Abstract: After the First Opium War and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, Hong Kong, China rapidly assumed dual historical identities. It functioned simultaneously as a strategic colony of the British Empire and as a crucial transfer station facilitating the transportation of the first major wave of Chinese labor migrants to the United States. Often historically referred to as "Coolie Labour," these early migrant workers faced exceptionally harsh living and working conditions. Tragically, a significant number of these migrants died prematurely from severe illness, physical abuse, or extreme exhaustion. Oftentimes, their remains were discarded or buried randomly in foreign soil without a proper name, formal identity, or traditional funerary rites. In response to this humanitarian crisis, some wealthy Chinese merchants and established Chinese Americans, driven by deep cultural sympathy for the plight of these impoverished migrants, generously donated funds. These financial contributions were specifically allocated for the systematic repatriation of their bones back to their ancestral homelands in China, alongside the meticulous categorization of the deceased's bodies according to their respective native towns and villages. Consequently, many of the earliest Chinese benevolent associations in San Francisco, widely known as huiguan or gongsuo in the United States, were initially established to provide these essential bones repatriation services. In this article, I will comprehensively examine the pivotal role of the Six Companies in San Francisco in organizing and providing transnational bones repatriation services in the United States throughout the late nineteenth century, highlighting their broader socio-cultural impact on the diaspora.

Keywords: huiguan; six companies; bones repatriation; san francisco; transnationalism

1. Introduction

Despite the enormous significance that charitable programs providing for the repatriation of the remains of migrants who died overseas have had to Chinese diasporic communities historically, bones repatriation programs for overseas Chinese have received relatively little scholarly attention. In Taiwan, China, there has not yet been any academic research about bones repatriation services among overseas Chinese. In Hong Kong, China and the US, there has been a considerable body of research on Chinese American history, but relatively few studies have examined the issues of death and repatriation. At the same time, previous studies have often overlooked the role of Chinese benevolent associations in this particular form of charitable activity. As one scholar has pointed out, few studies have paid attention to their charitable role overseas in repatriating the coffins and bones of the deceased from their host countries to their native towns in China for burial.

Furthermore, earlier studies of bones repatriation by Hong Kong, China-based researchers have celebrated the program as the unanimously supported expression of Chinese nationalism and identity without fully considering the limitations or deficiencies of these programs. In order to help fill this gap in existing scholarship on the history of Chinese migration, this article discusses the role of the Six Companies as a case study to

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analyze the role of huiguan in the bones repatriation programs [1]. By focusing on San Francisco, with its long history of Chinese migration, the role of huiguan can be viewed from a transnational perspective while also highlighting the difficulties and challenges posed by the prejudice of white Americans and local conditions in the United States and San Francisco specifically.

To analyze the role of the Six Companies in San Francisco in facilitating bones repatriation programs, this article builds on recent scholarship that has reinterpreted the history of Chinese migration from the perspective of transnational networks. One scholar argued for the significance of diasporic networks in shaping the history of overseas migration from China during the modern period. Hong Kong, China was a crucial node in these networks of migration. After the First Opium War and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, Hong Kong, China assumed dual identities as both a colony of the British Empire and a transfer station transporting the first wave of Chinese labor migrants to the United States. Often referred to as "coolie labor," some of these migrants died abroad from illness or abuse, and oftentimes their remains were discarded or buried randomly without a name or an identity [2]. Some wealthy Chinese Americans, out of sympathy for the plight of these poor migrants, donated money for the repatriation of their bones back to China and the categorization of the bodies of the deceased according to their native towns, due to the Chinese traditional culture of worshipping ancestors and the belief that fallen leaves return to their roots, instead of being lonely ghosts in a foreign land.

The repatriation of the remains of Chinese migrants in the United States was facilitated by transnational networks in which Chinese benevolent associations on both sides of the Pacific Ocean and the townsmen associations in Hong Kong, China were the key nodes. In 1870, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in Hong Kong, China was permitted by the colonial government to begin to deal with the "Chinese Problems" in Hong Kong, China, which also unconditionally served the Overseas Chinese due to its transnational and cross-Pacific network of Hong Kong, China merchants [2]. Before the establishment of Tung Wah Coffin Home in 1899, the repatriation of the remains of Chinese migrants in the United States had already been taking place for several decades. However, there had not been any systematic procedures for bones repatriation by 1870, and in part, because the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was known as the "Six Companies" in English, many people suspected that they profited through shipping the remains. Many of the earliest Chinese benevolent associations in San Francisco, known as huiguan or gongsuo in the US, were first established to provide such bones repatriation services. These Chinese benevolent associations were responsible for locating and packing their remains, which would then be transported to Hong Kong, China by sea. As early as the 1850s, there were many benevolent associations and townsmen associations in Hong Kong, China to help transfer the remains and bones to China, such as the Jishantang and the Mianyuantang. Since the appearance of the Tung Wah Global Repatriation Network, decedents and family members were easily able to receive back the bones, which were related to the international and powerful backgrounds of the local Chinese elites who led the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.

Huiguan in the United States worked together with the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in Hong Kong, China to facilitate the transnational process of bones repatriation [3]. A letter would be sent to the officer of the benevolent association or the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in Hong Kong, China in order to provide them with information about the deceased and when they should go to the port to pick up the bones or cremated remains. Representatives from the benevolent association or the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals would wait for the deceased at the port and hold a Chinese ceremony when they arrived. Then the remains were transferred to the other benevolent associations' coffin homes or Tung Wah Coffin Home for temporary stockpiling. After all of this was completed, the benevolent associations or the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals would finally publish the deceased's details in the newspaper or inform the deceased's family in China to take back the bones or remains and provide monetary aid to subsidize the expenses of transferring the remains back to their hometown and the burial expenses. Therefore, the

relationship between Chinese benevolent associations across the Pacific Ocean constituted the key nexus within a broader series of transnational circuits connecting deceased Chinese migrants to their families in South China.

This article examines the role of the Six Companies in the bones repatriation service in the nineteenth century, which had formed the foundation of the service in the early twentieth century [2]. How did the Six Companies coordinate the bones repatriation program on a transnational scale? And what can the role of the Six Companies in the bones repatriation program reveal about the transnational networks linking Chinese Americans back to Hong Kong, China, and other regions within the Chinese diaspora? By addressing these questions, this work moves beyond the nationalist frameworks that often inform studies of bones repatriation services to analyze the transnational connections and variety of competing motives underlying the repatriation of the remains of Chinese migrants who passed away while abroad.

2. The Beginning of Chinese Charity in the Cantonese Pacific

Charity has been an especially important feature of Chinese diasporic communities, and people have long paid attention to discussions of migrant Chinese communities and business leaders practicing charity both overseas and in China. However, a closer look at the initiatives of overseas Chinese charities, especially the charitable activities of the Cantonese Gold Rush communities, can reveal new insights and perspectives on this topic. Diaspora charity reflected a mode of interaction that supported transnational networking, transoceanic conversation, and high mobility among families, businesses, and civic associations, providing a key link that connected Chinese diasporic communities across vast geographic distances. Hong Kong, China, due to its ability to self-govern under British policy, grew to become the center of it all, developing a civic architecture that connected and spread to the other Chinese diasporic communities around the "Cantonese Pacific."

An important characteristic of Chinese charity in the Cantonese Pacific was that it was intended to benefit communities or individuals that were linked through kinship or hometown ties—unlike more traditional, Western notions of philanthropy as aiming to solve the world's problems and promote humanitarian ethics. Therefore, this charity was closely related to the communities the donors served and often had religious affiliations. The concept of aiding those in need among the communities of the Cantonese Pacific can be traced to the long history of charity in China, of which there are records dating back to the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties [4]. Researchers have gathered sufficient evidence to prove that Chinese charitable institutions and practices were related to competition for status among the gentry and the growing influence of merchant elites, and therefore often involved ulterior motives on the part of the charitable actors. Scholars have also engaged in comparative analysis of the funding, management, and activities of Chinese and Western charities, providing us with a clearer picture of their different structures.

Much of the research on overseas Chinese charity has focused on hometown giving; however, there was a variety of charitable activities in terms of both the beneficiaries and the level of the charity work. The first arena of charity was local giving at the destinations of Chinese migrants, which was mostly done through migrant organizations that were divided by clan, occupation, and neighborhood. Other than providing social welfare to specific groups in the immigrant Chinese community, they also took care of the community's culturally specific needs, such as Chinese medical treatment and handling religious rituals according to traditional requirements. In California, these migrant organizations were called huiguan, and they eventually developed into the system of the Six Companies of San Francisco. Another object of interest for huiguan was the protection of women, which was a practice linked with the Chinese patriarchal society [5]. One important detail is that while the huiguan protected their members from the often-unfriendly foreign community, they also protected them from other Chinese groups that were hostile, as animosity among clans often extended overseas.

There are many reasons why Chinese migrants who were capable were willing to give to charity. The most common reason was that they believed that the good deeds they did for others would one day benefit themselves, either by enhancing their karma or their descendants [1]. Another was that they believed that they should do the right thing and live morally righteous lives in the Chinese culture, the ideology of the unity of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The merchants especially liked being big donors, as it was proof that they were successful enough to help those in need, and these actions improved their social status and reputation. Other, less wealthy migrants also made donations, though not in such large sums, which were often paid in the form of huiguan membership fees that ensured they would also receive aid when they needed it in the future.

Though charity for their fellow countrymen has been the most frequently mentioned in the literature, cross-ethnic charity also existed. The Christian Church's aid for migrants in need was one of the most common examples of non-Chinese people helping the Chinese migrants. For example, Rev. William Speer organized the first Protestant mission in San Francisco Chinatown in 1853. Chinese immigrants also helped the people around them in need, even if they were not their countrymen [2]. They raised money to help with fire and hurricane damages and supported charitable causes that were not limited to just the Chinese community, such as the California Earthquake in 1906, hoping to simultaneously establish themselves socially and politically within the larger American society.

The second arena of overseas Chinese charity was giving to home villages in China [3]. The donors on this level gave primarily to their guxiang, a term that could refer to a range of geographic scales, from a specific village to a county or province. Chinese migrants offered relief supplies to their guxiang when disasters happened and helped build schools and public infrastructure, such as in Taishan. Records also show late Qing dynasty officials viewing overseas Chinese as a source of charitable funds on a national scale, often encouraging them to give money when disasters happened, especially when the government was unable to provide sufficient funds.

The third arena of charity was trans-local, inter-diaspora charity work among the Chinese migrants. Publications and newspapers aimed at overseas Chinese people helped rally philanthropic support so that the charity would reach all those in need. Networks connected different organizations on both sides of the Pacific and helped them work together to transport goods and people, including bones for repatriation [6]. The practice of charity within Chinese diasporic communities offers a lens through which to understand how the Chinese migrants viewed the world around them, from their fellow countrymen to their Chinese identity and the non-Chinese people around them.

3. Chinese Benevolent Associations and the Institutionalization of Chinese Diasporic Charity

Charity is sustained by money, so accountability for funds was especially important. Chinese charities developed systems to ensure the money would be used for the correct causes early on, in part because they knew that problems regarding the misuse of funds existed. However, accountability was low, and the government only interfered when there was clear evidence showing ineffectiveness and gross dishonesty. Support from the emperor promoted the expansion and bureaucratization of charities beginning in the Yongzheng era, pushing public charities to submit official reports to inform senior officials where the public funding went and requiring private charities to publish financial reports showing the use of donated funds to the donating members. Another reason charities published their accounts was to prove that they had not become cash cows, their money and goodwill swindled by ill-meaning people [7].

By the early 1900s, charity organizations in China had become integrated into urban administrations, catering to the needy with funds provided by the local government [8]. For example, in Shanghai, the charity halls appointed managers and submitted financial reports to the local government as required by the Charity Coalition, an organization that

included the major charities of the city, showing that they had achieved a clear organizational structure in their management policies. They mostly relied on their endowments to function and occasionally received funds from popular donations when there was a disaster. Western charities had also changed in the same direction at this time, but they did not operate in the same legal and religious framework as Chinese charities did.

The gradual development of financial governance structures in Chinese charitable institutions was even more prominent in communities outside of Chinese government rule. Huiguan developed a form of indirect rule over local Chinese communities overseas, providing registration for Chinese marriages and religious activities and settling disputes among Chinese people. However, prevailing philanthropic practices in the societies in which huiguan operated also influenced them to adapt some characteristics from Western models of charity, generating organizations run by Chinese people but in a way that was not completely Chinese, but rather adapted to the foreign environment [9].

In sum, the three main methods Chinese charities developed to maintain good financial accountability were to form voluntary associations, integrate into bureaucratic administrations, and operate within the boundaries of legislation. Although these solutions were not perfect, they provided several ways to ensure every cent was used to help the needy among them. Forming a voluntary association meant relying on the goodness and honesty of those in charge of managing the accounts; being incorporated into the bureaucracy meant that the accounting process was subject to outside scrutiny and that the person in charge would be punished if there were huge mistakes in the accounting books; and charities under colonial administration relied on the legitimacy of the law, which, despite not being tailored for Chinese people specifically, still managed to keep social order [9].

Within the larger context of the gradual institutionalization of Chinese and diasporic charitable activities, Chinese benevolent associations played an important role in the transnational operation of repatriating Chinese bones for hometown burial. They collected bones from mass graves and mortuaries and sent these remains back to the hometowns of Chinese migrants during the Gold Rush era, which was mostly located in South China. These associations acted as the key organizations in the global network of the Chinese diaspora, connecting the host countries of the Chinese emigrants and their native lands through the junction of Hong Kong, China. As the repatriation of remains to the deceased's hometown was crucial in Chinese death culture, free coffins and burial assistance were some of the most important services provided by Chinese charitable organizations. Therefore, coffin homes were set up to accommodate the remains awaiting the last leg of their journey, such as the Tung Wah Coffin Home in Hong Kong, China. They also provided temporary refuge for the remains of the local deceased while their families made burial arrangements, and the remains of the poor as well [10]. Through letters, coffin homes communicated with overseas Chinese benevolent associations and their subordinate charitable societies to arrange the repatriation of the deceased Chinese's bones.

Some shipment records show that repatriation of Chinese remains from the US to Hong Kong, China began as early as the 1850s, with the earliest recorded shipment occurring in 1855. The 1855 shipment was likely to have established the protocol of jianyun, the exhumation of bones for repatriation [11]. Even though long-distance jianyun was scarcely practiced by common people in China, it was highly demanded by the Chinese migrants overseas. In California, each huiguan had its charitable hall in charge of bones repatriation services. This large-scale repatriation likely began in the nineteenth century, and it was the networks of the charitable institutions that developed this into a new custom, creating an equitable luo ye gui gen program, which provided the service to both the rich and the poor. This project was funded by a portion of the exit fees paid by migrants to the huiguan when returning to China and the donations of wealthy merchants, and word of the operation quickly spread beyond Chinatown.

4. The Chinese Diaspora in San Francisco, the Six Companies, and the Bones Repatriation

What was the relationship between the Chinese Diaspora in San Francisco, the Six Companies, and bones repatriation? The key was the Chinese merchants, who connected China, the US, and Chinese and Americans on both sides of the Pacific [6]. The Chinese merchant was the middleman who facilitated the history of transnational migration between the US and China. If we would like to rethink the history of bones repatriation, we should start by looking at the role of the Six Companies and the Chinese merchants in San Francisco. After all, apart from manual labor, Chinese immigrants also included a significant number of merchants and intellectuals.

The history of Chinese immigration to San Francisco in the 19th century is a complex one. Chinese immigrants first began arriving in San Francisco during the California Gold Rush of 1848-1855, and the population of Chinese immigrants in the city grew steadily over the next several decades [12]. This growth was largely facilitated by the Six Companies, a group of organizations that provided social and economic support for Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. The Six Companies also played an important role in advocating for Chinese rights and opposing anti-Chinese legislation. In addition, as was mentioned in an article published in Tsun Wan Yat Po, a newspaper in Hong Kong, China (Figure 1), on April 2, 1881, the Six Companies were involved in repatriating the bones of deceased Chinese immigrants back to China, a practice that was seen as essential to maintaining proper respect for their ancestors.


舊金山近事　舊金山爲華人旅居之所經設有六大會館以通聲氣而資聯絡猶西洋之聚會公司云爾所有善事無不勉力舉行即如歲中遣人入山檢拾屍骸棄運回華俾歸骨於異域而遂首丘之思免泉下之憾尤屬義聞仁聲之最著者惟經費浩繁苦難籌措故聚衆會議每有華人滿載言旋則議赴會館酌捐貲貨報名註冊俾助善舉而垂不朽意至美而法至良也然人心不同有如其面其中不無妄攙

Figure 1. The advertisement of the Six Companies

The rise of Chinese bones repatriation programs in San Francisco in the 19th century was a significant event in the history of Chinese-American relations. The Six Companies, a powerful association of Chinese immigrants, organized the repatriation of bones from San Francisco to China. This was done to honor the dead and to ensure that their remains were returned to their homeland. The Six Companies also worked with the local authorities in China and the US to ensure that the remains were properly identified and buried according to Chinese customs. This act of respect for the dead was seen by many as a sign of solidarity between Chinese immigrants and other American merchants, and it helped to create a sense of community among those living in San Francisco's Chinatown. George F. Train, Gardiner G. Howland, and William H. Aspinwall, US citizens, had donated money to the repatriation of Chinese bones and remains, as they were recruiting a lot of Chinese laborers working in the shipping and transcontinental railway business companies. The repatriation of bones also served as an important reminder that Chinese immigrants had rights and deserved respect in American society.

The Six Companies of San Francisco was a powerful Chinese organization that was composed of seven different Chinese associations. These associations were the Kong Chow Company, the Sam Yup Company, the Sze Yup Company, the Yeong Wo Company, the Yan Wo Company, the Ning Yung Company, and the Sue Hing Company, established in 1876. In 1851, Kong Chow Company was the earliest huiguan in California, a district group which included all the Cantonese from six of the seventy-two districts, or counties,

of Canton Province. The Sam Yup Company, established in 1851, included the Cantonese from Nam Hoi, Poon Yue, and Shun Tak districts. The Sze Yup Company, which was established before the close of the year 1851, included the Cantonese from Yin Ping, Hoi Ping, Sun-Ning, and Sun Wui districts, leaving only the people of part of Sun Wui district and the Hok Shan district under Guangzhou rule. In 1852, Yeong Wo Company was formed by the Cantonese from Heung-shan, Tung-kun, and Tsang-shing districts. In 1852, the Yan Wo Company was formed by Hakka immigrants from Bow On, Chak Tai, Tung Gwoon, and Chu Mui districts. In 1854, the Sze Yap Company was divided, and the Ning Yeung Company emerged. Each of these companies represented a different district in China and was responsible for managing the affairs of its members in San Francisco. They provided services such as housing, food, and legal assistance to their members. Additionally, they acted as an intermediary between Chinese immigrants and American authorities in order to ensure that their rights were respected. The Six Companies also played an important role in helping to repatriate Chinese bones from the US back to China.

The Six Companies of San Francisco played a crucial role in the bones repatriation of Chinese immigrants in the 19th century. The Six Companies, also known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, was formed in 1862 to provide mutual aid and assistance to the Chinese immigrants living in San Francisco. They provided financial aid, legal assistance, and even organized funerals for those who had passed away. In particular, they were instrumental in organizing the repatriation of bones back to China for burial. The Six Companies provided funds for shipping coffins and other supplies necessary for a proper burial ceremony. They also worked with local officials to ensure that all necessary paperwork was completed correctly so that the remains could be returned to their homeland. This was a difficult process due to the cultural differences between China and America at that time, but thanks to the efforts of the Six Companies, many Chinese immigrants were able to have their remains properly buried according to their customs and beliefs.

However, during the nineteenth century, the Six Companies in San Francisco were known to have had conflicts over Chinese bones repatriation. This was because each company had different opinions on how to handle the repatriation process. Some companies wanted to take a more lenient approach, while others wanted a stricter approach. This led to disagreements between the companies as they argued over how best to handle the situation. Additionally, some of the companies had their own interests in mind, which often clashed with those of other companies. Therefore, they reached a consensus about the arrangement of the bones repatriation programs in which each company would be responsible for repatriating the remains of deceased migrants whose hometowns fell within the regions they represented. For example, San Francisco's Changhoutang was founded in 1858, as a subordinate organization to the Sam Yup Company, to handle the repatriation of the deceased from the Sam Yup region.

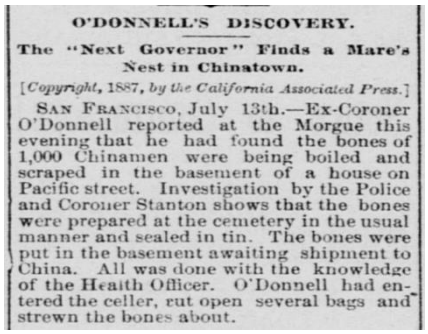
In some instances, the Six Companies were accused of improperly using the bones repatriation program to make a profit. Tsun Wan Yat Po published an article called "Discussion on Recruiting Chinese Labour" (Figure 2), which explained that these companies taking advantage of the situation by charging excessive fees to families who were desperate to have their loved ones' remains returned home was not uncommon. Even though the author of the article did not mention explicitly which institutions were exploiting the bones repatriation program, it obviously referred to the Six Companies, since they were well known at that time. These companies were also suspected of taking advantage of the language barrier between Chinese immigrants and English-speaking Americans and using it to their own benefit. This type of exploitation was particularly damaging to the Chinese community, as it made it even more difficult for them to get justice and respect in a foreign land.

中外新聞

論招工　近日招工出洋又復盛行而其爲拐賣猪仔與否則固各持一說究無從辨別其是非也在以招工爲是者則曰檀香山土膏腴沃物產蕃滋華人前往儘可謀生活有妻孥且各項工值又極昂貴無論男女皆可藉以度日而所立合同又極公道均可自由並無拘束實與古巴秘魯判若天淵中國生齒日蕃生機日蹙與其爲飢寒所迫流爲盜賊上干國紀下擾閭閻何若飄然長往轉得樂土歟在以招工爲非者又曰此皆強擄奪理以售其奸而濟其貪夫天下豈有以素不相識之人萍水相逢慨然代出船價聽往萬里外洋俟抵埠後覓有僱工之所然後扣抵工值生死則不問利息則不計者乎其云給以小票携往行棧報名即可下船是即詭言騙誘之故智也其云不須寫立承工期約是即勢逼威勒禁錮終身之伎倆也其船艙往返省河黨夥偏歷鄉落肆其簧鼓及遇官弁查緝則詭稱搭客是又設定阱穽逐漸嘗試以圖利藪之顯開也若爲民父母不嚴行查禁則奸人得志愚民受害將靡有底止矣是二說者其用心既殊而其見解亦別然自有識者觀之欲爲國家謀生聚爲民生籌安全仍責諸爲民司牧者而已矣夫國以民爲本民衆則國強故朝廷軫念民依勤求民瘼萬機不暇仍慮及君民之間分隔情疎有所未週特設各官以代其勞而宣其澤是民之休戚固爲官所難恝置也今無故而招我子民遠泛重洋聽人替轄役之如馬牛待之如犬豕是無異己有子弟不以順聚一堂爲樂忍心張目聽其自靡與人世爲奴僕也於心安乎於理順乎異日家庭有事鞭侮無人而子弟之爲人奴僕忘其宗祖竟聽指揮操戈入室豈不悔恨靡及乎出洋僱工亦猶是已今日似屬無妨異時必滋後累則

Figure 2. Discussion on Recruiting Chinese Labour

The difficulty of Chinese bones repatriation in San Francisco was immense [13]. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, also made it difficult for the Chinese community to repatriate the bones of their deceased family members. For example, the US government received many complaints from Americans accusing the Six Companies of acting as gangsters in San Francisco, even exporting the remains and bones to earn money. On 14 July 1887, the article "The 'Next Governor' Finds a Mare's Nest in Chinatown," published by Sacramento Daily Record-Union (Figure 3), stated that American citizens and public health authorities often had negative impressions of the bones repatriation program because of concerns that this was unhygienic and uncivilized behavior.



O'DONNELL'S DISCOVERY.

The "Next Governor" Finds a Mare's Nest in Chinatown.

[*Copyright*, 1887, *by the California Associated Press.*]

SAN FRANCISCO, July 13th.—Ex-Coroner O'Donnell reported at the Morgue this evening that he had found the bones of 1,000 Chinamen were being boiled and scraped in the basement of a house on Pacific street. Investigation by the Police and Coroner Stanton shows that the bones were prepared at the cemetery in the usual manner and sealed in tin. The bones were put in the basement awaiting shipment to China. All was done with the knowledge of the Heaith Officer. O'Donnell had entered the celler, rut open several bags and strewn the bones about.

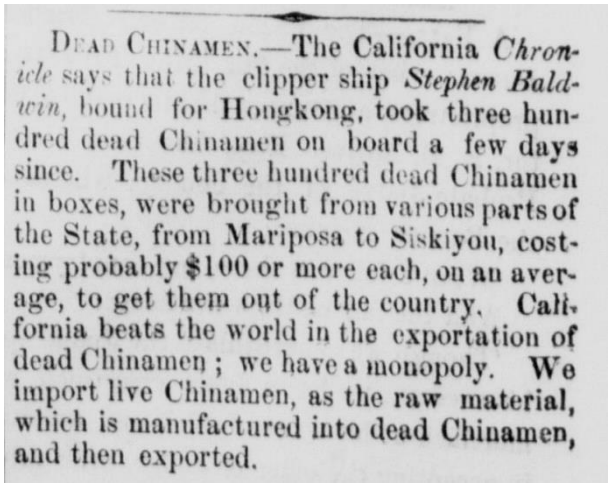
Figure 3. The public health problem of the Chinese bones repatriation

In 1901, the Six Companies registered with the government in California, calling themselves the "Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA)" to present a positive image to US society. The Six Companies had to fight against the anti-Chinese sentiment that was rampant in the city. They had to challenge the laws and regulations that were imposed on them by local governments, and they had to negotiate with shipping companies and other organizations in order to get their deceased family members' remains back home. Despite these difficulties, they were able to successfully repatriate thousands of bones back to China. This was a remarkable achievement that shows how determined and resilient the Chinese community was in San Francisco during this period.

Nevertheless, the American people had mixed reactions to the Chinese bones repatriation in San Francisco during the 19th century. Some argued that it was a moral obligation to return the bones of Chinese immigrants to their homeland, as they had no other family members in America to care for them. Others argued that it was a waste of resources and time and that the money should instead be used for other causes. The debate was often heated and divisive, with both sides making passionate arguments for their positions. Newspaper articles from this period reflect the intensity of the debate, with some articles calling for compassion and respect for those who had passed away, while others argued against what they saw as an unnecessary expenditure of resources.

Even in most cases when the Six Companies in San Francisco did not directly earn money from bones repatriation, they still benefited indirectly from repatriating the migrants' remains. The Six Companies had a long-standing relationship with Chinese migrants in San Francisco and were instrumental in helping to organize and facilitate the repatriation of bones. This act of goodwill increased their standing among Chinese immigrants and helped to strengthen their relationships with them. Additionally, it was seen as an act of solidarity that strengthened ties between the Chinese community in San Francisco and those in China. As such, while the Six Companies did not directly earn money or receive any benefits from the Chinese bones repatriation, they did benefit indirectly through increased goodwill and strengthened relationships with their constituents.

The Six Companies in San Francisco certainly benefited from the Chinese bones repatriation. The companies discovered the Chinese population in San Francisco was not stable, since some people died and left every year, and there were few Chinese women to increase the birth rate. On 7 June 1856, the article "Dead Chinamen" was published in The Trinity Journal (Figure 4), stating that an efficient way to increase the population was to export the remains and bones to China and import new Chinese laborers from China to San Francisco, which reflects that the Six Companies aimed to ensure economic stability within the community in Chinatown. The Six Companies were also responsible for organizing funds to pay for the transportation of the bones of deceased laborers back to China. The Six Companies also served as intermediaries between the Chinese laborers in San Francisco and their families in China, helping to facilitate communication and financial transactions. Additionally, the companies earned money from providing services such as funeral arrangements and other related activities. Finally, the Six Companies were able to use their influence over the Chinese community in San Francisco to gain political power and influence in local politics. In this way, they were able to benefit from the Chinese bones repatriation both financially and politically.



DEAD CHINAMEN.—The California *Chronicle* says that the clipper ship *Stephen Baldwin*, bound for Hongkong, took three hundred dead Chinamen on board a few days since. These three hundred dead Chinamen in boxes, were brought from various parts of the State, from Mariposa to Siskiyou, costing probably $100 or more each, on an average, to get them out of the country. California beats the world in the exportation of dead Chinamen; we have a monopoly. We import live Chinamen, as the raw material, which is manufactured into dead Chinamen, and then exported.

Figure 4. The criticism of the Chinese bones repatriation, a kind of trafficking in human beings.

5. Transnationalism and Chinese Bones Repatriation from San Francisco

The communication between the benevolent associations in Hong Kong, China and the Six Companies of San Francisco regarding bones repatriation was largely conducted through letters. The benevolent associations in Hong Kong, China would send letters to the Six Companies in San Francisco informing them of the need for bones to be repatriated. The Six Companies then responded with letters detailing their willingness to help in the repatriation process. Once an agreement was reached, a contract was signed, and arrangements were made for the bones to be shipped from San Francisco to Hong Kong, China. The Six Companies also provided financial support for the cost of shipping, as well as assisting in finding a suitable burial site in San Francisco for the remains. The organizations on two sides of the Pacific Ocean worked together closely throughout this process, ensuring that all necessary steps were taken to ensure the successful repatriation of the remains.

The practice of Chinese diasporic charity emerged out of the tradition of Chinese migrants overseas sending remittances back home to support their families and wider communities. First, the family remittances that constitute most of these letters are a form of charity by nature, as they help vulnerable people. The other reason for viewing remittances as a forerunner of diasporic charity is that the remittance industry was a transfer of resources that helped an area lagging, which is also a kind of charity. Unlike the Western idea of philanthropy, which emphasized solving problems at the root, the Chinese concept of philanthropy was to give to the people around them. But generally speaking, charity is not aimed towards kin, as it would then be viewed as having an ulterior motive to grow the family's wealth for one's own benefit. However, as many parts of China had developed from clans that shared a blood relationship, the boundaries between family and community are not that distinguished. Charity is personal when the giver donates to specific people he knows, and it is impersonal otherwise. Though the benefactors of these charities may often be related by blood, the donor usually was not aiming to donate only to friends and family or to only donate to the community impersonally.

We can further differentiate the concepts of charity and philanthropy, the former "a short-term, emotional, immediate response, focused primarily on rescue and relief," and the latter "more long-term, more strategic, focused on rebuilding." According to this definition, the leaders of the qiaopi system, a term used to refer to remittances or letters sent by overseas Chinese, were philanthropists who regularly gave on both an individual and a family basis by funding the construction of infrastructure and mobilizing support for war and natural disasters. But the other letters and remittances were not used all that differently. Though generally used to deal with short-term problems, remitters eventually started to use the system to command long-term investments from overseas. However,

these actions were built on the expectation that the overseas Chinese would one day return to their homeland. This voluntary giving that developed from the practice of sending remittances was based on the belief that the accumulation of goodness would one day be rewarded, whether in the afterlife or for the person's descendants, so the overseas donors were doing it for their family members in China.

The donations and experiences of these Chinese who left their hometown to work overseas catapulted them into the upper levels of their village society [14]. Their fellow villagers not only relied on them for monetary help to support village institutions but also needed their international experience to help promote modernization efforts in their native towns, counties, and provinces. Eventually, this new caste of merchants and workers began to replace the place of the gentry in society, taking over new tasks and functions as the merchant leaders of the qiaopi trade exerted their influence over the Chinese community. It was this group of people that carried strong ideas about education. They gathered funds to build schools and libraries and supported the school careers of their younger relatives. They also promoted the importance of girls and adults going to school and the idea that everyone should learn because "knowledge is strength." Long story short, remittances evolved into an important form of transnational charity that played an important role in the transformation of the education patterns of the hometowns of overseas Chinese migrants.

Usually, Chinese people overseas only donate to their families or home villages and home counties. But when wars and crises happened, they were very willing to donate to wider causes. Therefore, qiaopi played an important role in linking the overseas Chinese circles together and integrating the dispersed resources controlled by diasporic Chinese communities into a whole. The fact that governments took part in the development of the qiaopi trade cannot be denied. However, after failing to take charge of the trade, they adopted conflicting attitudes towards it, sometimes supporting it and other times opposing it. While some of the Chinese overseas sent resources home by finding couriers and other modes of transportation themselves, most did it through their hometown associations. Even though these associations united under threat or to achieve a shared goal, they were usually at odds due to longstanding regional feuds that extended to those organizations categorized by locality. In short, we can say that diaspora charity and philanthropy have a long history, though we still lack enough concrete evidence to offer detailed accounts of much of early diasporic charitable activity. But one interesting thing about China's charitable giving is that it has left much more detailed records compared to other emerging economies of the era.

The transnational inspiration for the bones repatriation program of the Six Companies was a remarkable example of cross-cultural cooperation and compassion. The Chinese labourers who had come to America to work in the gold fields, railroads, and other industries were often treated with great disrespect by their employers [15]. Despite this, the Chinese community in San Francisco worked together to ensure that their deceased compatriots were returned to their homeland for proper burial. This was a powerful statement of solidarity and respect for their culture and traditions, as well as a demonstration of how people from different backgrounds can come together to achieve a common goal. The Chinese bones repatriation program was an important milestone in the history of Chinese-American relations and a reminder that we can all learn from each other when we are willing to embrace our differences.

Madeline Hsu's view of transnationalism proposes that Chinese migrants to the United States in the 19th century were not merely economic migrants but instead were part of a larger global movement of people and ideas. This view has important implications for understanding Chinese bones repatriation and the Six Companies in San Francisco in the 19th century. By viewing these events through a transnational lens, we can better understand how Chinese migrants navigated their new environment while still maintaining strong ties to their homeland. The Six Companies, for example, provided social services and legal aid to Chinese migrants while also lobbying for better treatment from American authorities. This suggests that Chinese migrants were actively engaged in

creating a transnational network that allowed them to remain connected with their homeland while also adapting to life in America.

Adam McKeown's and Madeline Hsu's transnational approaches to the study of Chinese migration history can help illuminate previously overlooked aspects of 19th-century Chinese bone repatriation programs that relied on communication between the benevolent associations in Hong Kong, China and the Six Companies to create a network of connections between China and America that facilitated the movement of people, ideas, goods, and even human remains across borders. The Six Companies were able to communicate with the benevolent associations in Hong Kong, China by sending letters back and forth using Chinese merchants as intermediaries. Through this communication, they were able to organize the bones repatriation project. This article was a testament to how transnational networks could be created through communication between two different countries. It showed how people could come together to achieve a common goal despite their differences in culture, language, and geography.

Madeline Hsu and Adam McKeown have argued that Chinese migrants in the 19th century were part of a larger transnational community. Hsu and McKeown argue that Chinese migrants had a strong sense of belonging to their homeland and maintained ties to it through various networks, including the Six Companies in San Francisco [15]. In addition, Hsu and McKeown also point out that Chinese migrants were not completely isolated from their new homes, but instead actively engaged with the local environment. This engagement included participating in local politics, engaging in economic activities, and forming social ties with other migrants. The bones repatriation programs are an excellent example of how the Six Companies facilitated this kind of transnational community, engaging in close cooperation with both American authorities and institutions in Hong Kong, China to facilitate migrants' ties to their families and hometowns that extended beyond the grave.

6. Rethinking the History and Historiography of the Repatriation of Chinese American Bones

In Madeline Hsu's book and Adam McKeown's article, both authors attempt to view the history of Chinese people in America through the lens of transnationalism. To put it simply, transnationalism is a viewpoint that criticizes mono-ethnicity and emphasizes observing international interactions from a global point of view [16]. In historical research, transnationalism's biggest foe is historical research that presumes that nation-states are the natural containers of historical change and takes for granted the nation-state as the standard unit of historical analysis.

McKeown's article attempts to integrate the history of overseas Chinese people into a transnational global history. He proposes a historical view that breaks with the traditional research framework of analyzing the history of overseas Chinese through nationalism, shifting the focus from a China-centered vision to international interaction. Hsu's book discusses the history of the migrants from Taishan, a place in South China, during the Chinese Exclusion Act in America [15]. These migrants had come to San Francisco to search for jobs in hopes that sending more money back home would give their families a better life, regardless of the hardships brought on by the Chinese Exclusion Act and the complicated social environment. Although the topic is the history of Chinese people in America, Hsu uses transnationalism to emphasize the interaction between Chinese and American history, as the lifestyles of Chinese migrants in America were influenced by both the local American society and their home country of China on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, generating a more complete view of their transnational social and cultural worlds.

Hao Zou's "Tracing Their Transpacific Tradition" and Yucheng Qin's "A Century-old Puzzle" are also inspiring articles. Hao Zhou believes that the current state of historical research on the Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco is still lacking and has not yet fully articulated the characteristics and functions of Chinese benevolent associations. Chinese benevolent associations originated in sixteenth-century China and spread to the

entire empire by the end of the Ming Dynasty. They served as a space and network for social interactions among fellow countrymen, distinguished by the dialect spoken by and the birthplace of the members. Zou implies that the Chinese people of San Francisco had no Chinese national identity, but only a birthplace identity constructed by a shared language and culture. The Chinese began to immigrate to America after the First Opium War, and the first Chinese benevolent association in San Francisco appeared in the 1850s. This gathering place for Chinese people branched off into multiple benevolent associations rooted in native place ties, and eventually, the migrants established a Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, which was responsible for coordinating all the benevolent associations and the local Chinese communities.

Hao Zou thinks that Chinese national identity surfaced in the establishment of the San Francisco Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association because American society had started to oppress Chinese migrants at that time, which made them realize they were being grouped under racial and national labels and pushed them to change their self-identification—going beyond different birthplace identities to develop a shared Chinese national identity in diaspora. However, in this shared Chinese national identity, we can still see the persistence of cultural and social differences based on native places, for example, among the Hakka, migrants from the three counties in Quanzhou, and the five counties in Guangdong. These groups continued to exhibit major cultural differences and maintain separate social organizations even though they were mainly from the Guangdong region.

Hao Zou's article compares benevolent associations located in China in Hankow and Shanghai, and the Chinese benevolent associations of San Francisco. He concluded that, in response to the different social circumstances in China and America, the benevolent associations of Hankow and Shanghai and those of San Francisco were different in both essence and structure, with the biggest difference being their approach to charity. This was because the benevolent associations of Hankow and Shanghai were only open to a minority of the privileged and the elite, while the Chinese benevolent associations of San Francisco were led by Chinese merchants and included every common person who had a Chinese bloodline. Those benevolent associations of San Francisco indirectly forced every Chinese migrant to join by strengthening the organization into a quasi-governmental institution, such that those who did not join would not be protected by the Chinese communities in America. Therefore, Zou argues that the functions of the benevolent associations in San Francisco had changed to adapt to the different social environments, but not completely. The tactic of his article was to strike a balance between sinophone studies and transnationalism in developing his view of the history of Chinese migrants in America, simultaneously affirming their international interactions and denying the peculiarity of the Chinese race by highlighting adaptations to the social environment of the countries they live in.

Yucheng Qin's "A Century-old Puzzle" mainly discusses the character of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association as an organization that exports Chinese people to America. Secondly, it describes the role of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and its local sphere of control, as well as the condition of Chinese communities and Americans' biases and accusations toward Chinese immigrants in the Chinese Exclusion period. The American society and media at that time were prejudiced against and disgusted by Chinese immigrants and had continuously attacked and defamed Chinese people in the United States, as well as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco.

Qin thinks that some of the Americans' accusations against the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association were true, as the organization had firm control over Chinese labourers and life in Chinese communities. He proposes a question that urges us to rethink the position of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco: Was the organization still a simple group for fellow Chinese, or had it become a form of Chinese local influence that controlled the economy and society? Qin believes that, on the one hand, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was protecting the interests

of the Chinese merchants by bringing in Chinese labour and acting as an intermediary to help them find jobs in America (through aid such as helping them pay for their travel expenses in advance, booking ship tickets, and handling their visas and immigration procedures). However, the organization would later gradually exploit these Chinese labourers until they became the grassroots of the local Chinese community.

On the other hand, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association provided grassroots Chinese immigrants with some social welfare and resisted Chinese exclusion from American society, efficiently maintaining the stability of the economy of Chinese communities and the leading status of Chinese merchants. Because the leaders of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and other benevolent associations in San Francisco were Chinese merchants who mainly operated temples, opium dens, and brothels in the community, they simultaneously had personnel managing security, deliberating disputes in tribunals, and setting up their own rules, forming a faction of power that was like "a small government." At that time, the demographic structure of the Chinese migrants mainly consisted of male labourers who had a continuous need for religion, drugs, and sex in a foreign land, so the Chinese merchants who ran the temples, opium dens, and brothels had complete control over the economy of the Chinese communities in San Francisco.

The studies above affirmed the importance of transnationalism in research regarding overseas Chinese and helped us rethink the history and limitations of research regarding the repatriation of Chinese American bones. Currently, the two historians who have written most extensively about the repatriation of Chinese bones are Elizabeth Sinn and Hon-ming Yip. In the book Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong, China, Elizabeth Sinn analyzes the internationalism of Hong Kong, China after 1842 through the history of the Chinese communities in San Francisco, and she mentions the repatriation of Chinese American bones in her account. In explaining the purposes of the bones repatriation program, she only analyzes the need to return to one's roots and the Chinese migrants' sense of nostalgia for their home country, overlooking the role of each Chinese Benevolent Association in San Francisco and how they contributed to the repatriation of Chinese bones with their influence over the community.

Hon-ming Yip's studies on the repatriation of Chinese Bones from San Francisco point out the lack of research on the role of benevolent associations, as I mentioned in my introduction [17]. However, due to her emphasis on nationalist sentiment, she does not analyze the various interests (and, sometimes, even ulterior motives) of the Chinese merchants operating these programs behind the scenes. Considering more recent research showing the transnationalism of Chinese diasporic communities, this near-exclusive focus on national sentiments can be viewed as a deficiency in the existing research regarding the history of programs for the repatriation of Chinese bones. Scholars such as Xin-bao Ding, Chi-pang Lau, and Hon-ming Yip have all adopted a nationalist framework that attributes bones repatriation programs exclusively to nationalist sentiment rather than taking a transnational perspective that pays attention to the multiple interests of Chinese merchants who operated this charitable endeavor through benevolent associations in China and America. These scholars have remained focused on the interpretation of nationalist sentiments and emphasize the greatness of the Chinese people and their sense of national identity, centering their research on the oppression of Chinese migrants by American society. However, they have paid less attention to how Chinese people also oppressed their fellow countrymen and even played key roles in facilitating their oppression.

The Chinese merchants of San Francisco built their influence through benevolent associations, operating all kinds of businesses and controlling the population and economy. Superficially, they seem to be helping the Chinese labour migrants, when in fact, because they were familiar with the situation in China, the Chinese merchants made money from being the intermediary that sourced Chinese labourers from the Guangdong area to immigrate to America to work for American businessmen. They also maintained the population in San Francisco's Chinese communities and the stability of its economy

through contracts that restricted the freedom of Chinese people to fill the gap in the population left by the Chinese labourers who returned to China after finishing their contracts every year.

A history of Chinese people in America from a transnational point of view reveals Chinese merchants as the prime movers and emphasizes how they profited greatly from facilitating transnational migration. Adam McKeown and Madeline Hsu emphasized the importance of viewing the history of Chinese people in America through transnationalism. More recently, Hao Zhou pointed out the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of San Francisco by conducting comparative research regarding San Francisco's Chinese benevolent associations and the benevolent associations of China. Likewise, Yucheng Qin reminded us that the role of the San Francisco Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was not as simple as previously thought and involved many complex factors.

These scholars prompt us to keep in mind that the repatriation of bones was not done purely due to nationalist sentiments, but rather was part of the larger function of benevolent associations in China, which was ultimately to profit from the maintenance of a transnational diasporic community that facilitated the transpacific movement of Chinese people and goods. Thus, the repatriation of Chinese bones of America was not only a charitable service that helped Chinese people in America return to their roots, but also a tool used by the Chinese merchants of America to consolidate their interests in the name of doing good deeds, and even a way to whitewash their role in the oppression of their fellow countrymen [9, 12].

7. Conclusion

To conclude, charity was a significant aspect of Chinese American history and deeply rooted in the sense of community within Chinese culture. The widespread participation of individuals across all social classes in diasporic charity, rather than being limited to a few elites, transformed it into a community movement institutionalized through charitable organizations such as huiguan in both China and Chinese communities overseas. While the motives behind charitable actions were multifaceted, it is evident that such efforts ultimately benefited the broader Chinese community.

Due to their unique circumstances, Chinese communities overseas upheld a tradition of giving, both to their homeland and to the communities in which they resided. Driven by humanitarian values, ethnic solidarity, and a sense of cultural identity, Chinese Americans collaborated with government agencies and civic associations to plan and deliver charitable initiatives. Initially, the charitable acts of Chinese immigrants in China stemmed from concerns for their family members back home. Most overseas Chinese were laboring men who bore the responsibility of improving their families' livelihoods through remittances. These remittances were utilized to purchase real estate and invest in public projects that traditional social elites could not afford, such as energy, transportation, and hometown infrastructure, thereby blurring the line between family support and philanthropy.

The charitable efforts of Chinese Americans also extended to assisting their compatriots in need within the United States. They established huiguan, charitable associations that became integral to Chinese diasporic community life. Huiguan addressed various community affairs and mobilized the Chinese American community to support Chinese immigrants, as charity work in America was considered a collective responsibility of the diasporic Chinese community. Among the most notable services provided by huiguan were the repatriation of bones, a practice that was prohibitively expensive for most Chinese immigrant workers. Other services included medical care and funeral expenses. As nationalism grew among the Chinese, it elevated their charitable activities, although not all contributions were voluntary. Social pressure compelled Chinese migrants to donate money as a demonstration of good character, and some associations even regulated minimum donation amounts. In the long term, these efforts not only supported their compatriots in their homeland but also enhanced the public

image of the Chinese community in America and facilitated the integration of Chinese Americans into American society.

From the example of the Six Companies and the repatriation of Chinese bones from San Francisco in the nineteenth century, it is evident that diasporic Chinese communities utilized charity to foster trust both within their own communities and with their host societies. This was largely because business activities and social transactions in Chinese culture were conducted through networks built on trust. Supporting charitable activities served as a demonstration of trustworthiness for merchants, while for ordinary members, it functioned as a form of social insurance. Charity also helped overseas Chinese navigate exclusion in foreign lands. Initially, charitable organizations were based on hometown, clan, and brotherhood affiliations, but as more inclusive associations emerged, they adapted their membership criteria and structures. Despite these changes, the shared characteristics of old and new organizations were their commitment to charity and their focus on place-based initiatives. As these organizations expanded to include more members, they undertook larger charity projects, bringing together diverse families and dialect groups and elevating the pursuit of private benefit to that of public welfare.

Charity served as a means for Chinese Americans to expand their connections, which was a fundamental goal. To achieve this, they broadened the scope of community associations to include members who were not originally eligible, such as those outside familial or neighborhood ties, and promoted higher levels of cooperation among trust-based associations. They also participated in civic associations that transcended traditional boundaries, focusing on principles such as religion and community welfare. Regardless of the specific methods employed, charity remained the unifying factor, binding relative strangers together for the common good rather than individual gain.

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