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Global Connection and the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in the Context of Repatriation of Remains of Overseas Chinese

A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the literature concerning a crucial link that unites mainland China, Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities. The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, a charitable organisation based in Hong Kong, played a key role in the facilitation of the repatriation of the remains of individuals of Chinese descent living abroad. This paper places special emphasis on the value of archival records released by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. It proposes the pursuit of interdisciplinary research and underscores the necessity for comprehensive investigations that encompass publications in different languages. To enhance our understanding of the repatriation of deceased overseas Chinese individuals, there is a resounding need for expanded initiatives to collect and preserve primary historical sources. Comparative studies on burial practices across different regions are also recommended. Such pursuits will offer new insights into the history of overseas Chinese communities.

Keywords

Chinese diaspora – Chinese expats – Chinese labourers – Hong Kong – repatriation of remains – Tung Wah Group of Hospitals
1 Introduction

The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGH), a revered charitable organisation in Hong Kong, was formed with the merger of three hospitals in 1931: Tung Wah Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital and Tung Wah Eastern Hospital. The history of the TWGH, the oldest and largest charitable entity in Hong Kong, dates back to 1870, when the Tung Wah Hospital was established. A few years later, in 1875, the Kwan Fong Coffin Home was founded, in Kennedy Town on Hong Kong Island. It relocated to Sandy Bay around 1899 under the auspices of the TWGH. The prime purpose of this coffin home, which was subsequently renamed the Tung Wah Coffin Home, was as a repository for coffins and remains (Ma, 2010). Across its 150-year history, the TWGH (which now includes the Tung Wah Coffin Home) has emerged as a vital link connecting mainland China, Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities.

The TWGH has embarked on new efforts to forge links with the Chinese diaspora through its archives and publications that illuminate the organisation’s global network and its interactions with overseas Chinese communities. This paper explores the history of the TWGH, shedding light on its services regarding the repatriation of remains of overseas Chinese. Special emphasis is placed on the valuable insights derived from the repository known as the ‘Tung Wah Coffin Home’s Documents’, with the aspiration to expand the existing body of knowledge on the history of overseas Chinese.

2 Archival Compilations: Overseas Chinese Labourer Records and The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Archives

The historical trajectory of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals is intricately intertwined with the development of Hong Kong society (Sinn, 1989, 2003; Yu, 2009; Sun and Chen, 2017; Yang, 2016, 2018; Lee, 2019; Ma, 2011a, 2011b). Initial research into the organisation’s background and history scrutinised the role played by Chinese elites in Hong Kong society and their interactions with the colonial administration. (For the role of Hong Kong as a hub of migration networks, see McKeown, 2001.) Notably, in 1971, Henry James Lethbridge wrote a paper that focused on the group as a Chinese social entity and its mediation between the colonial government and local society (Lethbridge, 1971, 1978). Building on this, in 1976 Carl Smith delved into the early establishment of the TWGH and its multifaceted roles encompassing medical, educational, social and religious services, which involved a visit to the Tung Wah Museum. Furthermore, Smith highlighted the TWGH involvement in repatriating the remains of overseas Chi-
nese and in particular its engagement with the ‘Six Companies’ (also known as Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association) in San Francisco. After it transported the remains of deceased Chinese to Hong Kong, the tGWH would publish notices in local newspapers, informing relatives and friends, and arrange for the return of the remains (Smith, 1976). As early as the 1970s, the tGWH engaged with the archival records stored in the museum, which include correspondence with overseas associations (huiguan) and overseas Chinese organisations (tongxianghui).

The study of Chinese contract labourers (referred to as ‘huagong’ in Chinese, or colloquially known as ‘coolies’) who ventured abroad during the late Qing dynasty has attracted scholars’ attention extensively. This research has centred on the tribulations endured by these labourers, the dynamics of overseas Chinese communities and the diplomatic negotiations between China and various host countries, including the United States, Spain, Cuba, Peru and Mexico. Although foreign scholars primarily have explored the settlement and integration of Chinese labourers abroad (Williams, 2018), domestic and international scholars have made a wide range of inquiries into the annals of overseas Chinese history. This domain is expansive, making it unfeasible to encompass all its facets within this paper.

An abundance of official archives exists that document Chinese contract labourers’ migration abroad during the Qing dynasty and Republic period (Chen, H.S., 1980–1985; Chen, A.Q., 2008; Lu, 1995; Chen, S.C., 1997, 1998). These historical records, systematically organised, cover controversies, regulations, historical narratives and Sino-foreign relations pertaining to Chinese contract labourers. The records establish that Chinese contract labourers were dispersed across Europe, North and South America, Southeast Asia and even Africa.

In 2002, Yoshinobu Shiba compiled a selected bibliography on the Chinese diaspora, cataloguing an array of research volumes pertinent to this field. His categorisation provides an insight into the diverse topics of study within overseas Chinese research. These encompass identity, policies that impacted on the Chinese abroad, social organisations (such as clan associations, huiguan, lineages and religious groups), Chinatowns, Hakka communities, secret societies, Chinese diaspora literature, biographies, Sun Yat-sen’s influence, regional studies spanning the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, and more. However, it is worth noting that Shiba’s compilation largely overlooks research on Chinese communities in Latin America and the economic contributions of Chinese contract labourers across Europe, North and South America, Southeast Asia and Africa, as stated above (Shiba, 2002). (For more recent literature reviews by Japanese scholars, see Yuko and Serizawa, 2017, and Kadonaga, 2013). Other contribu-
tions to the study of Chinese overseas history have come from John Fitzgerald and Hon-ming Yip, who have provided comprehensive research on Chinese charitable organisations abroad (Fitzgerald and Yip, 2020).

The notion of ‘homecoming’ or the return to one’s hometown was deeply ingrained in the mindset of Chinese contract labourers. Traditionally, if an individual died away from their hometown, their descendants would repatriate their remains for burial. For many Chinese contract labourers who sought opportunities abroad and subsequently passed away there, the proper repatriation of their remains became a paramount concern for benevolent associations and clan communities. Despite this significance, research into the repatriation of remains has remained sparse. The unavailability and limited dissemination of archival records on this topic have contributed to the dearth of knowledge in this realm. An illustrative instance is the Sam Yup Benevolent Association’s historical compilation from 1975, which offers a concise account of the origin and historical progression of repatriating Chinese remains from San Francisco’s Chinatown. However, being self-published by the association, it had limited circulation. Until 2006, only the chapter discussing repatriation to China had been translated into English (The Sam Yup Benevolent Association, San Francisco, 1975, 2006).

The use of historical records from charitable organisations in Hong Kong can be traced back to Hiroaki Kani’s 1979 work, which examined the circumstances of immigrant coolies and trafficked women in modern China. His investigation drew on the archives of the Po Leung Kuk, which provided support for orphans, especially girls, to delve into the predicament of Chinese women who were trafficked to foreign nations (Kani, 1979). Po Leung Kuk, established in 1878 by Tung Wah Hospital’s Superintendent, Lo Kanyang, is strongly connected with the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. However, during Kani’s exploration of the archives in the 1970s, he bemoaned their neglect and deterioration over time.

The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals’ repository of documents about remains, the ‘Tung Wah Coffin Home Archives’, is distinctly different from the historical materials concerning Chinese contract labourers. This collection primarily comprises correspondence between the TWGH, Chinese communities and clan associations abroad, and benevolent organisations and hospitals in Guangdong. The trove of documents, housed in the Tung Wah Museum, showcases the integral role of the TWGH within its global network from 1910 to the 1970s, shedding light on the repatriation of overseas Chinese for burial in their homeland. The records include letters, applications for admission to the Tung Wah Coffin Home, contracts for coffin storage, registration records, receipts and waybills (Yip, 2010). Although the passage of time may have led to the loss of
certain documents, the Tung Wah Museum preserves a relatively comprehensive collection, which has been partially accessible for scholarly research.

The TWGH archives offer insights into historical practices of returning Chinese remains to the homeland for burial, including burial traditions, the handling of remains, transportation logistics and affiliations among the charitable entities. Through these archives, a distinct perspective emerges, which accentuates Hong Kong’s role and the relationships between local and international charitable groups and Chinese community associations. The study of these archives enriches scholars’ understanding of the historical and societal significance of the TWGH within the broader scope of overseas Chinese diaspora and charitable endeavours. They reveal that the TWGH acted as an intermediary in facilitating the repatriation of remains of overseas Chinese and Chinese contract labourers from North America, Central and South America, Southeast Asia and other regions.

From the late Qing period onwards, a substantial number of Chinese contract labourers embarked on journeys abroad, to cities like San Francisco in the United States and Havana in Cuba (Chen, Y., 2002; Yun, 2008). To address matters concerning death and afterlife, these immigrants formed clan associations to offer mutual assistance (McKeown, 2001; Khun Eng and Hu-Dehart, 2017). Many of these contract labourers hailed from Guangdong, and the opening of the Panama Canal and improved shipping routes to Hong Kong made the transportation of their remains from North America to Hong Kong easier. Consequently, the TWGH collaborated with clan associations, chambers of commerce, benevolent organisations and counterparts in Hong Kong and Guangdong to repatriate remains to ancestral villages for burial. However, several instances were reported where repatriation was unfeasible, resulting in local burial arrangements. For instance, the Chinese communities in Havana established the Chinese General Yishan Cemetery to accommodate the remains of Chinese individuals there. The 1930s, coupled with the Japanese invasion of China and the post-1949 period, presented challenges and impediments to transporting remains. Consequently, the TWGH gradually phased out this aspect of its services.

The TWGH has released two archival publications. The first was Donghua Sanyuan Dangan Ziliao Huibian (Compilation of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals’ Archives). Edited by Pui-yin Ho and Hon-ming Yip (Ho, P.Y., 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b), this five-volume series has four volumes dedicated to the history of the TWGH. The fifth volume, authored by Hon-ming Yip, is titled Donghua Yizhuang Yu Huanqiu Cishan Wangluo: Dangan Wenxian Ziliao de Yinzheng (Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and its Global Philanthropic Network: Evidence and Insights from Archival Documents). This volume compiles documentary
materials from the TWGH archives, shedding light on its establishment, regulations, operational systems, service categories and the repatriation of the remains of Chinese to their ancestral regions. It underscores the TWGH’s integral role as an intermediary in receiving the bodies and facilitating their return to China (Yip, 2010).

The second publication was *Luoye Guigen: Donghua Sanyuan Huaqiao Yuanji Anzang Dangan Xuanji* (Falling Leaves Returning to their Roots: A Selection of Archives on the Bone Repatriation Service of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals for Overseas Chinese). Compiled by the Records and Heritage Office of the TWGH, it contains around 300 letters from the Tung Wah Coffin Home Archives. These letters describe the TWGH’s efforts in repatriating the remains of Chinese abroad to their ancestral hometowns during the first half of the twentieth century (TWGH Maisy Ho Archives and Relics Centre, 2020). The letters have been digitised and are also accessible through the Records and Heritage Office, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals’ website.¹ The publication comprises two volumes: the first is an illustrated album and the second presents the original Chinese texts alongside English translations, of letters exchanged between the TWGH and overseas Chinese communities and charitable organisations from the 1920s to the 1930s regarding the repatriation of remains. It provides further insights into the historical interactions between the TWGH and Chinese communities across the globe. These two archives are a distinctive source from which to comprehend the history of overseas Chinese.

Lingyeong Chiu and Ngok Lee collaborated on a book containing translations of documents found in the records of the British Parliament, on Chinese contract labour from 1843 to 1949 (Chiu and Lee, 1994). Kache Yip, Man-kong Wong and Yuen-sang Leung also joined forces to co-edit an anthology of materials from the British National Archives and Hong Kong’s English newspapers. It focuses on the inception of hospitals by the TWGH (Yip, Wong and Leung, 2018). John Asome’s research on coolie ships and Akira Matsuura’s work on the history of shipping between the United States and Asia also offer background information for understanding the migration of Chinese labours and the repatriation of their remains (Asome, 2020; Matsuura, 2015a, 2015b). These resources are essential references for the historical underpinnings and operational dynamics of the TWGH and provide significant background information for the ‘Tung Wah Coffin Home Archives’. Unfortunately, these collections have not received sufficient attention in the academic community.

¹ http://www.twmarchives.hk.
3 The Discovery and Significance of Cemeteries in Guangdong

One article in the compilation *Luoye Guigen: Donghua Sanyuan Huaqiao Yuanji Anzang Dangan Xuanji* is by Jinhua Tan, who succinctly delineates the history of the TWGH’s involvement in collecting remains. It commences with the late Qing-era Chinese labourers’ immigration and the traditional practice of returning their remains to their hometowns for burial. The article navigates the contents of archives related to remains collection, management, associations, overseas cemeteries and the repatriation process, contextualising these materials historically and elucidating the importance of Hong Kong and the TWGH in this context (Tan, 2020).

The elaborate arrangements for repatriated remains did not end with their return to the hometown. Local benevolent organisations and hospitals assumed crucial roles in ensuring their respectful placement. This entire process was underpinned by the principles of traditional Chinese charitable culture. As highlighted by Tan, the repatriation of remains was a tripartite effort, between Chinese immigrants and clan organisations, the TWGH in Hong Kong and domestic benevolent organisations. Jinhua Tan, Barbara Voss and J. Ryan Kennedy collaboratively undertook an archaeological investigation of the sites associated with Chinese railroad workers in the United States and the hometown of overseas Chinese, specifically Cangdong village in Kaiping city. Their objective was to gain insights into the transnational experiences and lives of Chinese railroad workers (Tan, Voss and Kennedy, 2019; Voss, n.d.).

The repatriation journey involved the transfer of the deceased from overseas locations to Hong Kong as a transition hub, where the TWGH collaborated with Guangdong’s benevolent organisations to facilitate the transportation of remains to mainland China, primarily in the Guangdong region. (For overseas Chinese hometown research, see Kani, 1996; Chen, Ding and Wang, 2006; Voss et al, 2018.) Benevolent organisations, clan associations and hometown charitable groups engaged in benevolent acts, including the burial of indigent or unsupported individuals, covering expenses related to coffins, funerals and the establishment of burial sites.

The ancestral burial mounds in hometowns are a testament to the historical practice of repatriating remains for interment. The Jinniu Mountain Overseas Chinese Ancestral Cemetery, established by the Xinhui benevolent society (Xinhui is situated in the southwestern area of Guangdong, one of the largest hometowns of immigrant Chinese), is a significant example. Comprising 1,500 burial plots, this cemetery is the largest known ancestral cemetery. Its discovery in around 1992 marked a turning point, with Xinhui historian Ou Jilin being among the first to compile and present information about it in his book (Ou,
The cemetery’s establishment, spanning from 1888 to 1892, was driven by the need to provide a final resting place for Chinese immigrants from the United States who were returned to their homeland but had no one to claim their remains. Subsequent explorations led to the unearthing of additional ancestral cemeteries in Xinhui.

The earliest exploration into the Jinniu Mountain Ancestral Cemetery in Xinhui was undertaken by Marlon Hom, who offered insights into the identities of those interred there (Hom, 2002). But during the 1990s, when Ou Jilin and Marlon Hom were conducting their research on the Xinhui ancestral cemetery, the TWGH archives were not publicly accessible. As a result their investigations were not informed by these invaluable resources. In 2006, Ko Timkeung wrote an essay for a TWGH exhibition, scrutinising the Jinniu Mountain Ancestral Cemetery through the prism of the institution’s archives (Ko, 2010).

Fu Jian’s extensive work examines the process, expenses and routes associated with the repatriation of Chinese remains to Wuyi (five counties, including Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping, Enping, Heshan), culminating in their burial in ancestral cemeteries. Fu draws on the TWGH archives to craft chapters titled ‘Hong Kong-based Associations’ and ‘Tung Wah as a Hub’. These chapters shed light on the major roles of the TWGH and Hong Kong in the management and claiming of remains (Fu, 2017). Hu Shuiyu’s article delves into the domains of disaster relief, refugee support and repatriation of remains, highlighting the operational and administrative aspects of the repatriation process (Hu, 2017).

4 The Roles of Overseas Chinese Associations

Although there is a wealth of research on the history of Chinese Americans in the United States, explorations into the role of overseas associations and hometown organisations in repatriating their remains have predominantly centred on San Francisco’s Chinatown. One of the earliest works in this vein is Liu Pochi’s book, which investigates the history of the Chinese in the United States, including the roles of associations, clan organisations and the attitude of the US government regarding the burial and repatriation of Chinese remains (Liu, P.C., 1976).

Linda Sun Crowder gives an anthropological perspective on Chinese-American funeral rituals, concepts of death and identity. Her work briefly alludes to the importance within the Chinese-American community of repatriating remains to the ancestral homeland (Crowder, 2000, 2002). Sue Fawn Chung and Priscilla Wegars elaborate on Chinese-American funeral customs.
and cemeteries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Chung and Wegars, 2005). Their work highlights the interplay between the TWGH, Chinese-American associations and clan organisations, elucidating their indispensable role in repatriating remains. (For discussion on overseas Chinese burial practices, see McLean, 2015; Pasacreta, 2005; Grimwade, 2023.) Chung contributes an additional article on the TWGH role within this context (Chung, 2020). Gao Weinong’s work discusses The Sam Yup Benevolent Association of San Francisco, shedding light on the contributions of clan associations to the burial of Chinese Americans in San Francisco (Gao, 2006).

Notably, these historians of Chinese Americans have focused largely on how Chinese Americans upheld traditional Chinese beliefs while integrating into American culture. However, their use of the TWGH archives has been limited, with only fleeting mentions of the repatriation of remains.

5 The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and the Repatriation of Remains

In the realm of research on the repatriation of remains facilitated by the TWGH, Hiroshi Funakoshi’s book is grounded in a paper published in 1996 and his 1998 doctoral dissertation from the University of Tokyo (Funakoshi, 2015). The third chapter probes how the TWGH orchestrated charitable services for repatriating remains and distributing coffins through global networks. The emphasis lies on the global role assumed by the TWGH, linking overseas Chinese communities and Guangdong charitable organisations.

Elizabeth Sinn’s archival exploration (Sinn, 2007, 2013) unearthed intricate ties between the TWGH and Chinese organisations abroad. This connection prompted her to delve into the Hong Kong and Chinese emigration project, on which she wrote a collection of articles and a comprehensive book. In the chapter titled ‘Returning the Remains’, she draws on the TWGH archives for her analysis. The collaboration between the TWGH, Ji Shan Tong and the Chang Hau Tong in Hong Kong and San Francisco takes centre stage, along with their financial arrangements. Sinn also examines the enduring nature of charity within the Chinese diaspora, unveiling a history intertwined with the intricate associations between individuals, groups and subgroups in the diasporic community. The complexity of these interactions surfaces in diverse charitable contributions, involving local donations to overseas residences, support to family and community in the homeland, and donations within the diaspora across different settlements. Sinn’s perspective illuminates the multitudinous responsibilities and expectations of affluent and less affluent immigrants abroad. Through the lens of diaspora charity, she exposes the structure and dynamics of diaspora...
networks, unveiling the experiences of Chinese overseas communities across time (Sinn, 2020).

Ho Kailung’s article briefly mentions the establishment of charity graves by Tung Wah Hospital and its connection to the Hong Kong colonial government in the context of public graves for Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asian countries (Ho, K.L., 2015).

In 2018, Hon-ming Yip scrutinised the Tung Wah Coffin Home’s Documents to explore the connection between the TWGH and charitable organisations in North America and South China. Focusing on the TWGH and American-Chinese clan associations, her analysis revealed how the organisation systematically managed the repatriation of overseas Chinese remains through Hong Kong between 1900 and 1949. The roles played by overseas and Hong Kong-based organisations as well as associations in the Guangdong region take centre stage in her investigation (Yip, 2018). Another of Yip’s articles draws from these archives to show the interplay between institutions and networks. Specifically, she explores the links between Chinese benevolent associations abroad and their home communities in China. Mapping out the origin and destination points, Yip illuminates the critical role played by worldwide Chinese benevolent associations in cultivating charitable networks within the globalised context of the Chinese community. Her study documents how these operations sustained connections between the host countries and the ancestral hometowns of overseas Chinese communities (Yip, 2020).


6 Conclusion

This literature review underscores the global network and part played by the TWGH in connecting overseas and local communities in Chinese diaspora history. The contributions highlight Hong Kong’s vital position for the Chinese diaspora and the importance of the intersection of mainland China, Hong Kong and the US in this history. It is noteworthy that these studies, based on the archives of the TWGH, exhibit commonalities in their conclusions and
approaches, at times echoing the findings of Elizabeth Sinn, Hiroyuki Hokari and Hon-ming Yip (Hokari, 2015).

A notable limitation of the current research is its heavy dependence on Chinese and English material. Although the predominance of Chinese-language documents from the TWGH has meant the foregrounding of Chinese scholars, contributions from scholars outside the Chinese and English language domains have been overlooked. For instance, the valuable insights that Japanese scholars could offer in their native language are regrettably disregarded (Shiba, 2002; Yuko and Serizawa, 2017; Kadonaga, 2013). Similarly, the unexplored potential of Spanish-language documents from Central and South America presents an opportunity for Chinese scholars to expand their investigative scope. Currently, there is a gap in the comprehensive understanding of overseas Chinese history, in that the perspectives and resources offered by Japanese and Spanish-language materials are not adequately integrated into the existing body of research. Addressing this gap would enrich the overall scholarly discourse and contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive analysis of the TWGH and its global connections.

Recent developments have considerably expanded the avenues for research. In 2021, the Arizona State University Library established the ‘Chinese Immigrants in Cuba: Documents from the James and Ana Melikian Collection’. This collection includes Spanish-language original documents, manuscripts and photographs pertaining to Chinese labourers and their communities in Cuba from the 1840s to the 1890s. Similarly, the Brown University Library introduced the ‘Cuban Slavery Documents’, which contain letters and identification documents of Cuban-Chinese labourers, from 1820 to 1892. Additionally, the University of Miami Libraries’ Research Guide, titled ‘Chinese Cuba’, provides comprehensive insights into research materials, books, articles and online resources pertaining to the Chinese population in Cuba. (For additional information on the Chinese in Cuba, see López, 2013, and Louis, 2021.) The amalgamation of information from these sources, along with the Tung Wah Coffin Home’s Documents, holds the potential for a more holistic and diverse understanding. Concurrently, parallels may emerge between Chinese associations and charitable organisations in San Francisco and Havana regarding their relationship with the TWGH and their strategies for handling ancestral remains. Exploring these connections could yield valuable insights into the
broader global context of Chinese diaspora history and the parts played by organisations such as the TWGH in different geographical locations.

Although the existing research predominantly focuses on the nexus of the TWGH and overseas Chinese communities in North America, particularly San Francisco, the TWGH archives reveal interactions with overseas Chinese associations and organisations beyond North America. Regions such as Central and South America, including Cuba, Mexico and Peru, have received comparatively less attention. Despite the existence of research on the history of Chinese labourers from the late Qing dynasty in Central and South America and Southeast Asia, discussions regarding the repatriation of Chinese remains from these regions remain limited. This contrasts with the extensive research on the return of Chinese immigrants’ remains from San Francisco to China. Addressing this disparity in research focus would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the global dynamics surrounding the TWGH and its engagements with overseas Chinese communities in diverse geographical contexts.

Another limitation of the existing body of research is the exclusive reliance on a historical approach and perspective, with minimal incorporation of anthropological and archaeological studies for cross-corroboration. The absence of an anthropological viewpoint on overseas Chinese death rituals and concepts, coupled with the lack of tangible sources in the field of overseas Chinese archaeology, is conspicuous in the publications discussed. Over the past two decades, the field of overseas Chinese archaeology has emerged, focusing on material remains associated with individuals and communities of Chinese descent living abroad during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ross, 2014). For a comprehensive introduction to the field of overseas Chinese archaeology, see Casey and Ritchie, 2003; Voss, 2005; Smith, 2006; Schulz and Allen, 2008; Voss and Allen, 2008; González-Tennant, 2011; Wegars, 2016. Although some of this work investigates Chinese remains and cemeteries abroad (Abraham and Wegars, 2003, 2005; Harrod and Crandall, 2015; Li, 2015), overseas Chinese archaeology provides a unique angle to explore how Chinese communities in the diaspora managed remains in practice, beyond recorded archives. For instance, some Chinese individuals expressed no desire to return to their hometown even in their old age, choosing instead to be buried in the United States (Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2020; Farkas and Praetzellis, 2000). This topic is worth exploring in depth from different angles. In addition, in general, archaeologists have limited proficiency in the Chinese languages. The integration of historical, anthropological and archaeological studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how remains were managed in the US and other countries, the transition in Hong Kong and burials in hometowns. This interdisciplinary approach would enrich the scholarly discourse.
and offer a more nuanced perspective on the complex dynamics surrounding the TWGH and its engagements with overseas Chinese communities.

Notably, there are three avenues that require more extensive scholarly attention.

1. The establishment of relevant databases necessitates substantial resources, but the availability of accessible data, exemplified by the Tung Wah Coffin Home’s Documents, has considerably facilitated research efforts. Therefore, the establishment of databases housing original documents emerges as a critical step to advance related research.

2. Conducting surveys and gathering primary historical and archaeological data from burial sites in the United States, Australia, Southeast Asia and Central and South America is of utmost importance. Currently, there is a dearth of comprehensive research and collation of Chinese immigrant burial sites within these regions (Wegars, 2003).

3. The protection of data from overseas Chinese organisations and associations in the United States, Central and South America and Australia is at a precarious juncture. For example, several overseas Chinese associations and organisations in Havana have ceased operations as a result of declining Chinese populations. At present, the connections of the current generation of overseas Chinese with these associations and organisations are weakening. Consequently, there is an urgent need to preserve and leverage the existing records, including through personal interviews, and to engage in archival preservation that encompasses texts and images (Rose and Kennedy, 2020).

In conclusion, the domain of overseas Chinese history research holds substantial opportunities for expansion. It is crucial to underscore the importance of multilingual sources and robust data collection and of broadening research horizons to include Central and South America, Australia and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, conducting comparative studies of burial practices and connections with the TWGH across different regions and cities would enhance our understanding of the integral role played by the TWGH in the history of the Chinese diaspora. The online accessibility of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Archives has notably enriched resources and convenience for scholars. Anticipated forthcoming research endeavours are expected to yield further breakthroughs and unveil new discoveries within this dynamic field.
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