



# Video Story Transcript

## Chinese Immigrants Help Complete the Transcontinental Railroad

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://youtu.be/z-vXZuprI-A>

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Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, my name is Alton Takiyama-Chung. The story you are about to hear is an excerpt of a larger piece of what I call a Letter from Gold Mountain and I will become a character in the story named Ming Wong.

[replicated Chinese accent]

Hello, my name is Wong Ming, but here you say Ming Wong. 1850 - I'm 17 years old and in my village that district around my village that Taishan district in Guangdong province near the big city Canton in China. Too much rain - eh flooding! Harvest bad. Everyone starving.

Then some Chinese people come back from this strange land called Gam Saan - Gold Mountain, America. They have lots of money. Ooh, best friend Tong Sung, me, others in the village we think maybe we take chance. Maybe we go Gam Saan make money send money back to family in China. Then maybe after a few years we come back to village.

Entire family gather money. Have just enough to buy one ticket to send me Gam Saan. Come the day Tong Sung, other friends, me, we walk. Three days we walk to big city Canton. Canton big port city. Ships go all over world. We get on big boat go Gam Saan. We arrived in Gam Saan, America - San Francisco, California. We try get some jobs, but after a while we send money back China.

Then this Chinese man come in town and say, Oh, need 40 Chinese men to work on big project called railroad. This man named Ing Low, but everyone call him No Thumb 'cuz his left hand no thumb. Heh, heh!

We ask him what this railroad? What that? He say, "Oh, you know woo, woo, woo." [makes sound like a train whistle].

Woo, woo, what this woo, woo?

Ha, ha, that steam whistle for the train!

He say he getting together a gang of about 40 Chinese men. He say he make sure that we get Chinese food, we get rice, and we get paid. And he say if anything bad happen. You have accident - you die, anything bad happens, he make sure your bones get shipped back to China. Oh, that last part very important, because, you know, we far from home. We die our spirits will be restless until our bones can rest with the bones of our ancestors back in China in the graveyard in our village. So, me and Sung Tong, we sign up.

Mr. No Thumb say, Oh, Low Fun Westerners – call us Chinese Coolies he said. They also call us Celestials or moon eyes or John Chinaman. He say no get fire neck. No get angry. He say, pretend pig eat tiger. Pretend be simple but be clever.

You know building railroad, hoh, hard work! First you gotta make the ground flat. Then you gotta put all the small rocks. Then you get these big pieces of wood all same size. They call them railroad ties. Then you push 'em down inside the small rocks to make them flat. Then 5, 6 guys pick up big heavy steel rail carry 'em all. Position – drop 'em on top of railroad ties. Tunk! Then you get these big iron spikes you pound 'em inside the railroad ties to hold down the steel rails so steel rail don't move. Tunk, Tunk, Tunk!! You do the same thing on other side another steel rail. Now you've got two steel rail. That's what the choo choo - the train roll on top.

And after you get 'em down, do 'em all over again. Oh, in the broiling sun, in the biting wind, in the freezing cold. Trees in the way, cut them down! Stream in the way - build a bridge!

Winter time Sierra Nevada Mountains. Hoh, snow, so much snow. Higher than I can reach. We gotta dig tunnel under the snow to get to where we need to work. We sleep in these wooden shacks and then we gotta crawl to these tunnels. Dark you know. So we got to get lantern. So you crawl to the tunnel. You get to where you work. End of day, you crawl back. All the time you hoping the tunnel doesn't collapse on top you or the big, big snow doesn't come down mountain and crush you. Sometimes can dig out. Sometimes, hoh, no can.

And cold! Ooh, very cold! Many men die – frozen!

Then we have to go dig tunnels through the mountains, so the trees can go through... solid rock.

We gotta use explosives. Drill hole inside rock... put in explosive... put in fuse...light fuse – runaway! Hoh!!

Many things can go wrong.

Low Fun, Westerners said, Chinaman's chance when things no look so good. It means no chance. No hope.

Me no like – PCHHH! [makes explosion sound]

If something bad happened and you die, hmm, they dig hole for you. Put you inside. Then they write your name and your village name on a piece of paper. Put 'em in ceramic jar. Put 'em inside, bury with you. Cover

you up. Mark your grave. After a while when you're nothing but bones, they dig you back up send your bones back to village China.

Finally, we get to this place called Promontory, Utah. Ooooh, everybody happy. We meet the other company building train from other side of country. Ooooh, everybody happy. Big party. Best Chinese workers asked to put in the last rail. Carry the big rail in. And then they start pounding the last spikes.

And these important Low Fun, important white people come and they finish pounding spikes. Then some Chinese get invited to special lunch with important Low Fun in this special dining car. Oh, and the most important Low Fun come. They take all of us Chinese were working. Oh, everybody happy. Big party!

But, railroad finish, we gotta look for new job. Some like No Thumb, he can go find job with railroad doing other things. Some people go back San Francisco. Some go back China.

Me and Tong Sun, we decide go someplace else. Tong Sung say he stick with me because I Lucky. He say I need him to keep me out of trouble. We hear about this other place called Seattle. So, we head on up to Washington state. And what happened to us there. Well that's another story.