

THE MARKET STREET CHINATOWN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT: APPLIED RESEARCH IN THE UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

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The first phase of the re-curation and analysis of the Market Street Chinatown collection is being undertaken as part of a laboratory methods course taught in Winter Quarter 2003 at Stanford University. Through a "coaching" approach to classroom learning, students apply topics covered in traditional lectures and readings through hands-on participation in archaeological research – a process that culminates in the development of independent student research projects. Fieldtrips, guest lectures, public events, and a project website forge connections between the classroom and the communities and agencies involved in the larger project. Perhaps most importantly, conducting research on an orphaned collection leads students to engage with broader ethical and methodological issues in archaeology and cultural resource management.

The Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project is a research and education program developed to catalog, analyze, and curate a remarkable collection of artifacts that were excavated in 1985 and 1986 in downtown San José California. The City of San José Redevelopment Agency funded excavations at the site in 1985 and 1986, in advance of the construction of the Fairmont Hotel and the Silicon Valley Financial Center. After preliminary field analysis, the artifacts from the site were boxed and put in storage at a warehouse that was inaccessible to researchers and to the public.

The primary goal of the project is to catalog and analyze the collection and curate the materials in a way that they can once again be used for research and educational programs. This goal is being achieved through an innovative partnership between five very different organizations: the Stanford University Archaeology Center; two non-profit organizations, History San José and the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project; a private cultural resource management consulting firm, Past Forward, Inc.; and a government agency, the City of San José Redevelopment Agency. Additionally, several other historical archaeologists in California are generously sharing their expertise with the project; many of them participated in various aspects of the excavation, initial cataloging, and subsequent management of the collection.

Although this project is still in its first year, and research on the collection is just beginning, the

research team members felt that it was important for us to share even these early findings with the broader community of California archaeologists. This introductory presentation outlines the project's background and objectives and provides an overview of the project's achievements during the 2002-2003 academic year. Additional papers in this symposium provide a historical and cultural context for the study and present the findings of early research projects on the collection.

Project reports, research papers, and regular progress updates are available on the Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project website: <http://www.stanford.edu/~cengel/SJCT/>.

ADOPTING AN "ORPHANED" COLLECTION

The Market Street Chinatown was the heart of the Chinese Overseas community in the greater southern San Francisco Bay Area from its founding in the 1860s until its destruction by an arson fire on May 4, 1887. The Chinatown was located at the intersections of Market and San Fernando Streets in downtown San José, California. The archaeological site of this important community began to be investigated in the early 1980s as part of environmental studies conducted in preparation for a vast redevelopment of downtown San José. The site of the former Market Street Chinatown site was selected for construction of two key complexes: the Fairmont Hotel and the Silicon Valley Financial Center.

In 1985 and 1986, the San José Redevelopment Agency sponsored archaeological excavations at the site during the early stages of these construction projects. Archaeological Resource Services, a cultural resource management firm, was contracted to conduct these excavations. During the course of field research, the collection of artifacts from the Market Street Chinatown was described by archaeologists throughout California as one of the most significant Chinese overseas assemblages ever recovered in the American West. Members of the present-day Chinese community in San José, including some people who trace their ancestry to the Market Street Chinatown, also became involved in the project.

Despite the importance of this collection, full analysis of the artifacts and materials excavated from the Market Street collection never occurred. In the year following the excavations, Archaeological Resource Services sorted the artifacts and completed a preliminary hand-written catalog of the collection. In the late 1980s, the collection was transferred back to the City of San José Redevelopment Agency and was put in storage at the Stockton-Julian Street Warehouse in San José. In the 1990s, two firms - Archaeological Resource Management and Basin Research Associates, Inc. - were contracted by the City of San José and the San José Historical Museum to inventory the Market Street Chinatown collection along with other archaeological collections produced during the redevelopment projects of the mid 1980s. While these projects were important in maintaining current inventory of the collection, they were not sufficiently scoped to permit comprehensive curation and analysis of the artifacts. During the 1999 Woolen Mills Chinatown excavations sponsored by the California Department of Transportation, Mark Hylkema brought the Market Street materials to the attention of Rebecca Allen as a potential collection for comparative research.

Our primary goal in undertaking this project is to catalog and analyze the collection and curate the materials in a way that they can once again be used for research and educational programs. This new program was initiated by Alida Bray of History San José and Rebecca Allen of Past Forward, Inc. in cooperation with Chinese Historical Cultural Project and with financial support from the City of San José Redevelopment Agency. In Spring 2002, Rebecca Allen invited Barbara Voss of Stanford University to join the Project as an educational and research partner. The Market Street Chinatown collection was transferred to Voss's laboratory at Stanford University in Fall 2003.

CATALOGING AND ASSESSMENT: THE FIRST YEAR OF RESEARCH

Research on the collection began immediately. Our primary objectives during the first year of the project were to catalog a significant amount of the collection and, in doing so, to begin to assess the research potential of the collection. This was truly a team effort, one that required constant collaboration to develop a cataloging system that would meet the needs of all the partnering organizations, and that involved a massive amount of student and instructor labor in cataloging the materials.

During the first few months of the project, our efforts focused on understanding the organization of the collection and developing a context for its analysis and interpretation. We researched the history of the Market Street Chinatown and its excavation, combing through several file boxes of field notes, photos, memos, and reports. We learned that for the most part, the materials excavated from the site were recovered from hollow features such as privy pits or cisterns. Each of these contexts of recovery had been given a unique feature number that was embedded in the artifacts' field catalog numbers. Additionally, some features were excavated following natural and cultural strata, potentially allowing for intra-feature analysis in addition to broader comparative studies. As part of this contextual research, we also met with members of Chinese Historical and Cultural Project to discuss their interests in the collection. Our conversations focused on developing research themes of interest to all project partners, and on identifying ways that we can rapidly develop the collection for use in educational programs.

The collection itself is massive—over 250 file-sized boxes of densely packed artifacts. Even in this initial assessment, we needed to set priorities. Using an Access catalog database developed by Scott Baxter, we digitized the field catalog generated during the excavation of the site—over 5,000 records! We briefly inspected each box of artifacts, identifying the material types stored in each and also identifying and removing any deteriorating artifacts in need of immediate conservation measures. Our inspection of the collection led us to decide to focus our efforts on Lot 85-31, the materials excavated from the southern half of the Market Street Chinatown. We further narrowed our efforts to focus on the ceramics in the assemblage. The ceramics, we felt, were likely to provide the most information about the chronology of specific features and also were most easily used in cross-site comparisons with the findings of excavations at other Chinese overseas communities. Finally, we

developed a laboratory manual that standardized procedures for re-cataloging and re-housing the collection.

Cataloging began in earnest in January 2003, and continued through May 2003. During this period we cataloged all the Lot 85-31 ceramics, as well as a large number of the "small finds" (personal objects like toothbrushes, marbles, etc). In total we completed 2018 catalog records, representing represent more than 7000 individual artifacts. The data gathered in this cataloging effort formed the basis of student research projects on the collection, some of which are presented in this symposium. The findings of these student projects provide a tantalizing glimpse of the extraordinary research potential of this collection and its potential contribution to the study of Chinese immigration and culture in California.

Our final accomplishment in Spring 2003 was to prepare a collection of artifacts for use by History San José in educational programs. This collection of materials was drawn from the "surface finds" recovered by archaeological monitors during the construction of the Fairmont Hotel; they do not have any contextual information accompanying them and therefore lack research potential. This educational collection was returned to History San José on June 4, 2003 and is already being used in public outreach events.

WHAT'S NEXT? PLANS FOR CONTINUED RESEARCH

Our experiences during the 2002-2003 pilot year revealed that the archaeological study of the Market Street Chinatown would necessarily be a long-term, collaborative effort. By agreement of all the project partners, we expanded and extended the project so that this important assemblage can be studied and treated in a manner commensurate with its value. Specifically, we expanded the scope of the project to include not only continued study of Lot 85-31 but also Lots 86-36 and 88-91, which were excavated from the northern and western areas of the Market Street Chinatown site. We also extended the duration of the study. The first phase of the study, which simply involves continuing to re-house and re-catalog the collection, will likely take several years as it is being accomplished during undergraduate and graduate laboratory methods courses. During the cataloging phase, students will continue to undertake individual and group research projects at the undergraduate,

masters, and doctoral level. These projects will serve to productively explore the different research questions that can be addressed through study of the collection as a whole. Once the collection has been fully cataloged and is ready for permanent curation, it will be possible to undertake a comprehensive study of the collection, involving both comparative and contextual analyses. Throughout this process we will continue to communicate the results of our findings through research updates, student papers, and annual progress reports posted on our project website: <http://www.stanford.edu/~cengel/SJCT/>.

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