Fallen Leaves Returning to Their Roots
– Repatriating the Bones of Overseas Chinese (1850-1949)

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Introduction

The Wuyi area, or Five Counties, is located in the south western part of Guangdong province. In ancient times, it was part of the kingdom of Baiyue; in the Qin and Han dynasties, it belonged to Nanhai prefecture; during the Northern and Southern dynasties, Xinhui prefecture was established under the jurisdiction of Fengzhou; in the Tang dynasty, Fengzhou was renamed Gangzhou and the district government was set up in present-day Huicheng – Xinhui was thus also named Gangzhou. There were 12 counties under the jurisdiction of Xinhui prefecture, including today's Xinhui, all of Taishan, Kaiping, Enping and part of Heshan in the Wuyi area, whereas Taishan, Kaiping, Enping and Heshan were later established as independent counties. Meanwhile, the majority of early Chinese emigrants to North America and Oceania were natives of Guangdong province, and most of them were unemployed villagers from the four counties of Taishan, Kaiping, Xinhui and Enping. Since they shared the same culture and spoke similar dialects, they called themselves "Siyi (Sze Yap) people" (people from the Four Counties) and set up native associations to support one another when they were overseas. All along, Heshan, where the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars originated, was not included in the Sze Yap area (County Records of Xinning, 1893; County Records of Chixi, 1920; County Records of Kaiping, 1933). It was only in the 1980s, when the government re-divided the districts for administrative jurisdiction as China underwent reform and opening-up, that Heshan was incorporated into Jiangmen. Heshan, along with the other four counties Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping and Enping, were known as Wuyi (Five Counties). This was how the present-day administrative division of Wuyi came into being.

The First Opium War, which left China weak and vulnerable, ended with the cession of Hong Kong to Britain. As Guangzhou was no longer China's only trading port, many Wuyi laborers in the city found themselves out of work. Back on the hilly terrain of Wuyi, there was insufficient land for farming and harvest was particularly poor when natural calamities struck. Meanwhile, an uprising with most of the fighting taking place in Taishan, Kaiping, Heshan and Foshan broke out in the south western part of the Pearl River Delta, as the Red Turban Rebellion supporting the Taiping Rebellion. Subsequently, local people clashed with Hakka people, and the confrontations sparked the decade-long Punti-Hakka Clan Wars (1854-1867), making life in the underdeveloped Wuyi area even more difficult than before. By this time, China had signed the Treaty of Nanking (1842) with Britain and the Treaty of Wanghia (1844) with the United States, while European settlers and colonizers opened up countries in Southeast Asia, Central America and South America. Due to the decline of slavery in the west, some merchants and plantation owners turned to China to recruit laborers. At the same time, the discovery of gold in North America (1848 in California, USA; 1858 in British Columbia, Canada) and Oceania (1851 in Melbourne, Australia; 1868 in New Zealand) led to the gold rush, whereas large-scale railroads linking the east and west coasts of the United States and Canada were being constructed. Against this backdrop, penniless villagers from mainland Chinese counties near Hong Kong and Macau left their hometown in search of opportunities. They travelled to Southeast Asia, Central and South America, North America and Oceania to earn a living. After the gold rush in various cities, Chinese laborers were hired to build the Central Pacific Railroad (1863-1869), the Southern Pacific Railroad (1873-1883), the Northern Pacific Railway (1870-1883) and the Canadian Pacific Railway. Between the 1860s and 1890s, the Chinese laborers played a vital role in the construction and operation of these railroads (Voss, 2019). In

addition to gold mining and railway construction in the early days, overseas Chinese were engaged in cultivation, vegetable farming, fishing, laundry services, restaurants and the grocery industry. They also worked as factory workers, chefs and domestic helpers, as well as ran various kinds of businesses in Chinatown.

The 1893 county records of Taishan (Xinning) clearly states why Chinese from the Wuyi area travelled abroad to earn a living, "After the chaos created by the Taiping Rebellion and Punti-Hakka Clan Wars, and in the meantime western culture became very popular, those in their prime went overseas to earn a living and support their families. Life for the weak and poor become very difficult here." (Volume 6, About the Land, *County Records of Xinning*, 9th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign)

In a time when the vulnerable Qing government was yet to be accepted into the international arena, the culture of Chinese people was different from that of the countries they lived in. While employers were impressed by their diligence and sense of responsibility, the existence of the Chinese laborers posed a threat to local labor markets. In the late 19th century, anti-Chinese riots broke out in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – countries where most Chinese from Wuyi lived in. The riots ended with the enactment of anti-Chinese laws; in 1882, the United States promulgated the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first ever discriminating immigration law targeting a particular ethic group; in 1885, following the completion of the railroads, Canada restricted Chinese immigration through imposing a poll tax on Chinese persons; subsequently in 1924, Canada enacted the Chinese Immigration Act to restrict Chinese laborers from entering the country (1924-1947); in the late 19th century, Australia and New Zealand restricted Asian people from entry through implementing a "language test" – any person seeking to enter the country had to pass the test

by reading a passage out loud in a European language; in 1901, Australia even enacted the White Australia Policy (1901-1972) in which Australia was seen as a country for white people, thereby restricting entry of non-white persons. The Chinese overseas were not only discriminated in an alien culture and environment far away from home, but also, being Chinese laborers, it was hard for them to start a family and have peace of mind in a foreign country.

Many Chinese who could not take root in foreign countries chose to return to their hometown to start a family. Their families at home asked them to send money to them, while the feeling of "homelessness" they had amidst strong anti-Chinese sentiments prompted them to send their savings back to China to develop their hometown and invest in business. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the hometown of overseas Chinese in Wuyi underwent dramatic changes as a result of increased overseas remittances and the overseas Chinese's desire to develop their hometown. Gradually, the hometown of overseas Chinese developed unique landscapes – made up of *diaolou* (fortified multi-storey watchtower), western style buildings and shop-houses in market towns – with a strong local accent. Modern schools and libraries were established in the villages to enlighten people; commerce and trade flourished while land and water transportation was well developed. Goods and materials from all over the country and the rest of the world were widely available, and people acquired water pumps, flush toilets, fireplaces, bathtubs, telephone sets, cars and other imported goods (Tan, Jinhua: 2013). Meanwhile, the hometown of the overseas Chinese evolved from rural feudal communities dependent on farming to half-feudal societies emphasising industry and commerce more than agriculture.

Far from their families, Chinese overseas earning a living abroad led lonely lives. The Chinese native societies, communal halls and clan associations in Chinatown became their home, and members watched out for one another as

they developed a close bond. The lucky ones earned enough money to return to their families in China, while those who were less fortunate died abroad. Against this backdrop, the Chinese associations established charitable / benevolent associations to help them, acquiring land to build burial grounds. The deceased were buried while their spirits were appeased; after their bodies turned into bones, special ceremonies were performed and the bones were exhumed and repatriated to the deceased's hometown, as it was their final wish to return to their roots (Yip, 2009; Sinn, & Lau, 2006). In over a century, overseas Chinese perpetuated the tradition of sending the deceased's coffins or bones to their hometown for permanent burial. Meanwhile, Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong took the repatriated bones into its care from the 1870s. (The Tung Wah Hospital was founded in 1870, two more hospitals were later added, and in 1931, the three hospitals were amalgamated as the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.) Since discussing bone repatriation was a taboo in the early days, not many scholars – at home and abroad – conducted research on this topic. In the past 20 years, however, big changes have taken place, Xinhui historian Ou Jilin and Professor Hom, Marlon K. of San Francisco State University, among others, conducted research on the communal burial grounds of overseas Chinese in Xinhui, while the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals allowed access to its archives, so that scholars in Hong Kong and abroad can start research on the charitable deeds of Tung Wah Hospital, its coffin home and the global bone repatriation network.

In 1992, when building Guifeng Hi-Tech Village in the outskirts of Xinhui, the local county authority discovered 387 graves belonging to overseas Chinese in a burial ground in Haihuai, Huangkeng. Xinhui historian Ou Jilin started an investigation and discovered a total of 3,800 graves in six burial grounds in the vicinity for overseas Chinese. This lifted the veil on this kind of burial grounds (Ou, 1995, 2001). At the same time, Professor Marlon K. Hom drew on the

experience of Chinese living in the United States and conducted research on the burial ground in Haihuai, Huangkeng, analysing the internal and external factors for the return of the bones of overseas Chinese to their hometown for burial (Hom: 2001).

In his essay "Funeral services and bone repatriation", published in *Publication of Research Project on the History of Tung Wah–A Collection of Commemorative works of Tung Wah in celebration of its 135th Anniversary*, expert on Hong Kong history Ko Tim-keung introduces the funeral services of Tung Wah Hospital as well as the bone repatriation service offered by Tung Wah Coffin Home, which included taking the bones sent to Hong Kong from abroad into its care, storing them and transporting them to the deceased's hometown for burial (Ko, 2006); historian Professor Joseph Ting documents the establishment of Tung Wah Coffin Home as well as its bone repatriation service in his book *Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and the Chinese Community in Hong Kong (1870-1997)* (Ting, 2010); in *The Tung Wah Coffin Home and Global Charity Network: Evidence and Findings from Archival Materials*, Professor of History of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Yip Hon-ming, analyses the global charitable network through studying the archives of Tung Wah Museum and conducting field research (Yip, 2009); Elizabeth Sinn, Honorary Professor of the Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Hong Kong, illustrates Hong Kong's status in the global overseas Chinese trade and its international logistics network from the perspective of the trading company network while highlighting Hong Kong's indispensable role in the global bone transportation in her book *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Sinn, 2013); American scholar Sue Fawn Chung in "An Ocean Apart: Chinese American Segregated Burials" meticulously documents how early Chinese communities in the United States

treated fellow Chinese who passed away abroad as well as how bone repatriation and funeral services were handled (Chung, 2019).

The aforementioned research sheds light on burial and funeral arrangements on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, the global bone repatriation network influenced by deeply rooted traditional culture, as well as how Tung Wah Hospital and Tung Wah Coffin Home helped repatriate the bones of overseas Chinese to their hometown for burial. However, little has been said about the actual process of repatriation from Tung Wah Coffin Home to the destination. In particular, there is yet to be in-depth research on the transportation of bones to the deceased's hometown for storage and burial customs among other topics. This essay investigates the burial arrangements for coffins and bones repatriated to the deceased's hometown from abroad, with a focus on revealing the entire process of repatriation, from the exhumation of bones abroad to the bones' arrival in Tung Wah Coffin Home and the eventual burial in the deceased's hometown.

Traditional Funeral and Burial Customs

1) Funeral and Burial Beliefs

Traditional burial practices, which include interment, water burial, sky burial and cremation, are forms of beliefs. They are ways to mourn the deceased, as well as socio-cultural phenomena. In traditional Chinese society, interment was the prevalent burial practice.

In the Shang dynasty, people began to believe that the human spirit was

immortal. They started to bury the deceased and perform ceremonies to soothe their spirits. Such was the beginning of interment. By the Spring and Autumn time, there were norms of funeral rites – the *Rites of Zhou* specifies rites for the funerals of emperors, kings, generals and government officials. The funeral system and rites recorded in the *Rites of Zhou*, the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremony* and the *Book of Rites* were adopted by later generations. In fact, the funeral rites practised by later generations, such as pre-burial rituals, mourning clothing, mourning observation and sacrificial offerings to the deceased, all originated from the three ritual books (Ethnography, County Records of Fujian, 2013).

In Taoism, birth, ageing, sickness and death make up the circle of life and death is an important part of life according to tradition. The utmost respect should thus be given to the deceased. In the *Analects*, Confucius teaches his disciples, "To serve our father and mother with courtesy whilst they live; to bury them and pay respect to them with courtesy when they die." According to the Chinese interment tradition, "death is very important and the deceased should be buried in the earth." It is only through burying the deceased in the earth that they can be laid to rest and the living can be at peace. Thus interment, which originated from deeply rooted traditional culture, became the most prevalent burial practice in China.

First of all, interment was intricately related to Chinese people's veneration of the earth. China's millennia-old farming culture became the essence of life, etching the earth on the deepest part of our soul. Meanwhile the myth of Nüwa creating mankind with clay reflects the circle of life–mankind originates from clay and returns to the earth after death. This also tallies with the law of reincarnation in the natural world. According to the *Book of Rites: Meaning of Sacrifices*, "All the living must die, and, return to the earth; this

is called *kwei* [ghost]. The bones and flesh, moulder below, and, hidden away, become the earth of the fields." In *Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs (Hanshi Waizhuan)*, Han Ying from the Eastern Han dynasty writes that, "When humans die, they are called ghosts; in Cantonese, the sound of the character "ghost" is similar to that of "return''. The spirit returns to the heaven, while the flesh returns to the earth".

Secondly, interment was linked to fengshui. In the classic work of fengshui, the *Book of Burial*, Guo Pu writes that, "The Chinese character of "bury" means to "preserve". Burial is contingent upon shengqi – vital energy. The "qi" of "yin" and "yang" breathes out as wind, rises up as clouds, descends as rain, and runs underground as vital energy." The theories in the *Book of Burial* had a profound influence on later generations. According to traditional fengshui belief, if the deceased's body is not buried in the earth, it cannot receive the vital energy there. In other words, humans must be buried in the earth in order to complete their reincarnation.

Interment was also linked with elaborate funerals and perpetual offerings. Ancient people believed the human spirit was immortal. Interment does not only protect the deceased's body, but also ensures that the deceased (body and spirit) will have a comfortable life in the underworld. In this light, burial rites, covering funeral arrangements, interment and tomb building, were established through common practice.

In addition, interment was linked with traditional filial piety. In Confucianism, taking part in funerals is considered a key indicator of filial piety. If the deceased is not buried in the earth and given an elaborate funeral, their descendants are thought to have neglected their filial duties. While emphasising the "Three Principles and Five Virtues", filial piety is upheld as the most important good deed in Confucianism. If the deceased is laid to rest

in a plot with auspicious forces, their spirit can find eternal peace, while their descendants will thrive and prosper; if the deceased is randomly buried without considering the fengshui of the burial plot, their descendants are thought to have ignored ceremonial rites and neglected their filial duties. The *Mind-enlightening Classics* (*Mingxin Baojian)*, a collection of aphorisms and quotations from the Chinese classics reads, "Respecting the dead as if he is alive and respecting the deceased as if he is around - this is filial piety at its finest." In the *Analects (Lunyu)*, Zengzi says, "Heed the dead, follow the past, and the soul of the people will again grow great." Only through interment can the deceased fuse with the earth and bring prosperity to their descendants (Chen & Chen, 2008; Wang et el, 2001).

Funeral rites require the living to observe mourning in order to express their grief over the deceased and carry out their filial duties, and the three-year mourning period became an important cornerstone for Chinese ethics and social order. Over two millennia, from the pre-Qin period to the Qing dynasty, the mourning system had been kept in place. Filial sons were required to build a hut next to their parent's tomb and stay there in order to show their grief. More than often, some government officials could not carry out their duties as they stayed home to conduct the mourning for three years in the hut next to their parent's tomb. In recent years, very rarely that mourning is observed in a hut by the tomb – in some places (such as the Chaoshan area in Guangdong province), people still build a small structure next to the tomb to symbolise the mourning hut and show their respect for the deceased (Ko, 2012).

For overseas Chinese and their families in China, "interment" carried even deeper meaning as it provided a final resting place for their returning spirit. The gate between the living world and the underworld is known as the "earth". It is a medium between the two worlds, as well as the resting place for the deceased's

spirit. If interment is delayed, it is not only a cruelty to the deceased but also a form of torture for the living. Thus, over the past century, overseas Chinese have upheld traditions and repatriated the bones of their deceased friends to their hometown for burial.

2) Second Burial

Existing archaeological research has yielded evidence of second burial, also known as “bone collecting”, in the Banpo heritage site in Xi’an, the Yangshao cultural site in Zhengzhou and Luoyang of the Central Plain, the early Dawenkou cultural site in the Shandong peninsula, the Chu kingdom (present-day Hubei province) as well as the Baiyue area (Xinhua Net, 10 November 2007, 9 May 2007; Ding, 2008; Wang, 2010; Guangdong Provincial Museum, 1978).

The research of renowned ethnology scholar Ling Chunsheng points out that second burial was not only practised by the Han people. Instead, it was a cultural feature of primitive tribes in the Pacific Rim. Second burial was practised in Han, Zhuang, Tibetan and other ethnic minority communities in the Central Plain and along the south eastern coast (including Taiwan) of China, Southeast and Northeast Asia, the South Pacific Islands, the Americas and as far as Madagascar in East Africa. He contends that the “bone washing / collecting” practice of the various ethnic groups all stemmed from the same custom, and this custom originated in South China, where the ancient Baiyue tribes were located (Ling, 1979).

The earliest written record can be found in *Mozi: Simplicity in Funerals II (Jiezang Xia), Volume 6,* from the Warring States period, “In the South of Chu Kingdom there was a cannibal tribe. Upon the death of the relatives the flesh was scraped off and thrown away, while the bones were buried. And by

following this custom one became a filial son.” Meanwhile, *Geography II, Volume 31 of the Book of Sui (Shuishu)* also documents second burial practised by the indigenous people of the Jingzhou area, “After death, the body of the deceased is placed in the courtyard and not kept indoors. After the funeral, it is buried in the mountain for no more than 13 years. An auspicious date is then picked to move the bones of the deceased into a small coffin. The process is known as ‘bone collecting’”. The late Ming and early Qing dynasty scholar Gu Yanwu wrote in Chapter 100, *Volume 4, On the natural advantages and vulnerabilities of provinces and prefectures of the Chinese empire (Tianxia Junguo Libing Shu)* that people in northern Guangdong province “buried the deceased in a temporary grave within three days after they died. After three years, the remains were collected and buried in a tomb.” It was the same in the Xingmei Hakka area during the Qing dynasty, “According to local customs, the deceased were re-buried after 10 years. Their bones were collected from the coffin and placed in a pottery/earthen jar to rebury.”

French anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl illustrates the history of second burial, the reason for its popularity as well as its primitive significance from the perspective of primitive mentality. He claims that primitive man saw the second death as a transition ceremony in life, while second burial was practised to completely sever the interaction and link between the deceased and the collective activities of society. Completion of the second burial ceremony symbolised total death; in other words, when the mourning period ended along with the ceremony, the deceased’s connection with the society he once belonged to was completely severed and they were considered completely dead (Levy-Bruhl, 1985).

Professor Zhong Fulan, a renowned ethnologist from Shanghai, discussed second burial from the perspective of customs, culture and belief. He claims

written in ink on the inside of the lid. Before the jar is sealed, the descendants pay their last respects to the bones - hence the deceased. An auspicious time is selected for the sealed jar to be buried in a plot with auspicious forces. During removal and burial, a black umbrella shields the earthen jar. This process is known in Guangdong province of the Pearl River Delta as “wang fengshui” (observing fengshui) (extracted from the interview of Tan, Zhuoyong, fengshui master at Kaiping, 2018.11.20).

Descendants pay their respects at the tomb every year on Ching Ming Festival after the “wang fengshui” process.

As to the terms “fen” (grave) and “mu” (tomb), in ancient times graves were dug into the ground, while tombs were built in caves. Some say that tumuli were raised over graves, whereas tombs had flat tops, thus the generic term, “fenmu”. (*Cihai* 1979: 529, 604) Yet in Guangdong province of the Pearl River Delta, a first burial grave casually covered with a mound of earth and without a headstone was traditionally known as grave; a tomb, with a headstone, was built in a permanent burial plot with auspicious forces for the second burial.

“Grave sweeping” on Ching Ming Festival is a display of respect and remembrance for the ancestors. The practice had a long history, but it became customary in the Qin dynasty and gained popularity in the Tang dynasty (Zhang, 2006). Throughout Guangdong province, different grave sweeping customs are practised. In the Wuyi area, people visit the simple graves without headstones (for first burial) – *fen* – on Ching Ming Festival, whereas in the month before Ching Ming, families visit the permanent *fengshui* tombs with headstones (for second burial) – mu – according to their own schedules.

that in some cases, Chinese who passed away abroad were buried in the foreign countries until their remains could be repatriated to their hometown for second burial at an opportune time, as in the saying, “fallen leaves returning to their roots”. In other cases, the deceased were buried after their death, but their descendants subsequently made fortune and arranged an elaborate second burial for them, in order to “bring glory to the family”. There were also instances when the remains of one person were exhumed to be buried together with the other half who passed away later, so that the married couple “shared a bed when they were living and a tomb after they died”. Sometimes, driven by fengshui or superstitious beliefs, ancestors were reburied in plots with auspicious forces to bring wealth and prosperity to their descendants (Zhong, 2012).

Even today, the practice of second burial remains common in the Lingnan area, and the customs are similar to the past. The deceased are buried in a coffin for three, five or seven years (or even more than 10 years). After the body has decomposed, the bones are exhumed (known as “jiangu” and “zhigu” [collecting bones], or “jianjin” and “zhijin” (collecting gold) in the Pearl River Delta) and reburied.

The bones are exhumed by the deceased’s relatives and elders in the village who are experienced in the matter. A canopy is erected over the grave to shelter it from the sun before the bones are exhumed from the coffin from head to toe. Next, the bones are cleaned with rice wine, rough straw paper and rags. Incense sticks are burnt and the bones are dried over heat. Then, the bones are vertically placed inside an earthen/pottery jar (known as “jintan”, “jincheng” or “jinta” [golden jar] in Guangdong) from toe to head according to the structure of the human skeletal system, such that the skeleton seems to be in a squatting position. The earthen / pottery jar only contains the bones – there are no burial objects – and the deceased’s name along with the dates of birth and death are

Bone Exhumation and Repatriation

1) The Chinese Migration

In the Tang and Song dynasties, people in the southern provinces left China for short periods of time to trade with merchants in other countries. It was not until after the First Opium War in the mid-19th century, when western colonizers began to open new frontiers in Southeast Asia as well as Central and South America that large numbers of Chinese laborers travelled overseas to make a living. According to the law of the Qing dynasty, it was illegal to leave the country to earn a livelihood. Yet the western colonizers who were setting up colonies in Southeast Asia and Central and South America required extensive laborers, and as slavery declined in the west, Chinese were caught up in the wave of emigration. The Treaty of Nanking, signed after the First Opium War, contained clauses permitting British companies to recruit workers in China, making it legal for Chinese workers to earn a living abroad. The clauses were also applicable to British colonies, such as Victoria (British Colombia, Canada), Australia and New Zealand. In 1868, the Qing government and the United States signed the Burlingame Treaty, giving citizens of the two countries the right to emigrate freely from one to the other. This led to more Chinese workers emigrating to the United States.

Chinese who earned a livelihood abroad in the early days called themselves “tangren” (meaning Chinese people from the Tang Dynasty) and where they lived “tangren jie” (Chinatown; literally Tang Chinese people street) due to their self-identity as well as identification with their homeland and culture. In addition, they called their home country “Tangshan” (literally Tang mountain, meaning China), returning to China “xuantang” (literally returning to Tang mountain, meaning returning to China) and the dialect they spoke “tanghua” (literally Tang language, meaning their home language). The early Chinese workers were mostly men without support of their families. In order to protect themselves and help one another, they lived close together and formed Chinatowns of different sizes. Matters big and small – from resisting the anti-Chinese campaigns and fighting for the rights of Chinese people to the simple necessities of everyday life – were all resolved in Chinatown. As such, the clan associations and native societies in Chinatowns became the “home” of overseas Chinese.

2) Southeast Asia

Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia largely originated from southern Fujian province, the Hakka area in Xingmei of northern Guangdong province, Chaozhou, Guangdong and Hainan among others, and they had a long history of living in the region. Chinese had traded in Nanyang (Southeast Asia) as early as the Tang and Song dynasties, whereas others emigrated to Southeast Asia in the 16th century when western colonizers opened new frontiers there, working in various industries including mining, natural rubber and commerce. By the 1920s, there were 1,553,137 Chinese persons in the British Straits Settlements and the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia (Chen, 2011). Most Chinese people in Southeast Asia were natives of southern Fujian province, Hakka people and people from Chaozhou and Shantou. They had a long history in Southeast Asia and exerted great influence on the culture of the region. Since they left China from the ports of Xiamen and Shantou, they were less influenced by western culture. More importantly, they were middleman minorities between

the indigenous population and the western colonizers. There were yet to be anti-Chinese laws in these colonies, so many Chinese started families, acquired properties and opened businesses there. It was common for them to have one family at home and one abroad. (Li, 2015)

3) Cuba and Peru

Chinese went to Central and South America to earn a living when western colonizers started to develop new frontiers there before the First Opium War. At that time, there was a severe laborer shortage in Cuba and Peru, and slavery trade was carried out in the dark. In 1839, Chinese began to set foot in Cuba; in 1846, the first group of 212 indentured Chinese workers from Xiamen arrived in Havana; in 1849 the first group of 75 indentured Chinese workers from Macau arrived in Peru. Following the end of slavery, Chinese workers made up most of the workforce at the sugar cane plantations and guano mines in Central and South America during the late 19th century. They were also employed by the coffee manufacturing, construction as well as mining industries, and as railroad builders. In the three decades that followed, more than 140,000 Chinese arrived in Cuba and 100,000 went to Peru. 95% of them originated from Guangdong province, while nearly all of them were men.

Having come out of slavery, Chinese workers in Cuba played an active role in the Cuban War of Independence in the thirty years after 1868. 2,000 to 3,000 Chinese volunteer soldiers took part in fighting whereas close to 5,000 people joined the work in the rear. The inscription on a commemorative stele that pays tribute to their unfaltering contribution towards the independence of the Cuba reads, "*(Spanish) No hubo un chino Cubano desertor, no hubo un chino cubano traidor* (There was not one Chinese Cuban that deserted, not one Chinese Cuban

that betrayed [the cause])". (Pang, 2013; Naravaez, 2010; Yang, 2000)

4) United States

It is generally believed that the first Chinese migrated to the United States in 1785, when US national John O'Donnell hired 32 sailors from India and 4 from China to transport the first Asian products to Baltimore, Maryland on the US merchant vessel *Pallas* (Chin, 2015). Emigration on a larger scale took place in the 1850s: in 1848, news about the discovery of gold in California spread to the Pearl River Delta, resulting in the first wave of emigration when large numbers of Chinese joined the gold rush; between 1863 and 1869, the United States needed a lot of workers to build the transcontinental railroad and some 12,000 to 15,000 Chinese laborers were hired to build the railroad in the second wave of emigration; after the Burlingame Treaty was signed in 1868, large numbers of Chinese flocked to the United States to work in a number of industries, including railroad construction, mining, cultivation, vegetable farming, fishing, laundry services, as well as restaurants. By the 1870s, there were approximately 150,000 Chinese in the United States (151,300 according to the statistics of the Chinese associations in Chinatowns across the country; 107,488 according to the US census). The Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1882 imposed many restrictions on Chinese workers – they were forbidden to marry US nationals and own properties, whereas anti-Chinese riots broke out in Chinatowns in different parts of the country. More than 20,000 Chinese workers returning on the way to the United States were refused entry, leading to a decline in the Chinese population. In 1906, immigration records were destroyed in a fire that broke out after the San Francisco earthquake. Many Chinese falsely claimed they were US nationals and were thus able to sponsor their children born in China to emigrate

to the United States. Some Chinese even sold their improperly obtained birth registration records to other people, so that they could emigrate to the United States as “paper sons”. The US government suspected fraudulence, and in 1910 Angel Island Immigration Station was set up to detain and interrogate immigrants entering the United States. As many as 175,000 Chinese were subject to humiliating interrogation there. By 1930, there were some 100,000 Chinese persons in the United States (102,159 according to the US census). There was a serious gender imbalance, to such an extent that Chinatown was once called a “bachelor society” (Liu, 1976; Chinn, 1969; US Census Data 1840-2010; Amanik & Fletcher, 2019).

5) Australia

According to records in the Melbourne-Chinese Museum, the history of Chinese emigrating to Australia can be dated to the 1810s. Ma Shiying, a carpenter from Guangzhou, arrived in Sydney in 1818 – he was the first Chinese person to arrive in Australia. After Ma, the first group of Chinese immigrants in Australia were 3,000 indentured workers (1848-1853) from Fujian and Guangdong, hired by the colonial government of New South Wales to work in sheep farming. The second group of Chinese immigrants were gold diggers (1851-1877) who flocked to Australia from Fujian and Guangdong following the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851, and most of them were from Siyi (Taishan, Kaiping, Xinhui and Enping), Zhongshan and Sanyi (Nanhai, Panyu and Shunde) in Guangdong province. In 1857, there were 24,062 Chinese mining gold in Melbourne; in 1890, there were some 49,000 Chinese in Australia, 90% of whom came from the four counties of Taishan, Kaiping, Xinhui and Enping. The majority of Chinese immigrants worked in the mining industry, plantations, the fishing

industry and carpentry. Anti-Chinese sentiments were particularly strong from the colonial period in the 1880s to the federation of the colonies in 1901. To limit Chinese immigration to Australia, the first Federal Parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act. The law formed the basis of the White Australia policy, requiring all immigrants to pass a 50-word dictation and listening test in any European language. The policy was successful, as no Chinese laborer could pass the language test and enter Australia. At that time, the Chinese population in the country was about 29,000, but the figure had since declined. (Gunstone, 2010: 2; Price, 1987:176)

6) Canada

In 1788, a group of Chinese carpenters from Macau landed in British Columbia with British naval captain John Meares. They were the first Chinese persons to set foot in Canada (Ma & Cartier, 2003). In 1858, one year after gold was discovered along the Thompson River in British Columbia, Chinese who were mining gold in California got wind of the discovery and crossed the border to look for gold in the Fraser Valley area. Half of the gold diggers in the Barkerville gold mines in Cariboo Valley were Chinese, while Chinatowns had been set up in the gold rush towns nearby, including Richfield, Stanley, Van Winkle, Quesnellemouthe (present-day Quesnel), Antler and Quesnelle Forks. These were the first Chinese immigrants in Canada (Skelton, 1980).

Between 1881 and 1885, approximately 15,000 to 17,000 Chinese laborers were hired for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, sparking the second wave of Chinese emigration. Like their counterparts who worked on the Central Pacific Railroad in the United States, the Chinese laborers were made to build the most treacherous section of the Canadian Pacific Railway. During

the construction of the section through the Canadian Rocky Mountains, some 4,000 Chinese lost their lives. After the gold rush and railway construction, Chinese mostly worked in plantations, the fishing industry, laundry services as well as restaurants. Construction of the railway was completed in 1885. In the same year, the Canadian government began to limit Chinese immigration. A poll tax of 50 Canadian dollars was imposed upon Chinese persons wanting to enter the country. In 1900, the tax was increased to 100 Canadian dollars; in 1903, it was further increased to 500 Canadian dollars. In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act was enacted, banning Chinese immigrants (with the exception of students, diplomats and persons being granted special permission). (Chow, 2014; Li, 2013) Chinese people were also discriminated against in the labour market. When granting financial subsidy and land to the British Columbia Sugar Refining Company in 1890, the municipal government of Vancouver stipulated that "…offer the grant and land by way of bonus, in aid of the establishment of the said sugar refining business, is enacted by the Major and Council thereof on the condition that the said Company shall not at any time employ Chinese laborers in and about the said works." (Aug.4.1890) (Yu, 2018: 43)

All in all, most Chinese laborers in modern times left their home on their own to earn a living abroad. Away from their families, they did strenuous work in an unfamiliar environment. There were cultural differences, language barriers and strong anti-Chinese sentiments. They missed their homeland deeply and longed to return to their awaiting families, if not during their lifetime then at least after death. Therefore, Chinese who died overseas all wished that their bones could be repatriated to their hometown for burial, so that their spirits could have eternal peace. Meanwhile, those living tried their utmost to fulfil these last wishes: according to second burial customs, Chinese laborers who died abroad in the early days were given simple burials by fellow clansmen and

after a certain period of time their bones were exhumed and repatriated to their hometown for permanent burial. In this way, they would not become desolate spirits with no one paying respects to them.

From the beginning of bone repatriation to the ban on the tradition following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, uncountable sets of bones had been sent back to China. In those days, bone repatriation was practised wherever there was a Chinese population. In 1913, over 10,000 boxes had reportedly been repatriated from the United States (Sinn, 2013).

Mr Yang Jingchu, who lived in Victoria, Canada in his senior years, wrote a poem about the Chinese railway workers who died abroad, expressing his concern for the lonely spirits who did not have the chance to return home:

The Chinese workers came from afar
To build the railway from coast to coast.
Unwanted they became when the work was complete –
Marginalised they were, and discriminated against.
They were tormented by cold and hunger till they died.
How could their desolate spirits return home?
Who would sweep their graves on Ching Ming and Chung Yeung?
With no family, on foreign land – they were doubly sad.

(Yang, 1997:60)

7) Background for Exhumation

In western cultures, "cemetery" and "graveyard" refer to the places where deceased persons and their belongings, bones or ashes are buried. The deceased

are usually buried in plots designated by the management office. In Chinese society before 1949, traditional customs and rituals were an important part of people's lives. The practice of second burial was widely popular: all burial grounds were meticulously selected by *fengshui* masters, whereas the tomb itself was located at the *fengshui* point with the strongest auspicious forces – the location of the tomb had to be precise, since a slight deviation could mean departure from the umbrella point. The largest burial grounds were family graveyards, where members of the same extended family were buried. The concept of modern cemeteries, which provide a final resting place to a large number of deceased persons, was yet to take shape.

8) Native Societies and Charitable/Benevolent Associations

Chinese laborers first travelled to Southeast Asia on a large scale, and then to other regions, to earn a living. Most of the workers were bachelors without family support who quickly established social networks in overseas Chinese communities using the traditional rites and clan systems of Chinese rural societies – organizations were formed based on the native or industry associations that were popular in the Ming and Qing dynasties. There were native societies called "huiguan", clan associations known as "gongsuo" and industry associations with a special purpose known as "tang". In the native societies and larger clan associations, charitable or benevolent associations were set up to oversee the bone repatriation process and offer support to the deceased's families. The well managed and intricately connected organizations maintained order in the Chinatowns. Cao Yazhi, also known as Cao Yazhu, was a native of Taishan, Guangdong province. He worked as a carpenter in Macau before travelling to the Malay Peninsula to earn a living. In 1819, he established

a clan association, known as "*gongsuo*", in Singapore. It was the first clan association established by overseas Chinese based on blood connections. In 1822, Cao founded the Ning Yeung Wui Kuan in Singapore, the first native society founded by overseas Chinese based on geographical connections. The purpose of the Cao's clan association and native society are clearly recorded, "Members of the Cao clan left their footprints all over the world, in America and even British Victoria. All graves were checked, whereas bones were exhumed from every grave upon receiving report to the association. No deceased friend from our native county was missed out. If the body had not yet fully decomposed, the remains were first placed in a lead can and then sealed in a wooden box. Sometimes, the deceased was drowned and his body was consumed by fish, or the deceased was murdered and buried in a secluded place, and his body was later stolen by foreigners, or the marker of the grave went missing and the identity of the deceased could not be traced. In such cases, the name of the deceased, if known, was written on a small silver plaque, attached to a 'spirit summoning' box, and repatriated [to China]." (Yu, 1987: 8)

The story of "graves were stolen by foreigners" was sometimes reported in American newspapers. The *Seattle Star* once warned that the wigs might be made from long braids stolen from Chinese graves (*The Seattle Star*, July 27, 1908). Therefore, Chinese people's concern about the safety of cemeteries gradually became one of the key reasons to the establishment of *shangtang* (charitable association) in clan and native associations to collect bones and return them to their places of original for burial.

People from Guangdong began to leave their hometown in large numbers to earn a living in North America and Oceania in the 1840s to 1850s. In the few years that followed, Chinatown in San Francisco, with its network of native societies, clan associations and industry associations, was established. The

9) Overseas Cemeteries

The funeral as well as the subsequent bone exhumation and repatriation of deceased Chinese were undertaken by the native societies and charitable associations. Chinese attached great importance to the fortune of their "next life", where they were buried after they died and whether their bones and spirit could return to their hometown. Their greatest wish was: every year on Ching Ming Festival their descendants would visit their graves, so that they would not become desolate spirits. The cemetery was where deceased people were buried. Even for transient first burials, it was an important temporary resting place. If possible, overseas cemeteries were built by the sea or where there was a view of the sea, while the altar and incense burner faced the direction of the sea – home on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

At some early overseas Chinese cemeteries, spirits and the Earth God were revered, whereas altars and incense burners were set up in the cemeteries purchased by native societies and charitable associations. Every year on Ching Ming and Chung Yeung, their representatives would visit the cemeteries and pay respect to the deceased.

During the time when anti-Chinese sentiments were strong, finding a piece of land to build a cemetery was not easy. Chinese were blatantly discriminated against, and there were restrictions due to local laws. White people did not believe that spirits in another world had strong connections with the living. Their cemeteries were usually separated from the graveyards of Chinese in the name of religion, whereas some religious groups refused to allocate burial space to the "heathen Chinese". Even though some Chinese managed to purchase land in a local cemetery, the burial space was often downgraded – the usual practice was to separate the graves of white people and those of Chinese. Most Chinatowns that emerged later in other places were managed in similar manners.

The native societies took funeral and burial matters seriously. Most of them established charitable/benevolent associations to help old and poor Chinese return to their hometown, manage funerals and burials, offer support to the deceased's families, repatriate the bones of deceased Chinese to their hometown for burial as well as manage graveyards. In a letter to Zheng Zaoru, the Chinese Minister to the Unites States, Huang Zunxian, the Chinese Consul-General in San Francisco between 1882 and 1886, wrote that:

> ***Every time a ship arrives, the district associations look after the newcomers, taking their belongings and helping them rent accommodation. In the case of incidents, the directors sort out matters for the members. When someone without a family dies of illness, the association exhumes their bones and repatriate them to the deceased's hometown for burial. (In some cases, this matter is not handled by the district association but by the charity tang established by the counties.)***
>
> (Huang, 2003: 520)

The charitable associations set out to help fellow clansmen abroad return to their roots. They served two functions: firstly, exhume and repatriate the bones of deceased Chinese; secondly, provide assistance to impoverished members in the best way they could. After verifying membership records, the associations offered subsidies to the members to pay for the ship tickets so that they could spend their last years in their hometown.

graveyards of white people did not allow Chinese persons to be buried there, with the exception of loyal Chinese servants, who might be buried with the white families they served in the families' private burial grounds. Meanwhile, since most Chinese could not afford to have their remains embalmed and repatriated to their hometown in a coffin after they died, they could only have their remains buried temporarily in a segregated cemetery or overseas Chinese cemetery. After a few years, their remains would be exhumed and repatriated to China for permanent burial.

The Chinese cemeteries near the cities with a significant Chinese population often ran out of space. For example, at the entrance of Hoy Sun Ning Yung Cemetery and the Chinese Cemetery in San Francisco, a piece of land was designated as temporary burial ground. The bones were exhumed once every three to five years to make room for other deceased Chinese. After exhumation, the bones were put in boxes and then placed in a small shed used for storing bones in the cemetery until they were repatriated to China.

Even though burial in the deceased's hometown in China was the common practice in those days, some Americanised Chinese people who had families and descendants in the United States chose to be buried there. This was because they regarded the United States as their home – their descendants, relatives and families all lived in the US. In 1896, *The San Francisco Call* ran an unusual story, entitled "His Bones to Lie in This Land", about a Chinese named Yee Ah-tai who would like to be laid to rest in the United States. (*The San Francisco Call*, 14 June 1896)

In some small towns where anti-Chinese sentiments were less strong, Chinese and other ethnic minorities could be buried in public cemeteries, the final resting place of deceased local residents. Bakersfield was one of these towns in the 1870s (Amanik & Fletcher, 2019: 28).

Exhumation and repatriation were costly and laborious. The bones were usually transported to San Francisco of the United States and Victoria, British Columbia of Canada, and then repatriated to China. Based on the funeral and burial management framework of the San Francisco Chinatown, the author has briefly figured out the relationship between the native societies and charitable associations:

Ning Yung Benevolent Association had a large membership and ample financial resources, and could afford to purchase land and build Hoy Sun Ning Yung Cemetery for people from Taishan. Meanwhile, Chinese of the other six large native societies jointly purchased a plot of land and established the Chinese Cemetery, where deceased members of the six native societies were buried. These cemeteries were run by dedicated personnel, whereas the charitable associations were responsible for matters related to bone exhumation and repatriation. These arrangements did not apply to those Chinese not belonging to any native society or clan association, or those who lived in rural towns with no native society or clan association for them to join. (They would usually join their local Chinese Freemasons, Hip Sing Tong Association, Hop Sing Tong Association, Chee Kung Tong Association, Suey Sing Tong Association and On Leong Tong Association, which also offered bone exhumation and repatriation service for their members.) The link between the native societies, charitable associations and the cemeteries are illustrated in the table below:

Major Native Societies and Charitable Associations in San Francisco (1849-1949)

Year of Establishment	Name of Native Society	Corresponding Counties in China	Name of Charitable/ Benevolent Association (Tong)	Name of Cemetery
1849	Sze Yup Benevolent Association	Taishan (Hoy Sun), Xinhui (Sun Wei), Kaiping (Hoi Ping), Enping (Yan Ping) (Renamed Kong Chow Benevolent Association led by Xinhui and Heshan in 1854)		
1850	Sam Yup Benevolent Association	Nanhai (Nam Hoy), Panyu (Poon Yu), Shunde (Shun Duck)	Nam Hoy Fook Yum Benevolent Society Hung On Tong Pon Yup Chong How Benevolent Association	Chinese Cemetery
1850	Yan Wo Benevolent Association	Hakka communities from Bao'an, Huiyang, Meixian and Chixi	No designated charitable associations to undertake funerals or burials matters	Chinese Cemetery
1852	Yeong Wo Benevolent Association	Xiangshan (Zhongshan), Dongguan, Zengcheng, Boluo	Tung Sen Association, Jack Sen Benevolent Association, Hee Sen Association Tun Shen Association, Jup Shin Tong, Gway Sen Association, Duck Sen Association, Leong Sen Association, Lock Sen Association, Bok Sen Association, Yee On Association Tung Goon Bo On Association, Yan On Tong	Chinese Cemetery
1854	Ning Yung Benevolent Association	Taishan (Hoy Sun)	Yee Hing Tong	Hoy Sun Ning Yung Cemetery
1854	Kong Chow Benevolent Association	Xinhui (Sun Wei), Heshan (Hok Shan)	Sun Wei Fook Hing Tong, Tung Duck Tong, Hok Shan Duck How Tong	Chinese Cemetery
1862	Hop Wo Benevolent Association	Yu (Yee) clan from Taishan; Deng, Xie, Hu, Zhu, Pan, Li and , Ou clans from Kaiping; Zheng clan from Enping	Quong Fook Tong Benevolent Association	Chinese Cemetery
1876	Sue Hing Benevolent Association	Kaiping (Hoi Ping), Enping (Yan Ping)	Quong Fook Tong Benevolent Association	Chinese Cemetery

10) Exhumation and Repatriation

In 1848, gold was discovered in California of the United States, and many Chinese were drawn to North America by the gold rush. As early as 1853, the Sze Yup Benevolent Association began to exhume the bones of deceased friends and repatriate them to their hometown for burial (Liu, 1976:165). On 22 July 1855, *The China Mail* of Hong Kong reported briefly on a special cargo shipment from San Francisco, USA – 94 boxes containing the bones of Chinese (Ko, 2006: 102; Yip, 2009: 23). Meanwhile, the 6 January 1858 issue of *Daily Alta California* contained one of the earliest newspaper reports about bone repatriation for Chinese in California that Chinese dug holes in the

ground, exhumed the bones and sent them back to China. The Pon Yup Chong How Benevolent Association under Sam Yup Benevolent Association of San Francisco began to gather manpower and raise funds for bone repatriation in the 8th year of Qing Emperor Xianfeng's reign (1858). The bones were exhumed and repatriated once every seven to ten years, and the entire process – including fund-raising and difficulties encountered during exhumation–was documented in detail in all the accounting journals of Chong How Benevolent Association in San Francisco preserved till today. Their clansmen founded Kai Sin Tong in Hong Kong to undertake repatriation of the bones from Hong Kong to Panyu for burial (Archives of Sam Yup Benevolent Association, Hanford, California).

1. Fund Raising

The charitable associations were largely funded by donations from fellow clansmen and income generated by properties they owned. In terms of expenses, money was spent on exhuming the bones, sending the bones to Hong Kong in boxes and burial fees paid to the deceased's families. At that time, it cost approximately 5 US dollars to transport a box of bones to Hong Kong. There was a sanitary charge of 10 US dollars, and burial fees of 5-10 US dollars were offered to the family of each deceased friend (Hom, 2001: V3-2). By the 1860s to 1870s, the cost of sending one set of bones to Hong Kong by sea had risen to 20 US dollars (Sinn, 2013: 268). The operations of the native societies and charitable associations were supported by membership fees collected from the members or money donated especially for bone repatriation. Every donor received a receipt called "exit permit" that functioned as a "boarding pass" for Chinese travelling to China by sea (there are other forms of donations that can also serve as an "exit permit"). Meanwhile, to ensure adequate funds to cover

the costs of bone repatriation and to provide ship ticket subsidies for old and impoverished clansmen, the native societies somewhat forced members to pay membership fees or donate money for bone exhumation. There were inspection points being set up on the vessels. Chinese must present an exit permit in order to board the vessel; for those who failed to present an exit permit, the association would not be responsible for exhuming and repatriating their bones if they happened to pass away in the United States.

The costs of exhumation and repatriation were very high. According to the accounting journal of Chong How Benevolent Association in 1863, the total costs for the association's first repatriation was 20,500 dollars. 258 sets of remains and 59 "spirit summoning" boxes were repatriated. Burial fees of 7 US dollars were offered for each set of remains, whereas four persons were appointed to escort the remains to Hong Kong. In 1876, the total costs of the second repatriation had risen to more than 40,000 dollars. 858 sets of remains and 24 "spirit summoning" boxes were repatriated. Burial fees of 10 US dollars were offered for each set of remains (*Accounting Journal of Chong How Benevolent Association of San Francisco 1863 & 1876*). Considering the high operational costs, the repatriation of bones would not be possible if not for well-established organizations as well as shared cultural views and values.

Responsible and trustworthy clansmen were appointed to oversee the exhumation and repatriation process. These dedicated persons would travel from city to city to collect donations and issue receipts to the donors. The association relied heavily on donations, which might vary from time to time, to support bone exhumation work. A donation record was kept and receipts were issued to the donor. Those who did not make a donation would not have their bones exhumed and repatriated after their passing. This measure helped guarantee adequate funding for bone exhumation and repatriation – the living donated money not

First the skull was removed, followed by the backbone, ribs, arm and leg bones. A dozen of Chinese people gathered around the grave, counting the bones meticulously. They were happy to see that no bone was missing – not even a tooth could be left out. Every tooth had to be secured to the jaws. Then, the bones in the legs and foot were set aside. During the exhumation process, a Chinese couple were busy cleaning the bones and placing them in the appropriate place. The bones were laid out under the sun. After the arms bones, leg bones and other bones became dry, they were placed in different bags, tied and labelled. The whole skeleton was placed in a small rectangular box about 1.2 metres long.

As a matter of fact, not all deceased persons were buried in graves and not all headstones were well preserved with clear information about the deceased. If the bones could be identified, they would be placed in a box marked with the deceased's name and address; if, for whatever reason, the bones could not be located, the deceased's spirit would be summoned into a box and repatriated.

In order to manage the exhumation and repatriation well and also prevent corruption, there were strict requirements that the exhumation foreman had to meet. Due to stringent financial management, the native society would not hire a person from their own county as exhumation foreman. The 8th clause of the rules and regulations of Chong How Benevolent Association in the 4th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign stipulated that, "Persons from our county would not be hired as exhumation foreman. If it is proved that a foreman from another county secretly hired men from our own county, both parties would be fined 1,000 dollars. No exemption would be made with regard to this rule" (Rules and regulations for bone repatriation in 1878).

only to help others, but also to ensure that their own remains would be exhumed and repatriated after their death.

Apart from collecting donations from fellow clansmen during bone exhumation, the general committee members of the associations also considered investing in real estate so as to generate income. Many benevolent associations acquired properties in Chinatowns, Hong Kong or the villages in mainland China, and the interest collected would be used to cover bone exhumation expenses.

2. Process of Exhumation

The persons designated by a charitable association to oversee the exhumation process would hire workers to exhume the bones, and they travelled from city to city, trying their utmost to look for bones while cases were reported to the association. Before bone exhumation and repatriation were officially carried out in Canada, these people even travelled from the United States to Victoria of British Columbia – which was yet to be incorporated into Canada at the time – searching for the graves of deceased Chinese. Since bone exhumation was a serious matter, the native societies would spell out the requirements of exhumation before hiring workers. The workers should exhume the bones, in order, from head to toe, and the article also described the feature of each piece of bone.

On 23 May 1867, *The Illustrated Adelaide Post* of Melbourne published an account by a white person named Kandell describing how he and four Chinese friends exhumed bones in White Hills Cemetery in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia (Ross, 2009: 265-266)

3. Transporting to Hong Kong

In North America, the native societies in the Chinatown of San Francisco, USA, and Victoria, Canada, collected the bones of the deceased and repatriated them to Hong Kong. Repatriation was carried out once every 7 to 10 years. While native societies and charitable associations with a large membership (such as Yee Hing Tong of Ning Yung Benevolent Association) could organize their own repatriation, smaller native societies could only pay the charitable associations of neighbouring counties to help them. For instance, Yan Wo Benevolent Association, a Hakka organization in San Francisco, did not have their own charitable association to take care of bones. As to places with a small Chinese population, several charitable associations would carry out joint exhumation and repatriation. A great deal of care and attention was paid to loading the boxes containing the bones of deceased persons onto the ships. The deceased's names and the boxes carrying their bones were meticulously recorded. On 20 August 1864, Mark Twain published an article in the *San Francisco Daily Morning Call* about the bone repatriation he had witnessed in Ning Yung Benevolent Association:

> ***On the Pacific coast the Chinamen all belong to one or another of several great companies or organizations, and these companies keep track of their members, register their names, and ship their bodies home when they die. The See Yup Company (Sze Yup Benevolent Association) is held to be the largest of these. The Ning Yeong Company (Ning Yung Benevolent Association) is next, and numbers eighteen thousand members on the coast. Its headquarters are at San Francisco, where it has a costly temple, several great officers..., and a numerous priesthood. In it I was shown a register of its members, with the dead and the date of their shipment to China duly marked.***

The section of the Central Pacific Railroad built by Chinese between 1865 and 1869 was located between Sacramento, California, and Salt Lake City, Nevada. It was the most treacherous section in the construction of the US transcontinental railroad: many workers were killed or injured. There were newspaper reports about repatriation of the bones of Chinese laborers who died while building the railroad:

> ***On January 5, 1870 the Elko Independent reported six carloads of deceased Chinese destined for San Francisco and then probably to China. According to the Silver State (Winnemucca, Nevada) in March 1870, two designated Chinese funeral cars were on a siding near the present-day Bridge Street grade crossing preparing the deceased for their final trip home. The bones were boxed, labelled with the name of the individual, and listed the date of death and association (tang) name, which were then shipped to Hong Kong via San Francisco. On June 30, 1870 the Sacramento Reporter (Sacramento, California) stated that 20,000 pounds of bones (an estimated 1,200 deceased Chinese or 1 in 10 Chinese workers) were enroute to China.***
>
> (Amanik & Fletcher, 2019:8-9)

Generally speaking, the charitable associations would appoint representatives to escort the bones to Hong Kong and liaise with persons-in-charge in Hong Kong with regard to the final leg of the journey from Hong Kong to the deceased's hometown. The delivery charges were paid by the charitable associations. Meanwhile, depending on the amount of donations collected in that year, the charitable associations would offer burial fees of 5-10 dollars for each set of remains. The representatives of the charitable associations would also oversee the burial of the remains in the deceased's hometown. Pray masters were hired to perform rituals to pacify the deceased's spirits. Afterwards, the bones

Transit in Hong Kong

1) Hong Kong's Role

After the First Opium War, Hong Kong became a British colony in 1841. In the same year, it was declared a free trading port – the British Hong Kong government made use of Hong Kong's advantage in shipping to build a trading port which supported free trade, convenient investment, an open financial system and free flow of people.

In 1848, news of the discovery of gold in the United States spread to the Pearl River Delta via Hong Kong, and farmers who were out of work began to flock to the United States. In the same year, Hong Kong's Harbour Master Office opened the sea route between Hong Kong and the Americas; in the following year, 23 vessels sailed from Hong Kong to San Francisco; according to a government report in 1852, as many as 30,000 Chinese travelled to San Francisco via Hong Kong in that year, while the total population Hong Kong was only 39,000 (Ko, 2006: 102). At the same time, many Chinese travelled to the islands in Southeast Asia by way of Hong Kong, and also to Australia after gold was discovered in Melbourne in 1851. By 1860, the number of vessels sailing in and out of Hong Kong had soared to 2,888 (Ting, 2010: 18). In 1877, civilian boats that sailed from Hong Kong to destinations in Guangdong province – mostly in the Pearl River Delta – totalled 111 (Ko, 2006: 113). Due to its proximity to Guangdong province along with its well-developed shipping industry, Hong Kong gradually became a transit point for Chinese from the Pearl River Delta, especially the Wuyi area, travelling abroad to earn a living or returning home from overseas. Meanwhile, a transportation network connecting

were placed in the local coffin home, charitable association or shelter/clinic, so that the deceased's families could collect the bones and bury them in their hometown. Any unclaimed bones would be buried in the communal graveyards built by the overseas charitable associations, whereas sacrifices would be offered to the deceased every year (Rules and regulations for bone exhumation and repatriation of Chong How Benevolent Association, 1878).

If the burial of Chinese people was viewed from a commercial perspective apart from their funeral beliefs, the shipment of Chinese bones to Hong Kong was also a good business. Health authorities and shipping companies in the United States took this lucrative opportunity on their own terms. In 1900, The *San Francisco Call* in San Francisco reported that shipping "fish bones" to China had become an important local industry. The local health bureau imposed a tax of 10 dollars per set of bones on the Chinese who transported the bones to Hong Kong. But the Chinese, in order to evade taxes, colluded with the shipping manager to falsely claim that the bones shipped to Hong Kong were "fish bones" (*The San Francisco Call*, April. 20, 1900) In 1911, The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* in Honolulu published an advertisement "Makes A Low Rate For Chinese Corpses", reporting that "corpse of white person, $230; corpse of Chinese, dead less than one year, $55; corpse of Chinese, dead over one year, $35." (The Pacific Commercial Advertiser, May 27, 1911)

2) Founding of Tung Wah Hospital

When Hong Kong first opened its port to foreign trade, it only had a population of 5,000. As the city developed, there was a labour shortage and people from various counties in Guangdong province came to Hong Kong to earn a living. Meanwhile, during the Taiping Rebellion and the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars, which lasted more than 10 years from 1854 to 1867 and affected the entire Wuyi area as well as Foshan and Gaoming nearby, life was extremely difficult for the people. Many of them came to Hong Kong to escape the turmoil. By 1860, the population of Hong Kong had surged to 92,442 (Ting, 2010: 18). Meanwhile, after the Second Opium War broke out in 1856, the people of Guangzhou burned down the Thirteen Factories, where most foreign trading companies were based, prompting the foreign trading companies to move their headquarters from Guangzhou to Hong Kong. Subsequently, compradors of the foreign trading companies moved to Hong Kong while more and more people from the Pearl River Delta came to the city looking for work. Hong Kong's Chinese population continued to grow. Nevertheless, mainstream society cared little about the livelihood, healthcare and burial arrangements of Chinese people. Hong Kong's Chinese elite thus got together to work for the welfare of Chinese. In 1851, 14 Hong Kong industry representatives and merchants, led by Kaiping native Tam Ah choy, applied to the Hong Kong government for land allocation while they raised funds to build Kwong Fook I-Tsz, a communal ancestral hall for the spirit tablets of Chinese who passed away in Hong Kong and had no family. The ancestral hall was thus also called "Temple of One Hundred Family Names" (Ting, 2010: 17-25).

According to the research by Ko Tim-keung, an expert on local Hong Kong history, there is no trace of upper-class Chinese persons buried in Hong Kong and the inland water channels in the Pearl River Delta, as well as a commercial network for gold mountain trade with mainland China and North America was established. (Sinn, 2013:297-304).

During this time, Tung Wah Hospital emerged as a charitable organization entrusted by overseas Chinese to handle the bones repatriated from abroad. In addition to Hong Kong's well-developed shipping industry and its proximity to the Pearl River Delta, the interpersonal network of the Directors of Tung Wah Hospital was also an important factor. Of the 13 founding Directors of Tung Wah Hospital, 12 were prominent compradors in foreign trading companies or merchants specialising in trade with North and South China, South-east Asia and North America (Ko, 2006:103). These individuals were often directors of native societies who maintained close relationship with the native societies in different countries, or they had already established a stable, trusting relationship with overseas parties through their commercial network. Meanwhile, taking advantage of Hong Kong's free trade policy, the connections with North America and Southeast Asia, the proximity to Guangdong as well as the city's open financial system, many overseas native societies set up liaison offices in Hong Kong to – for the most part – collect overseas donations for the development of their hometown. Hong Kong had a prosperous financial industry. The city's many banks could easily handle funds remitted from overseas counterparts, whereas native banks in Hong Kong could send the funds to the families of overseas Chinese compatriot affiliated shops in their hometown. Against this backdrop, Hong Kong developed into a transit point for the remittance from overseas Chinese. Interpersonal network played a crucial role here.

A large global charitable network centred on Hong Kong had since been established.

3) Tung Wah Coffin Home

The origin of coffin homes can be traced to *History of Song: Biography of Fan Zhongyan*. According to the historical text, Fan Zhongyan "...was very kind-hearted and generous who established the Fan charitable estate to provide various relief services for the underprivileged members of the clan". In the Qing dynasty, Feng Guifen wrote in *Discussion on the Patriarchal Clan System* that, "the charitable estate founded by Fan Wenzheng [Fan Zhongyan] of the Song dynasty has set an example for future generations." Comprising schools, farmland and an ancestral hall, the charitable estate of Fan established a sound management system to help needy members of the clan in the areas of child and elderly care, weddings and funerals, poverty and disaster relief, and education (Tang, 1997: 190-199). The charitable estate of the Fan clan exerted a profound influence in the Qing dynasty, especially in the region south of the Yangtze River. Wealthy clans followed suit and established their own charitable estates to help poor members of the clan; in the Qing dynasty, there were as many as 179 charitable estates in Suzhou (Wang, 1998: 84-97). Meanwhile, some smaller scale estates served as communal ancestral halls for the spirit tablets of deceased persons with no family, or coffin homes providing temporary refuge for coffins. Kwong Fook I-Tsz, built with funds raised by Chinese in Hong Kong, was an exemplification of this concept.

While Tung Wah Hospital was under construction, the graves of Chinese persons discovered on the site (originally a graveyard for Chinese people) were moved to Slaughter House Cemetery. This marked the start of the funeral services of Tung Wah Hospital. After the hospital opened, many poor people died there, and offering free coffins and burials became an important service of Tung Wah in addition to free medical services. Meanwhile, historical records

Kong before 1870, presumably because their remains were repatriated to their hometown for burial. Before the Chinese Permanent Cemetery at Aberdeen was established in 1915, there was no cemetery for non-Christian upper-class Chinese in Hong Kong. Those who could afford the costs of transporting their coffins to their hometown for burial would, therefore, not choose to be laid to rest in Hong Kong after death (Ko, 2006: 99).

Along with the rise of the foreign trading companies and the increase in the number of Chinese compradors, Hong Kong's Chinese merchants began to gain influence and dealt with the government on matters regarding the Chinese community. Hong Kong's Chinese elite first sought the government's approval for a Chinese hospital to be built in 1866, but their request was turned down. Subsequently in 1869, the *Hong Kong Daily Press* published a report about the poor management of Kwong Fook I-Tsz. Many critically ill patients were left to die in this communal ancestral hall, which also housed the remains of deceased persons. Naturally, hygiene conditions were very appalling. In 1869, then Hong Kong governor Richard Graves MacDonnell gave in to public pressure and granted land for the building of Tung Wah Hospital – a Chinese medicine hospital and charitable organization for the Chinese community. On 30 March 1870, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong passed "The Chinese Hospital Incorporation Ordinance, 1870" and Tung Wah Hospital was established (Ho, 2009:18; Ting, 2010: 17-25).

On 14 February 1872, Tung Wah Hospital was inaugurated. According to *The China Mail*, an elaborate sacrificial ceremony for Shennong, the God of Medicine in Chinese legend, was held in the morning. It is believed that Shennong tested medicinal herbs on his own body and compiled theories on Chinese medicine. He was thus hailed as the creator of Chinese medicine. The spirit tablet of Shennong was revered in Tung Wah Hospital.

reveal that Man Mo Temple built a coffin home adjacent to Slaughter House Cemetery, which was located on a slope in Kennedy Town; in 1875, management of the coffin home was subsequently handed over to Tung Wah. The section "Room Regulations" in the *Zhengxinlu of Tung Wah Hospital in 1873* – the earliest accounting journal of Tung Wah in existence today – was changed to "Coffin Home Regulations" in the following year, suggesting that Tung Wah Hospital already operated a coffin home in its early years (Ting, 2010: 25).

There is no evidence to determine when Tung Wah Hospital began to take bones repatriated from overseas into its care. Yet a short article in the 8 April 1874 issue of Hong Kong's *Tsun Wan Yat Po* recorded that "a steamship operated by American Shipping Company transported some 30 coffins from Kobe, Japan, to Hong Kong, which belonged to Guangdong natives who died in Japan. Upon arrival in Hong Kong, the coffins were temporarily placed in Tung Wah Hospital, and would be repatriated to the deceased's hometown in due course. Subsidies for transportation were offered, 15 dollars for destinations close to Hong Kong and 20 dollars for destinations farther away. This was indeed a great act of benevolence" (Ko, 2006: 103). According to this news, Tung Wah Hospital was already taking coffins repatriated from abroad into its care temporarily at that time.

In the 8th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign (1883), the *"Guidelines for the Communal Graveyard Fundraising Campaign"* of Quong Fook Tong Benevolent Association in San Francisco mentioned that "Quong Fook Tong collected donations from shops run by fellow clansmen in order to exhume the bones of deceased friends and repatriate them to Hong Kong, where they would be placed temporarily in the coffin home of Tung Wah Hospital. The families of the deceased were asked to collect the remains, while burial fees were offered to them" (From the Accounting Journal of Quong Fook Tong Benevolent Association, San Francisco, 1902). This confirms that in the 1880s, overseas

benevolent associations were already placing bones repatriated from abroad in the care of Tung Wah Hospital. As more and more bones were sent to Hong Kong, space ran out in the small coffin home managed by Tung Wah Hospital. In 1899, Tung Wah Hospital obtained approval from the government to build a new coffin home. Located in Sandy Bay on the western part of Hong Kong Island, Tung Wah Coffin Home greatly expanded Tung Wah's charity network where services were offered to Chinese all over the world from Hong Kong. The network extended to the Americas, Asia, Oceania, Europe and Africa, covering the United States and Canada in the north; Cuba, Peru and Chile in the south; Britain, France, Norway and the Netherlands in the west; Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore in Southeast Asia; Australia and New Zealand; and even the Zanzibar Archipelago in Africa. In China, the network reached 43 destinations in Guangdong province, in addition to provinces like Shandong, Zhejiang, Fujian and Yunnan as well as the cities of Shanghai, Tianjin and more through inland water channels (Yip, 2009: 175, 185-187).

Returning to the Roots

The last stop of the repatriation process was the deceased's hometown. Finally, the deceased returned to their roots and could have eternal peace. Generally speaking, funeral and burial arrangements in the deceased's hometown were undertaken by the charitable organizations in Hong Kong in cooperation with their counterparts in the deceased's hometown.

1) Charitable Associations and Charitable Hospitals in the Deceased's Hometown

In the hometown of overseas Chinese, the bones repatriated from abroad were usually handled by charitable hospitals, coffin homes and communal ancestral halls or benevolent associations. Their main connecting charitable organization in Hong Kong was Tung Wah Hospital.

In Panyu, Huaxian and Conghua counties, the charitable association, Cheong Shing Tong, founded in 1882 by Choie Sew Hoy, a Chinese compatriot in New Zealand, took delivery of all bones repatriated from abroad. Based in Gaotang Xu in northern Panyu, the headquarters of the association acquired properties to generate income to support its operations. Cheong Shing Tong was founded to "help repatriate the bones of deceased friends from Panyu, Huaxian and Conghua to their hometown for burial. When the bones arrived in the headquarters, they would try to locate the families of the deceased friends and inform them to collect the remains for burial. Burial fees were also offered to the families. The deceased could be laid to rest in peace" (Zhou, 1995: 17).

In Xinhui, overseas Chinese raised funds to establish the charitable hospitals and associations namely, Xinhui Chengxi Ren'an Yiyuan, Renyu Tang and Jideshe to handle the bones. Burials in the communal graveyards discovered in Xinhui to date were undertaken by these three charitable associations, whereas bones awaiting collection by the deceased's families were placed in coffin homes. According to the research of Lin Zhenyu, an expert in Xinhui local history, on the charitable shelters and clinics as well as coffin homes in the county, the predecessor of Ren'an Yiyuan was a Fangbian Yisuo (charitable shelter and clinic) founded in the 24th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign (1898). In that year, bubonic plague broke out in Xinhui. Members of the local

gentry proposed the founding of a shelter and clinic in the western part of the county, like Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong, to offer free medical services and handle unclaimed bodies. In the 28th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1902), the shelter and clinic were renamed Xinhui Chengxi Ren'an Yiyuan and appealed to Chinese at home and abroad for donations to support its operations, and appointed fundraising officers in Chinese communities in Vietnam, the United States, Canada, Cuba and Australia. Ren'an Yiyuan built the communal free graveyards in Hezui (also known as Jinniushan), and Dahuai, and Huangkeng. The Xinhui Yici (communal ancestral hall), built in the 3rd year of Qing Emperor Yongzheng's reign (1725), housed the spirit tablets of the deceased who were poor and had no descendants; yet it is not known when Xinhui Coffin Home, used to store the bones of Chinese temporarily, was built (Lun, June 1986; Ou, 2005: 25; Lin, January 1, 2016).

In Taishan, a coffin home for storing bones repatriated from abroad, was built with funds donated by overseas Chinese in the 7th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign (1881). Meanwhile, Toi Shan Association in Hong Kong was responsible for transporting the bones to the deceased's hometown, contacting the deceased's families to claim the remains as well as building communal free graveyards for unclaimed remains. In the 17th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1890), Chinese donated some 13,000 US dollars for the establishment of a charitable association known as Mingshan She in Qingyun Road, Taishan, and a free clinic in the Wu Temple. In following year, Mingshanshe Fangbian Yiyuan was founded to look after the sick and elderly. The deity Luzu, an embodiment of benevolence, was revered at the clinic for worshipping (County Records of *Xinning*, 19th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's Reign, 1968: 368).

Similar charitable establishments which offered free medical services, looked after the sick and elderly and buried unclaimed remains of the deceased

were found in various towns and market towns. They were Tongji Yiyuan in Dihai and Ningji Yiyuan in Xinchang built in 1898, Le Shan Tang in Guanghai built in the reign of Emperor Guangxu, Funing Yiyuan in Gongyi Town (1921), Puji Yiyuan in Sijiu Xu Wushi Xu (1947) and more. In 1925, Hongji Yiyuan, which had a 180-square-metre shelter, was built in Dihai with funds donated by overseas Chinese. The hospital offered free medical services, took in critically ill patients and stored bones of Chinese repatriated from abroad (*Taishan Weishengzhi* 1988: 82-85).

In the 20th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign (1894), Chinese from Kaiping and Enping established the "Enkai Xiangyue"(Rural Alliance) in Baihe Xu, Kaiping to coordinate bone repatriation from abroad, built communal free graveyards for unclaimed remains, as well as set up temporary bone storage facilities in Jinhua Temple and Sanling Temple nearby. The bones repatriated to Kaiping could be unloaded at the piers in Dihai or Baihe Xu, and were generally received by the local charitable Ai Shan Tang established by different clans, which would make arrangements for the deceased's families to collect the bones. Unclaimed bones were buried in the local communal free graveyards. After the first Ai Shan Tang – Magong Ai Shan Tang – was founded in 1885, 17 more Ai Shan Tangs were successively set up, including Chikan Ai Shan Tang, Shuikou Ai Shan Tang, Baihe Ai Shan Tang, Midong Ai Shan Tang, Changsha Ai Shan Tang, Maogang Ai Shan Tang, Xiangang Ai Shan Tang, Chishui Chongkou Ai Shan Tang, Xu-clan Ai Shan Tang, Yixing Ai Shan Tang and Xiaohai Ai Shan Tang. Most of these charitable "tang" offered medical services and took in critically ill villagers through the shelters, clinics and hospitals they operated; they also offered free burial services and assistance with bone repatriation, as well as built communal free graveyards. Meanwhile, some charitable associations did not offer free medical services, but only provided free burial

services, buried unclaimed remains and took bones repatriated from abroad into their care (*Kaiping Weishengzhi,* 1988: 3-5; *Guangdong Lidai Fanzhi Jicheng – Miguo Kaiping Xianzhi,* 2014: 140-141).

2) Spirit Summoning and Releasing the Deceased's Spirit from Purgatory

When coffins or bones repatriated from abroad arrived in the deceased's hometown, rituals would be performed to release their spirits from purgatory. The remains were then claimed by the deceased's families or buried in communal free graveyards. In the 8th year of Qing Emperor Xianfeng's reign (1858), the rules and regulations for the 1st bone repatriation of Pon Yup Chong How Benevolent Association stipulated that, "A boat would be hired to transport the coffins of our deceased friends to the county capital, and rituals would be performed to release their spirits from purgatory." Subsequently, "notices would be put up in the villages urging the deceased's families to claim the remains, whereas those deceased friends who have no families would be laid to rest in the communal free graveyard."

3) Spirit Summoning

According to traditional funeral beliefs, the spirits of those who die in foreign land become hungry and desolate ghosts who lose the opportunity to be reincarnated. They cannot receive offerings or incense sticks or food, and their spirits cannot be released from purgatory either. Therefore, the deceased's families must perform a "spirit summoning" ritual for them, in the hope that the spirits will hear the voices of summoning and go home. The spirit summoning

ritual originated a long time ago, as described in historical records from the Zhou Dynasty (1056-256 B.C.), the family of the deceased should call the spirit from the roof at the front. Facing north, they should hold the deceased's clothing and call out his name, so that the deceased's spirit would follow the sound and return to the clothing. The family of the deceased should descend at the back of the house and put the clothing on the deceased's body. This piece of clothing was also called "fuyifu (literally abdominal clothing)". It was believed that the clothing had links with the deceased's "body" and "breath", and the deceased's spirit would be attracted to it and return following a familiar scent or form. Meanwhile, for those who died away from their hometown, a custom called "spirit burial" was practised.

For Chinese sojourning in foreign countries, their bodies were buried overseas after they died, and their spirits stayed on the other side of the Pacific Ocean for many years until their bones were repatriated. Obviously, the spirit summoning customs of the hometown of overseas Chinese originated from the ancient practice of "spirit burial". While bone exhumation was carried out in foreign countries, the spirits of those deceased Chinese whose remains could not be found were summoned into boxes and repatriated to their hometown. Overseas Chinese practised spirit summoning according to ancient customs. Adaptations might have been made to suit the circumstances at the time, yet the traditional concept of spirit burial remained unchanged.

After collecting the bones, the deceased's family in his hometown performed a ritual to summon his spirit. Since the spirit needed to "take a boat" to return to his hometown from abroad, a duck served the function of the boat in the ritual. On the day of spirit summoning, the ritual master would prepare a banner with the deceased's name and address, tying on top of a bamboo tail; he would also prepare a piece of long, thin string to the foot of a duck and take the

family of the deceased to a nearby pier along the river. Three animal sacrifices were offered to the deceased, while the deceased's family cried and mourned. Next, the ritual master threw the duck with force into the river and held the string as the duck swam. The ritual master then offered wine and food to the deceased, chanted spells and called the deceased's name, asking him to "take the boat" home. At the same time, he waved the bamboo tail with the deceased's name and address written on it, in order to remind the spirit of the "boat's" direction and location. Subsequently, the ritual master slowly retrieved the string. After the spirit summoning ritual was over, the ritual master carried the duck and led the deceased's family back to the village and into the deceased's home. A spirit tablet could now be set up for the deceased. The spirit of the deceased could eventually return home from the other side of the globe. Fallen leaves returned to the roots, and the deceased could be revered by their loved ones and descendants. This custom has been widely practised in the hometown of overseas Chinese for more than a century; until today, it is still occasionally practised. The account represented above is of two spirit summoning rituals the author experienced in person.

4) Releasing the Deceased's Spirit from Purgatory

In Taoism and Buddhism, the family of deceased persons commission ritual masters to enlighten the deceased, chant prayers and perform rituals, so that the deceased could go to pure land and their spirits could be relieved from suffering. In Buddhism, human beings exist in one of the six realms: Deva (heavenly), Manusya (human), Asura (demigod), Preta (ghost), Tiryak (animal like ox, horse or even mosquito and ant) and Naraka (residents of hell). The actions of a person lead to a new existence of the realms after death in an endless cycle,

whereas Buddhism helps the deceased break free from the cycle and release him from purgatory.

Buddhism believes that the best time to perform rituals to release the deceased's spirit from purgatory is within seven days after death, when the spirit can take a new form to reincarnate. It is believed that seven days is a period. If the new form is not yet determined after seven days, the search can be continued for another seven days until the seventh period ends. During these 49 days, if rituals are sincerely performed, the spirit can find a better form. After 49 days, the deceased would have been reincarnated, and it would be impossible to change anything.

Nevertheless, for those deceased persons whose spirits are not released from purgatory within 49 days of death, the *Ullambana Sutra* states that rituals can still be performed on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month every year to relieve their spirits from suffering. "The merits can release seven generations of ancestors from purgatory." (Mi, 2002)

Therefore, even though the bones of overseas Chinese were repatriated to their hometown more than a decade after their passing, the responsible charitable organization could still perform the traditional rituals to release the deceased's spirits from purgatory before informing their families to collect the bones.

5) Communal Free Graveyards for Overseas Chinese

Records reveal that charitable associations in the hometown of overseas Chinese, which were responsible for handling bones repatriated from abroad, have all built communal free graveyards for unclaimed bones, so that the deceased could be "laid to rest and receive sacrificial offerings" (From the rules and regulations

for bone repatriation of Pon Yup Chong How Benevolent Association in the 4th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign, 1878).

As local economies develop, many communal free graveyards, which were built a long time ago, have been destroyed. Today, Xinhui in Guangdong has the largest number of communal free graveyards. There are some 3,800 tombs in six graveyards: 386 tombs in the communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese from the United States in Haihuai of Huangkeng, built in 1893; about 200 tombs in the communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese from Vietnam in Mushan of Huangkeng, built in 1880; 441 tombs in the communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese in Dahuai, Hengkeng, built in 1936 by Ren'an Yiyuan ; some 1,500 tombs in the communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese in Hezuishan of Huangchongkeng, built by Ren'an Yiyuan; about 800 tombs (already damaged) in the communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese in Kengxia, Huangkeng ; and about 400 to 500 tombs (already damaged) in Dayun Shan. (Ou, Jilin 2005: 4-6)

In 1853, Sze Yup Benevolent Association in San Francisco, with Chinese from Taishan making up most of its membership, began to exhume and repatriate the bones of deceased Chinese to their hometown. However, the communal free graveyards for overseas Chinese in Taishan have all disappeared during the process of urbanization, while the original site of the coffin home, located in present-day Taicheng city centre, stands only the remains of the wall.

In Kaiping, the situation is a bit different from that of Xinhui and Taishan. The bones repatriated to Xinhui were mostly received by the charitable Ren'an Yiyuan, Ren Yu Tang and Ji De She, and coffin homes were set up to store the bones. In Taishan, the bones were handled by the coffin home built with funds donated by overseas Chinese as well as Ming Shan She. Meanwhile, Toi Shan Association of Hong Kong was a charitable organization which oversaw funerals

and burials. It directly participated in bone repatriation and establishment of communal free graveyards.

In the 9th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign (1883), the counties of Kaiping and Enping established the "Enkai Rural Alliance" in Baihe Xu, Kaiping (not far from Enping) to handle the bones of deceased overseas Chinese repatriated with funds raised by native societies abroad. At the same time, many charitable associations were built across Kaiping; Chinese from the county even donated money for the purchase of farmland as communal property to generate income to fund free medical services as well as bone repatriation and burial. Therefore, most of the communal free graveyards in Kaiping were built by local charitable associations, which also oversaw burial affairs. There were a total of 21 communal free graveyards built by the charitable associations for unclaimed bones or deceased and destitute sick people without descendants. They are located in: Sijiudong ; Changshatang ; Xianchengnan ; Midong ; Louganghou Zhugoukeng ; Donghewan Qushui Cun ; Boluo Changgangwei ; Longtang Liyu Shan built in the 7th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign; Shagang ; Ailingtou ; Yuanshanzai ; Xiaxiangkou ; Goushan ; Hengqiaoda, built by Chikan Shantang in Baizusha, Niuyanshui, built by Situ Jiaolun Tang in the 3rd year of the Republic of China; Shuikoushi Luoshan, built by Shuikou Shantang in the 7th year of the Republic of China; Mashan, Sijiudong, built by Yang Airu and others in the 9th year of the Republic of China; Dagangdi, Pancun, built in the 2nd year of Qing Emperor Xuantong's reign; Jiuxudi, built in the 4th year of the Republic of China; Hanlang Langqian, built in the 10th year of the Republic of China; Gangweida, Xianchengxi, built in the 20th year of the Republic of China; next to Bushu Bus Company. (Book 10, Jianzhi Shang, County Records of Kaiping, 1933).

6) Communal Free Cemetery for Overseas Chinese in Taishan

In 1948, the last batch of bones of overseas Chinese from Taishan were returned to their hometown. This was also the last time that charitable organizations in Taishan built a communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese, and the initiative was widely publicized in Taishan newspapers. In addition to the coverage in *Xinning Magazine*, which targeted all residents of the county, the monthly magazines of different clans also reported on the repatriation, so that the deceased's families could claim the bones from the coffin home. In Taishan, *Zhixiao Duqin Monthly*, published in early November 1948, ran a story entitled "Chen Zhixuan returns to Taishan to oversee repatriation of 1,000 sets of bones from US". Even though the bones repatriated did not belong to any member of their clan, they still reported on the repatriation:

> ***Yu Qing Tang (Yee Hing Tong), also known as "White Bones Society" and run by Toi Shan Association in Hong Kong, was responsible for the repatriation of bones for deceased overseas Chinese from different cities. It repatriated some 260 sets of bones from the United States before the war. The bones of Lei Weiluo, Lei Yanxue, Liu Yiwei, Ma Zhenyuan and Huang Chuanyan are still placed in Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong as the families and addresses of the deceased are not known. The hospital wrote in a letter and asked the White Bones Society to handle the matters properly. On the 2nd day of this month, another 1,063 sets of bones arrived in Hong Kong by ship. Lei Yinsun, the Chairman of Toi Shan Association, called a general committee meeting and decided on several ways to repatriate and bury the bones. Chen Zhixuan, the manager of Hai Sheng Xiang Store, would come to Taishan and set up an office to oversee the matter in Tianxin Gold Store on Zhonghe Road,***

Taicheng. We understand that Chen has arrived in Taicheng on the 13th day of this month. After discussing with the county assembly, he went to the coffin home in our county with funeral workers hired by the county assembly on the 14th day of this month. With regard to the 600 or so sets of bones repatriated before the war, burial fees of 5 Hong Kong dollars should have been offered for each deceased person. Yet the manager at the time used the funds for other purposes, such that the bones are still not buried. This time, all the bones repatriated in the past decade have been numbered, and efforts have been made to locate the families of the deceased. The respective village offices would be informed in due course, and the deceased's families would be asked to collect the remains for burial in two months. Otherwise, the county coffin home would bury the bones. Meanwhile, bone repatriation thereafter would be announced on the notice board.

(*Zhixiao Duqin Yuekan*, November 15, 1948: 44)

If members of the clan were included in the repatriation, the names of the deceased would be announced so that clan members could inform one another. In 1948, *Wenbian Monthly* published the article "Bones of four deceased clan members including Li Bairu repatriated from US are to be claimed", informing the deceased's families of the time and place to collect the bones, and that burial fees of 15 dollars would be provided,

Toi Shan Association of Hong Kong has sent a general committee member Chen Zhixuan to repatriate some 1,290 sets of bones of overseas Chinese of our county and those which were temporarily stored in the coffin home of Tung Wah Hospital over the years. The bones of four members of our clan, Li Bairu and Li Changhua of Wenbian Village, Li Weiqing of old Wenbian

Village, Li Lai'an of Songmei Village, are now deposited in the Dongmen Coffin Home at Taicheng. Last month, the respective village offices have been asked to inform the deceased's families to collect the bones, and that burial fees of 15 dollars would be offered for each deceased friend. Families of the deceased may claim the bones from Li Quanying of Junsheng Hao on Zhengshi Street, Taicheng. The following should be noted with regard to collecting the bones: (1) The claimant should be a member of the deceased's immediate family (if the deceased has no immediate family, a member of his extended family can claim the bones); (2) The claimant must present a certificate issued by the village office, or a note of guarantee from an honest business in Taicheng; (3) The claimant must fill in three receipts prepared by our society, one to be kept by the coffin home, one by our association, and one to be sent to the respective overseas charitable association; (4) The bones should be claimed in the six months from 15 October of this year to 15 April of the 38th year of the Republic of China (1949); remains not claimed after that would be buried by the coffin home of our association and no disagreement would be entertained.

(*Wenbian Yuekan*, November 15, 1948: 9-10)

Xinning Magazine is the most popular newsletter for Taishan people at home and abroad. While learning about what was happening in China and their hometown through the magazine, overseas Chinese used the magazine as a medium to pass information about foreign countries to their hometown and exchange ideas with fellow clansmen. The magazine covered major events in the country, province and county, news related to Siyi people in Hong Kong and Macau, as well as immigration policies of foreign countries where overseas Chinese reside. In January 1949, two consecutive issues of the magazine reported on matters regarding Yu Qing Tang Cemetery). The first issue contains

an article entitled “The Yu Qing Tang Cemetery newly established a cemetery in Shihuashan to bury some 1,000 overseas Chinese”. It provides a detailed account of the bone repatriation process, burial fees arrangement, collection of bones from the coffin home and the construction of a communal free graveyard to bury unclaimed remains. It also reveals that Toi Shan Association in Hong Kong was responsible for transporting the bones from Hong Kong to Taishan, and guaranteed funds for the last part of the bone repatriation process.” (*Xinning Magazine*, January 1, 1949: 28-29)

The first issue of *Xinning Magazine* in the 37th year of the Republic of China reported on the foundation laying ceremony for the cemetery in Shihuashan, which was attended by the county magistrate as well as prominent government officials. This shows that the construction of a communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese was a major event in the county concerning people both at home and abroad. (*Xinning Magazine*, January 1, 1949: 28)

The second issue of *Xinning Magazine* contains an article entitled “Construction work for the new 80000 square feet Yu Qing Tang Cemetery in Shihuashan begins, with 8 memorial pavilions built with funds to be raised abroad”, illustrating to Taishan people in China and overseas the planning of the cemetery, the concept of western cemetery construction as well as the construction of the memorial pavilions. The article also gave an update on the fundraising campaign (*Xinning Magazine*, January 15, 1949: 51-52).

In addition to reports on the construction of the cemetery published in two consecutive issues of *Xinning Magazine*, *Datong Daily* of Taishan, which was also circulated across the county, published detailed reports on the foundation laying ceremony and the construction work on 14 and 15 December in the 37th year of the Republic of China. The author looked through hundreds of overseas Chinese magazines published in the following few years, but did not find any

news about the construction of the cemetery. There was little coverage on the completion and subsequent operation of the cemetery. Nevertheless, the first issue of *Xinning Magazine* in 1957 contains an essay by Tan Tingbiao on visiting the cemetery on Qing Ming Festival. The essay, entitled "Scenery arousing deep thoughts – paying homage to deceased in Shihuashan on Qing Ming Festival”, depicts the communal free graveyard for overseas Chinese after completion,

> ***After breakfast, returnees and relatives of overseas Chinese who gathered on the Qing Ming Festival to sweep the tombs of ancestors and friends of overseas Chinese in Taishan (the Yu Qing Tang Cemetery for the county of Taishan) came to the door of the Returned Overseas Chinese Federation on Xi’an Road of Taicheng, from all sides, carrying flowers. Then the heads of various organizations and people from local community also arrived one after another. ...Families of overseas Chinese men and women relatives; they brought a team of more than 200 people to visit the cemetery. The Taishan Returned Overseas Chinese Federation has already prepared rich sacrifices, such as yellow sugar steamed cake, white sugar steamed cake, roast pig, white meat, white eggs, sugar cane, wine, incense candles and so on.***
>
> ***The grave sweeping ceremony began, chaired by Chen Houfu, returned overseas Chinese. People came to forward to pay respect, offering flowers to show their infinite respect for those who contributed a lot for the development of their hometown and died overseas. After the worshipping ceremony, people took pictures together for commemoration.***
>
> (*Xinning Magazine*, January 15, 1957: 89-91)

Conclusion

1) Charitable Spirit

Chinese people have a strong sense of attachment to their hometown. For Chinese laborers who went abroad to earn a living, the concept of "fallen leaves returning to the roots" were all the most important. If they could not return to their hometown during their golden years, it would be their final wish to be buried there after they died. Meanwhile, death was very important to Chinese and the concept of interment was deeply rooted. Under the influence of long standing Chinese culture, Chinese persevere to maintain the traditional burial practice. This, along with the unpleasant experiences of Chinese in overseas countries, gave rise to the custom of bone repatriation which involved a colossal amount of work and lasted much of a century.

The general route of bone repatriation can be summed up as follows: overseas native society and charitable association – Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong (temporary deposit in Tung Wah Coffin Home) – Tung Wah Hospital, branches of the native society or charitable association in Hong Kong (repatriation to the deceased's hometown) – charitable association in the deceased's hometown (bone collection and construction of communal free graveyards). From foreign countries to the deceased's hometown, charitable associations were responsible for every leg of the journey. These vast bone repatriation undertakings were not only reflections on bone repatriation itself, but also the Chinese culture and traditions therein. They symbolised the fear for ghosts and deities in traditional Chinese culture, as well as the social and ethical beliefs in Confucian teachings. They were the result of joint efforts by Chinese

communities in China and abroad, where a sophisticated charitable network was built through the spirit of benevolence in traditional Chinese culture. This benevolence was blown up in a specific time in history, a special living environment and special cultural beliefs – "The generous, benevolent deed prevents the bones of our deceased friends from being exposed; it is also the responsibility of our generation. As the ancient saying goes, 'benevolent deeds bring good fortune', while we repatriate the bones of our deceased friends, we also build a foundation of blessings." (Advertisement of Quong Fook Tong Benevolent Association of Kaiping, May 16, 1916) (Website of Chinese in Northwest America Research Committee)

Such spirit of benevolence was often exemplified in the rules and regulations in the accounting journal for each bone repatriation undertaking. General committee members were told, "Work together. Do not gang up for personal interests. Do not be complacent. Put public interest before personal gain. Be careful with your speech. Do not practise favouritism. Be diligent and thrifty. Be meticulous and thorough. Do not abuse your position. Thoughts and actions should be consistent. Persevere unremittingly. Be god fearing and uphold the spirit of benevolence." (Clause 1 of the rules and regulations of Chong How Benevolent Association, 23rd year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign, 1897)

In order to remind the managers to always keep in mind traditional moral and ethical beliefs as well as uphold the spirit of benevolence, a template for the general committee member's oath (to be burned) was included in the accounting journal (multiple accounting journals of Chong How Benevolent Association). It was widely known that when general committee members took office, they were required to fill their name in the template, offer sacrifice to the gods and burn the oath. In doing this, they asked the deities to be their witnesses. Below is an excerpt of the template.

I, general committee member of Chong How Benevolent Association, have been elected to undertake bone repatriation for our deceased friends. I hereby swear that I will stay true to my conscience, work to the best of my ability and keep clear accounting records. I shall not misappropriate funds to serve my personal interests. If I violate this oath, may ill fortune fall upon me. I ask the gods to be my witness.

Signed by *on* _____ *day of* _____ *month in the year* _____

2) Further Insights

With regard to the custom of bone repatriation, a closer look at the archives of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals will reveal that the bones from the Americas far outnumbered those from Southeast Asia – which had a larger Chinese population. I believe there were at least three reasons why bone repatriation was not as widely practised in Southeast Asia than in North America:

First of all, the political climate in Southeast Asia was less tense than that in North America and Australia. There were no exclusion laws. Many Chinese people had families, and there were Chinese schools perpetuating Chinese culture. Chinese compatriots did not have to worry about not having anyone visiting their graves after they died. Meanwhile, in North America and Australia, where Chinese people were discriminated against, it was difficult for most Chinese people to start a family. Supporting their parents as well as their wives and children at home became the spiritual support and motivation for their work. They regarded the foreign countries as temporary places of residence, where they made money to support their families. *The Chinese Times*, a Chinese

newspaper in Vancouver, Canada, published an advertisement of Quong Fook Tong Benevolent Association of Kaiping on 16 May 1916, stating the reason for the bone repatriation, "Sending the bones of our deceased friends to their hometown mean they will not be buried in a foreign country. They will have no regrets" (Website of Chinese in Northwest America Research Committee).

Secondly, there were specific laws in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore that restricted the transport of human bones. In 1934, Tung Wah Hospital wrote in its reply to Singapore's Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital, "We are aware of your government's intention to loosen bone repatriation laws. We are, however, obliged to follow the existing laws in Hong Kong. In response to your request, we have enclosed Chinese and English versions of Hong Kong's bone repatriation laws, so that you can submit them to your government. We are most delighted to offer our assistance in this charitable deed." In 1935, the volunteer manager of Kwong Tong Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur wrote in a letter to Tung Wah Hospital, "Many overseas Chinese compatriots repatriate the bones of deceased Chinese persons to China for burial. Due to hygiene concerns, however, our government has imposed strict regulations on bone repatriation. The procedures are complicated, resulting in increased costs. Even though we want to repatriate the bones, it is very difficult to carry out the process" (Yip, 2009: 250-251). As a matter of fact, there were also bone transportation laws in the United States, and the application procedure was rather cumbersome.

In different political environment, the same restrictions on bone transportation and the same cumbersome procedures produced different psychological effects.

Thirdly, in Hong Kong, Tung Wah Hospital had built a coffin home, offered free coffins for Chinese persons who passed away at sea and took delivery of bones repatriated from abroad. These benevolent deeds, along with

Hong Kong's international shipping network, meant the city was unique as a port-of-exit for Chinese people leaving China. Most of the Chinese in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand originated from Guangdong Province. Their native societies abroad maintained close connections with counterparts in Hong Kong to make sure that the bones reach the deceased's hometown. The trading companies specialising in trade with China, Southeast Asia and North America in Hong Kong which had their business locally played an important role in the charitable bone repatriation network. To them, bone repatriation was both a business opportunity and a benevolent act (Sinn, 2013; Yip, 2009).

3) Other than Bone Repatriation…

As far as the development history of the hometown of overseas Chinese is concerned, it is worthwhile to look into the family and society behind. Chinese making a living abroad often carried the weight of their families on their shoulders. They were totally devoted to their families and the development of their hometown. Yet, once they died, their families would change and the women behind them would see their lives change completely. Most of the stories about "chaste women" found in county records involve a "husband who died abroad":

Chen was betrothed to Li Beidou. They were not yet married when Beidou died abroad. When Chen heard the news, she was devastated. She adopted a son and cared for him for more than ten years. People in the village all thought she was a virtuous woman. When her son was old enough, she found him a wife. After that, she said, "I have done what I should do, and can now go see my husband." She threw herself into the sea and died.

Huang was betrothed to Chen Chunping. They were not yet married when her husband went abroad. Huang went to live with her husband's family. Her husband died abroad, and Huang was devastated. She adopted a son and cared for him until he was grown-up. People in the village thought she was a virtuous woman.

(*Xinning Xianzhi*, 19th year of Qing Emperor Guangxu's reign, 1968: 896-898)

In the magnificent diaolou, buildings and villas in the hometown of overseas Chinese often lived women who spent their whole lives waiting for their husbands. After their husbands died abroad, it was customary for them to raise the children they had with their husbands, or adopt children.

Looking back on the bone repatriation undertakings, which lasted most of a century, the lives of the Chinese who died abroad can be described with two lines in the renowned lyrical poem *Man Jiang Hong* by Yue Fei, "At the age of thirty, my deeds are nothing but dust, my journey has taken me over eight thousand *li* [approximately 4,000 km] away". Whether the Chinese were successful or not, all that was left of them in the end was a coffin or a set of bones repatriated to their hometown. In 1902, the remains of Choie Sew Hoy, a wealthy Chinese merchant tycoon in New Zealand, as well as those of 500 Chinese laborers affiliated with Cheong Shing Tong, sank to the bottom of the sea along with the *SS Ventnor*. (Zhou, 1995: 17). And as Professor Marlon K. Hom said, "The bone repatriation service provides a fair chance for all fallen leaves return to their roots" (Hom, 2002: 38, cited in Yip, 2009: 24).

Today, more than a hundred years after the cultural tradition of "fallen leaves returning to the roots" prevailed among overseas Chinese, the world has undergone a reverse development. With the abolition of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the change of contemporary immigration policy, overseas Chinese can

be naturalized, marry and have children in their country of residence, take root and live and work in peace and contentment. Overseas Chinese began to worry that their parents were too lonely in the graves of their hometown – there would be no future generations worshipping them. As a result, quite some Chinese immigrants returned to their home village in China and brought their parents' ashes to overseas for burial – for easier care and worshiping. In fact, this is also due to the consideration of traditional cultural thinking – take roots in a place, and bring blessings to the future generations.

The correspondences from the Tung Wah Coffin Home archives published in this volume reflect the yearning of overseas Chinese to return to their roots. They also illustrate how native societies and charitable associations in overseas countries, Hong Kong and the Mainland China uphold a spirit of mutual assistance and benevolence when working together to repatriate the bones of deceased Chinese to their hometown for burial. Today, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals of Hong Kong is committed to preserving Tung Wah Coffin Home and its historical archives, which act as silence witnesses to the history of overseas Chinese.

– END –

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