

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 2005

Review of *Ethnic Oasis: The Chinese in the Black Hills* By Uping Zhu and Rose Estep Fosha, with essays by Donald L. Hardesty and A. Dudley Gardner

William Wei

University of Colorado at Boulder, william.wei@colorado.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Wei, William, "Review of *Ethnic Oasis: The Chinese in the Black Hills* By Uping Zhu and Rose Estep Fosha, with essays by Donald L. Hardesty and A. Dudley Gardner" (2005). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2470.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2470>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Ethnic Oasis: The Chinese in the Black Hills. By Liping Zhu and Rose Estep Fosha, with essays by Donald L. Hardesty and A. Dudley Gardner. Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004. 100 pp. Photographs, tables, notes, index. \$15.95 paper.

The first thing readers should be made aware of is that the book's title is somewhat misleading. While the first two articles by Liping Zhu and Rose Estep Fosha focus on the Chinese in the Black Hills, the second two by Donald L. Hardesty and A. Dudley Gardner deal with the Chinese communities in Nevada and Wyoming, respectively. Perhaps more important, three of the four articles are actually about archaeology and what it reveals about the Chinese frontier experience rather than about the history and culture of the Chinese in the American West itself.

Billed as the background piece, Zhu's lengthy essay is the most substantive of the four, providing a historical overview of Deadwood's Chinese community. As in his earlier work, *A Chinaman's Chance: The Chinese of*

the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier (1997), Zhu advances the inspiring theme that Chinese workers were creative competitors in the American West rather than simply passive victims resigned to their fate in stereotypical "oriental" fashion. Indeed, they not only survived in a hostile environment but also thrived in what Zhu aptly describes as "ethnic oases." He considers these oases as both Chinese enclaves and American neighborhoods within Euro-American towns and mining camps.

Complementing Zhu is Fosha's essay on the archeological excavations of Deadwood's Chinese community. Fosha's purpose is to present some of her preliminary findings. The rub is their paucity, making her contribution appear more like a research proposal than anything else. Instead of findings, Fosha recycles questionable ideas such as the failure of the Chinese to participate in the Euro-American economy as the cause of their problems in America. Without realizing it, she is implicitly blaming the victims for their victimization. Still, Fosha's site may yield some interesting results, and she would be well advised to be guided by what Hardesty and Gardner have learned at archaeological sites of Chinese communities elsewhere in the American West.

Though Hardesty's contribution also reads like a research proposal rather than a completed study, his essay is conceptually more engaging. He talks about how the archaeological record can provide "research pathways" for understanding the Chinese experience in Nevada. Among his examples, "glocalization" is potentially powerful because it could provide a model for "how the global is locally interpreted and transformed." This, of course, has contemporary as well as past relevance for understanding the human experience.

Gardner's essay on the Chinese in Wyoming draws on the excavations of Chinese communities archaeologists of Western Wyoming College have been conducting since 1990. Analyzing the materials and data they have collected, he is able to describe the

evolution of “core” and “peripheral” Chinese communities. Through an analysis of artifacts, he has reconstructed in a preliminary way the food consumption patterns of the Chinese in both types of communities, allowing him to talk intelligently about the acculturation of the Chinese of Wyoming. Except for mistakenly identifying Jade Snow Wong as a historian when she is a writer and artist, Gardner has written a fine essay, one that is short but pithy.

In sum, this is a book of limited use. Those interested in the subject of the Chinese in the Black Hills will have to be content with Zhu’s article until Fosha’s research team has had a chance to analyze its findings. Meanwhile, those attracted to what archeological research can reveal about the Chinese experience in the American West can profit from reading the Hardesty and Gardner essays.

WILLIAM WEI
Department of History
University of Colorado at Boulder