

**“OUR FIRST CHINESE”:
SOCIAL INTERACTION AND POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS
OF CHINESE COMMUNITIES AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY**

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The Chinese workforce was an integral part of the community on the land owned by Leland Stanford that would become Stanford University. Though their roles changed through time, their presence and activity helped shape the emerging town and university. Surface evidence of Chinese materials suggests that archaeologists can contribute to understanding this community, as has been done with other Bay Area Chinese populations. Historical resources such as student letters, census data, and memoirs reveal Stanford as a dynamic, though volatile, multiethnic community, and highlight the need to evaluate material from an archaeological perspective. This paper explores evidence of the post-Exclusion Act Chinese community at Stanford.

The Chinese community at Stanford University leading up to the turn of the twentieth century is new territory for archaeologists to address questions of identity formation and scales of community among California’s greater Chinese population.

Elsewhere, archaeological investigation has been applied to urban ethnic enclaves such as those of Market Street Chinatown San Jose (Voss 2005, 2008) and Sacramento’s Chinatown (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1997). Several recent projects have explored isolated communities such as coastal fishing villages and railroad workers in small towns (Van Bueren 2008; Warner 2012). However, a combination urban-rural lifestyle was common in western North America (Wong 2002; Yu 2001:19), although it has remained unexplored archaeologically. Archaeological work at Stanford would be an opportunity to explore the bridge between these urban and rural communities, and the scale of community between the multiple neighboring urban and rural centers.

The research conducted for this project so far has been based on documentary history, including maps, memoirs, letters, interviews, and photographs, in preparation for future survey and sampling that will move the project toward excavation. This research has been influenced by the records of the first joint meeting of the Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project (Voss 2005:434-435), a research and education program developed by the Stanford Archaeology Center, the Stanford University Department of Anthropology, History San Jose, Past Forward, Inc., and the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project. Attendees indicated that the current Chinese community members were particularly interested in the relationship of the Market Street Chinatown to the wider San Francisco Bay Area Chinese population, the social and business interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese people, and the intra-Chinese ethnicity of people living at the site.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

Almost all of the Chinese who came to Stanford to work were from the same district: Huangliang Du, modern-day Doumen County and its neighboring islands in Guangdong, in southern China (Lai 1998). Once one member of a kinship group took up residence in a location in California, it was common for that person to invite other members of his kinship group to live with him or nearby. Some of the first Chinese residents of the area included a large workforce employed by Peter Coutts in building roads in the mid-1870s (Kimball 1905:144) and a Chinese store-owner named Yuen Lung who opened his business in 1879 (McReynolds 1997).

Leland Stanford purchased the land for his stock farm in 1876, and also employed Chinese workers and house servants. According to interviews available from descendants of the Stanford employees, some of them had originally been railroad workers prior to coming to work on the Stanford stock farm (Cain 2011). Listed in the census, there were already about 70 Chinese people living in the area surrounding Stanford in 1880 (U.S. Census 1880), at a time when about 75,000, or about 8.7 percent of California's population, were Chinese in origin. Most of the other documentary sources are from the late 1880s and early 1890s, and by 1900 the Chinese population of the area was double that of 1880, making up just under 20 percent of all residents in Mayfield, the town next to Palo Alto, where some of the Stanford employees lived (U.S. Census 1900). The census itself likely underestimates even these numbers. The census taker for Mayfield swept a pen down some of the columns indicating numbers of Chinese residents but leaving out their names, employment, and all other information. The census is a biased document, but it is useful as a gauge for numbers, and most importantly for archaeologists, because it provides some of the locations where the Chinese were living and working at the time.

One-third of the stock farm's 150 staff were Chinese, and many were reported to live in bunkhouses on Stanford land (Elliot 1937:256). By the time the university opened in 1891, the Chinese had taken on a number of different professions in the Stanford area, mostly related to service industries. The memoirs of Ellen Coit Elliot, the wife of the first university provost, record many interactions between herself and the Chinese employees of the university. Fruit and vegetable sellers were common sights on the early campus, and would carry heavy baskets on poles across their shoulders, selling lettuces and strawberries (Elliot 1940:222). Chinese workmen, wearing blue shirts and overalls, built the first wooden sidewalks along Mayfield Road (Elliot 1940: 222). All of the cooks in the "halls" were Chinese, as well as many of the janitors during the first year (Allabach 1891). There was even a restaurant, run by a man named Mock Chong, that operated out of a building that had housed the workmen who built the university's main quad (Elliot 1937:209). Once some of the students had formed fraternities and moved into houses separate from the main residence hall, they continued to employ Chinese cooks and house servants (Kimball 1905:78). Other memoirs from that first year record "dozens of Chinese servants" in the houses of the Stanfords, at Timothy Hopkins's estate in Menlo Park, and at Escondite Cottage, the residence of University President David Starr Jordan (Elliot 1937:176; Svanevik and Burgett 2000).

There is some documentary evidence that directly concerns community formation on two scales: the interethnic community of the Chinese and non-Chinese employees at Stanford, and the intra-ethnic community of the Chinese population across the greater Bay Area. According to records left by stock farm employees, both the Chinese and non-Chinese laborers would come together for special occasions such as the christening of one of the Chinese children and the sharing of meals on holidays (Cain and Nilan 2003). The same records also suggest that the Chinese would leave work early on certain days, such as Chinese New Year. The influx of the Chinese population of the greater Bay Area into urban centers such as Market Street Chinatown is recorded elsewhere: only about one-quarter to one-third of the Chinese in Santa Clara County actually lived in the Chinatown itself. Those who lived outside would stay in Market Street on weekends, during festivals, and when they were between jobs (Yu 2001:19).

POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The Stanford campus contains several areas that can be linked in the historical record with Chinese and non-Chinese occupation and places of interaction, to be used as the basis for community-level comparative analysis. One of these is a Chinese boarding house first identified as a single square building in a map of the Palo Alto Stock Farm created for Senator Leland Stanford to show ranch operations between 1878 and 1879 (Stanford University Archives 1879:M153). The boarding house was located on the northwest edge of the stock farm, near the bank of San Francisquito Creek that divides Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. The land surrounding the boarding house is marked on the map as belonging to "China Camp." While the possibility that the structure's foundations and floor have survived is an important focus for survey and sampling, the agricultural workspace surrounding it may also yield materials related to the daily activity of the laborers. Trash disposal practices were not yet standardized at

Stanford before the turn of the twentieth century (Laura Jones, personal communication 2012), and the proximity of other known midden deposits associated with buildings on the campus suggests that the midden may be located not far from the structure.

A non-Chinese boarding house, south and slightly west in the sharp double-bend of San Francisquito Creek, is pictured, along with an enlarged view of the Chinese boarding house and neighboring vegetable garden, in a different map (Stanford University Archives 1880:M158). While other studies have acknowledged that the non-Chinese population frequented urban Chinese communities (Voss 2008), few studies have focused explicitly on the analysis of a mixed community. This structure has been previously excavated, and the brick foundation and a small number of artifacts were recovered (Jones et al. 1997). The survival of traces of this boarding house suggests a greater probability that remains of the Chinese boarding house are also recoverable.

Other potential locations from which to recover materials include middens associated with historic fraternities. The cooks and household servants who worked in the private residences and halls of the early university may have left behind evidence of their daily work as well as of their own practices of consumption, food storage, and trade. Such analysis has been successfully conducted before: Laurie Wilkie's work on the deposition surrounding the servant's entrance to the Zeta Psi house at the University of California, Berkeley, which included brown stoneware and faunal remains with traditionally Chinese butchery marks, allowed her to explore the gendered role of the Chinese servant in the fraternity (Wilkie 2010). Excavations that uncovered a comparable assemblage would allow archaeologists to explore similarities between other culturally hybrid populations across the Bay Area. Comparisons with the rich material recovered from Market Street Chinatown San Jose could allow for greater understanding of trade networks and larger-scale Chinese communities outside of urban centers.

CONCLUSION

Stanford was occupied at a crucial time period in the political reification of race and discrimination between 1876 and the early 1900s, during which multiple iterations of exclusion were passed into law. It also represents the urban/rural divide spatially and temporally, situated at the heart of the Bay Area Chinese communities and developing from a rural farm to a university over the course of three decades of occupation

Through using historically defined living spaces as a basis for comparison, the nature and spatial layout of materials relating to consumption, storage, and leisure can be compared to determine differences and similarities in access, trade, subsistence, and traditional practices. Most archaeological work related to Chinese-American populations has been contextual in nature, but with relatively few regional studies due to lack of comparable archaeological excavations. Because of the extensive archaeological work conducted at Market Street Chinatown, San Jose, this project has a strong basis for regional comparison of materials to determine kinship groups and trade networks visible through tracing material goods or organic remains to common suppliers or origins. Future archaeological work would be invaluable for exploring this hybrid culture at Stanford by providing material for analysis of trade, diet, and patterns of use in the landscape.

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