

EXCLUDE THE PEOPLE NOT THEIR POTS.

By Michael D. Meyer

ABSTRACT

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, exclusionary and discriminatory legislation was passed which not only limited, but reduced the Asian population in the United States. At the same time this legislation was being implemented, Euro-American households were using a variety of Asian ceramics. This paper considers Asian ceramics on some non-Asian sites in California and examines the contexts in which this apparent contradiction occurred.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about the working class of late 19th and early 20th century California, and the apparent inconsistencies between the rejection of Asian labor and the acceptance of Asian material culture. Materials recovered from archaeological sites indicate that despite sentiment against Asian labor, there was a strong desire for Asian goods, specifically ceramics. The types of ceramics purchased by the working class consisted not only of wares intended for export, but also of traditional forms such as Bamboo and celadon or "Winter Green" bowls, typically associated with Chinese sites.

Chinese ceramics have been arriving in California for centuries. Sherds recovered from Marin County sites have been associated with 16th century contact by Sir Francis Drake and Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeno (Chartkoff & Chartkoff 1984). Traders through the 19th century were still following the same routes across the Pacific supplying at various times Spanish, Mexican, Russian, English and American settlements with Asian goods (Mudge 1986).

By the California Gold Rush in 1849, there was a well established pattern of trade in the Pacific, through Hawaii and extending from Alaska to Peru. Non-Asians who rushed to California in search of gold were already familiar with Asian ceramics. Chinese porcelain had been imported into Europe since the 16th century and by the 18th century, porcelain was referred to in England as "China ware" [Old English Dictionary (OED)]. The high quality of Asian porcelain was admired, desired and imitated. Europeans not only copied Asian designs, but they also sent designs and patterns to be copied in the factories of China.

The overlap of designs was more profound once European potters were able to produce porcelain on their own.

The "Willow Pattern," the most common of all transferprints, was a product of the English potter Thomas Minton during the late 18th century. There are also numerous designs in similar motifs, such as "Two Temples," based on Chinese patterns such as Canton blue and white (Coysh & Henrywood 1982).

While Chinese ceramics were more common in Europe and the Americas, some Japanese porcelain was also available. The Dutch had been the primary European trading partner with Japan since the 16th century. However, Japan's isolation, limited trade and the higher cost of goods brought a virtual end to trade around 1740 (Battle 1990).

Japan remained isolated from the western world until 1853 when Japan's ports were opened by the United States. President Fillmore managed to sway the Emperor with his treaty request delivered by four naval warships. Other countries gained treaties using the same strategy and trade began in 1854 (Schiffer 1986).

At the time trade was reopened with Japan, Chinese ceramics had lost some of their popularity from the previous century. The Opium Wars, beginning in 1839, had initially reduced the volume of goods, but British victory subsequently opened a larger number of ports to trade. The infusion of Japanese goods to the world market revitalized the popularity of Chinese goods as well.

The influence of Japanese style in the Western World was momentous. Displays at the International Exhibitions of London 1862, Paris 1867, Vienna 1873 and Philadelphia 1876 helped shift tastes from Classical order toward stylized asymmetry (Dunbar 1997). The exchange of ideas between east and west also helped develop the Japanese industrial state (Battie 1990).

One of Japan's advisors for the 1876 exhibition was Dr. Gottfried Wagener, a German chemist. In 1870, he was employed by the Japanese to modernize their ceramics industry (Schiffer 1986). When trading had resumed in the 1850s, Japanese ceramics were relatively inexpensive due to the potters' low wages and subsidies paid to artisans. Modernization allowed production to meet an increasing demand, but market forces changed many traditional practices.

Like China a century before, Japan produced a variety of both traditional and Western ceramic designs. As demand increased, the technological change from hand painting to decals, stencilling and transfer printing allowed factories to increase production with fewer skilled workers. With a reliable supply, mail order retailers like Montgomery Ward and Butler Brothers carried Japanese ceramics in their catalogues.

In San Francisco, the ink manufacturing firm of Shattuck and Fletcher opened a large showroom of Asian goods. The export of ink was supplemented by the import of Asian decorative arts, cutting into the Chinatown merchants trade. By 1882 Shattuck and Fletcher had 10,000 square feet of showroom on Geary Street (Hittell 1882). About that time, the firm of Silber and Fleming also carried a variety of Chinese and Japanese goods for the middle class in Victorian England (Silber and Fleming 1990).

In California at the end of the 19th century, as Asian goods were increasing in demand, Asian labor was generally despised by the non-Asian work force. Anti-Chinese sentiment which began during the Gold Rush grew as the Chinese took over the labor for local industries, specifically cigar making, shoe making, and sewing trades (Mink 1986). There were many causes of anti-Chinese sentiment, not the least of which was racism due to differences of appearance and customs. Chinese labor was likened to slavery due to labor contracts and low wages. Yet while other laborers resented the devaluation of labor wages, employers were glad to have this pool of cheap

labor. Other criticism of the Chinese focused on issues of morality (Daniels 1988; Lyman 1970; Takaki 1989). Regardless of whether criticism was based on economics, culture or race, it was usually hypocritical.

San Francisco police were less likely to confront sedated opium smokers hidden in a den, than an alcohol induced pugilist roaming the streets at night. Public outcry against the opium dens only occurred after occupation by the youth of upper and middle class white society.

In 1862, Governor Leland Stanford was decrying the presence of Chinese in California. He called them "an inferior race" and sought immigration restrictions. His actions as president of the Central Pacific were contrary to his words as governor, as Stanford hired 14,000 Chinese laborers to build his railroad.

Once the transcontinental line was completed in 1869, over 10,000 Chinese laborers were left unemployed to compete for work with the existing labor force and new immigrants, now arriving by rail from the east. Labor contracts which had brought the Chinese to America never accounted for the return trip. Many of these men returned to San Francisco where the companies who had contracted their labor were located.

In the 1870s the population of San Francisco was about 20% Chinese and 20% Irish. Dennis Kearny, an Irish immigrant, was the leader of the Workingmen's Party in San Francisco. The Workingmen protested against both the Chinese and the capitalists who brought and hired them. The Central Pacific's directors on Nob Hill were prime targets for the Workingmen.

In 1877, Kearny led a protest at the mansion of Charles Crocker. Crocker, one of the Central Pacific's "Big Four" had tried to purchase the entire block his mansion occupied. His neighbor, an undertaker, refused to sell. In retaliation, Crocker built a 30 foot high "spite fence" around the neighbor's lot. The fence was perceived as an elitist affront to the Workingmen, who showed less concern that the undertaker, Mr. Yung, was Chinese (Decker 1978).

The desire for goods and trade placed Chinese merchants in a different class than laborers. In 1880, an immigration treaty with China limited laborers, but allowed merchants and tourists to enter the country. Chinese merchants

were the elite of Chinese society in California. Wealth provided power and merchants would have been remiss by failing to attract white customers, at least to some degree. The merchants' threat to white labor, came from those who were importing Chinese laborers. This threat was primarily due to demand of white business owners for inexpensive labor.

In the context of Capitalism and materialism, dislike of Asian labor and desire for Asian goods were not inconsistent. Asian material culture was part of a national and international ideology that people could buy into to be fashionable. Taste makers such as Charles Eastlake (1886) and merchants such as Silber and Fleming made these items part of the "Victorian" lifestyle. "Japanism" and "Chinamania" also were adapted to ideology of the Aesthetic Movement and were precursors to Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts Movement as well (Mackay 1974).

As the popularity of Japanese goods soared in the West, the popularity of Western goods soared in Japan. Japanese factories began producing their concept of "Western" goods in an attempt to gain the largest possible market share. Since traditional style had created the "Japanism" and "Chinamania" craze, it should be of little surprise that traditional Asian ceramic forms would be desired by consumers in California. Some of these pieces were probably cheaper than those created specifically for export sale, and are both found together in artifact assemblages.

The sites I refer to which contained Asian ceramics range from Castroville to Sacramento. While they do not represent the destitute working poor, they are also not representative of the white-

collar middle class. Dating from 1880 to 1910, the ethnicity and occupation of families associated with these artifacts include: from Castroville, an Irish laborer/farmer (Van Buren 1993); from Oakland, Anglo-American well drillers, iron molders and clerks, Canadian machinist, millman and ships carpenter, an American carpet layer born in New York, and an Irish teamster with English wife from Massachusetts (Cypress Project); from Sacramento, African-American barbers and dressmaker (Praetzellis & Praetzellis 1992).

While an association with Chinese laborers or servants may be possible (Van Buren 1993), it seems rather unlikely, when economically, these people were closer to being servants than having them, especially in a time of outward hostility toward Asian labor. Creating a correlation between Asian pots and Asian consumers without further evidence would lead to some interesting conclusions about similar quantities of Euro-American ceramics found on Chinese sites.

Instead, this pattern of Asian ceramics on non-Asian sites represents the desire for nifty stuff outweighing a consistent doctrine of racism. While white workers did not want competition from Asian labor, immigration law indicated that white society did want access to Asian goods from Asian merchants. The presence of these artifacts on white working class sites from a century ago indicates that the desire for material culture makes it rational to exclude a people, but not their pots.

REFERENCES CITED

Battle, David, editor

1990 *Sotheby's Concise Encyclopedia of Porcelain*. Conran Octopus, London.

Chartkoff, Joseph L. and Kerry Kona Chartkoff

1984 *The Archaeology of California*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Coysh, A.W. and R.K. Henrywood

1982 *The Dictionary of Blue and White Printed Pottery, 1780-1880*. Antique Collector's

Club Ltd. Baron Publishing, Woodbridge, England.

Cypress Project

n.d. Unpublished fieldnotes and research from the I-880 Cypress Freeway Replacement Project archaeological excavations. Reports in progress.

Daniels, Roger

1988 *Asian America*. University of Washington Press, Seattle.

- Decker, Peter R.
1978 *Fortunes and Failures*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Dunbar, Jean
1997 Out of Japan. *Preservation*. 49:1 pp.58-67.
- Eastlake, Charles
1986 *Hints on Household Taste: The Classic Handbook of Victorian Interior Design*. Reprint of Fourth edition 1876. Dover, New York.
- Hittell, John S.
1882 *The Commerce and Industries of the Pacific Coast of North America*. Second ed. A.L.Bancroft, San Francisco.
- Lyman, Stanford M.
1970 Strangers in the Cities: The Chinese on the Urban Frontier. In Charles Wollenberberg ed. *Ethnic Conflict in California History*, Tinnon-Brown, Los Angeles.
- Mackay, James
1974 *Turn-of-the-Century Antiques, an Encyclopedia*. E.P. Dutton & Co., New York.
- Mink, Gwendolyn
1986 *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Mudge, Jean McClure
1986 *Chinese Export Porcelain*. Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York.
- Praetzellis, Adrian and Mary Praetzellis
1992 *"We Were There Too": Archaeology of an African-American Family in Sacramento, California*. Cultural Resources Facility, Anthropological Studies Center, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California.
- Schiffer, Nancy N.
1986 *Japanese Porcelain 1800-1950*. Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, Pennsylvania
- Silber & Fleming
1990 *The Silber and Fleming Glass and China Book*. Reprint. Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire, England.
- Takaki, Ronald
1989 *Strangers From a Different Shore*. Penguin, New York.
- Van Buren, Thad M.
1993 Privy to the Role of Choice in Ethnicity: Some Thoughts on the Lives of the Castroville Haggartys. Paper presented at the Society of California Archaeology Annual Meeting, Asilomar.