



Barkerville's Travelling Exhibit to China:

Who Am I? 我是谁?

Bridging the Pacific – From Guangdong to Barkerville and Back

Exhibit Overview

February 2011

THE PROJECT

In response to interest expressed by several institutions in China, Barkerville is developing an exhibit consisting of Cariboo photographs that depict the lives of Chinese in the region. These will be complemented by three dioramas, an interactive computer kiosk and a bilingual book.

This exhibit will examine the history of the Chinese people who came to Barkerville, British Columbia over a 100 year period to mine and carry out business. It will be about those who returned home to China and those who made new homes in Canada. Historic Barkerville photographs and the portraits of Chow Dong Hoy, a Chinese photographer, will be featured. The exhibit *Who Am I?* will explore these people's lives, aspirations and work. It will also ask the question: Who were they as individuals? History has treated them as a group and few details, including their names, have been recorded. The intent of the exhibit is to reach out to these people's descendants and gather stories to identify who they were, where they came from and went to, how they lived and when. By doing this, it is hoped that a greater understanding of the Chinese in the Cariboo will be achieved.

Work on this exhibit will begin as soon as possible. Upon its completion in the spring of 2012, the exhibit will first be showcased in Prince George, in conjunction with the UNBC Academic Symposium, before travelling to China. The symposium's focus will be Barkerville, which celebrates its 150th anniversary that year. Preliminary discussions are taking place in regard to potential exhibit venues in China. The exhibit is expected to tour for a year to 18 months to places such as Hong Kong, Taishan, Kaiping, Jiangmen and Guangzhou.

CONNECTION TO CHINA

During the Cariboo Gold Rush, thousands of people from all over the world stampeded up the Fraser River to Barkerville in search of gold. One of the largest migrations was from the Wuyi County districts in Guangdong province in southern China. The Chinese, almost exclusively men, were involved in many mining ventures and businesses, often as labourers.

Barkerville's beautifully preserved Chinatown, its Chinese cemetery and its extensive collection of archival records, photographs, and artifacts – many brought to the Cariboo by immigrants from Guangdong – now comprise the oldest and largest collection of Chinese buildings and artifacts in North America. This includes the largest collection of pre-1900 written documents that are specific to North American activities and the oldest Chee Kung Tong building in Canada, which was designated as a National Historic Site of Canada in 2009. As western North America's largest living history museum, Barkerville is indeed rich in Chinese-Canadian history.

Today, the people in Guangdong Province still feel incredibly connected to the "Overseas Chinese" who left Guangdong in the 19th and early 20th century. The money they sent back to their families and to support a variety of charitable organizations changed the face of Guangdong, resulting in significant economic and social development. Much of the interest is on a more personal level, though. There is a sincere desire to know more about the emigrants: the work they did, how they lived, and where their remains were buried. Nearly 75% of the men who came to North America never returned, but many Chinese have at least one such ancestor who continued to send familial support to China.

Barkerville's collections have an increasingly important role to play in building bridges between cultures and linking our past to our future. Barkerville has been praised by Chinese officials for its excellence in preserving and presenting the history of the Chinese immigrants. The buildings, photographs and archival material tell stories that have been lost on the other side of the Pacific.



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Cultural exchanges, an important part of sharing historical, social and economic perspectives, have begun. The next step to increasing understanding and deepening our heritage connections is through a program of travelling exhibits and academic exchanges. Advantageous outcomes of cultural projects, specifically this exhibit, are:

- the creation of links for research and communication with museums and academic institutions on both sides of the Pacific, leading to information exchanges that will increase our understanding of the Chinese collections held in museums across Canada as well as our understanding of the experiences of early Chinese immigrants in British Columbia and Canada;
- improved awareness of Canada and British Columbia in China, which is an asset for developing commercial linkages;
- the exhibit exemplifies the success of Barkerville in interpreting the Chinese experience in Canada– one of the few museums in Canada to do so, and certainly the first– and promotional flyers can become an important component for all levels of government as well as private companies to include in their trade missions to China;
- with Canada's new Approved Destination Status with China, the exhibit will raise awareness of Barkerville as the anchor tourism destination in northern BC and an important cultural destination for all Chinese tourists.

Barkerville has become particularly important to the City of Prince George, which is twinning with Jiangmen in Guangdong Province. Jiangmen is in the heart of the Wuyi District from which the Chinese miners in Barkerville originated. Opening the exhibit in Prince George for a "send off" to China will be a symbolic gesture that can strengthen that relationship. A satellite exhibit has been proposed to reside permanently in the Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum in Jiangmen, again a gesture that will strengthen the cultural relationship between the two cities. Additionally, as Prince George looks for new markets for their International Airport, Barkerville can be an important resource.

As British Columbia looks to China for new markets, Barkerville's connection to China is an asset. Barkerville presents an opportunity to showcase British Columbia overseas and contribute to British Columbia's Pacific Gateway goals.

Tentative Schedule for Barkerville Exhibit Travelling to Hong Kong/Macau and China:

Hong Kong/Macau	August – September, 2012
Guangzhou	October – November, 2012
Jiangmen	December 2012 – February, 2013
Taishan	March - April, 2013
Kaiping	May – June, 2013

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