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FINDING COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF EXCLUSION

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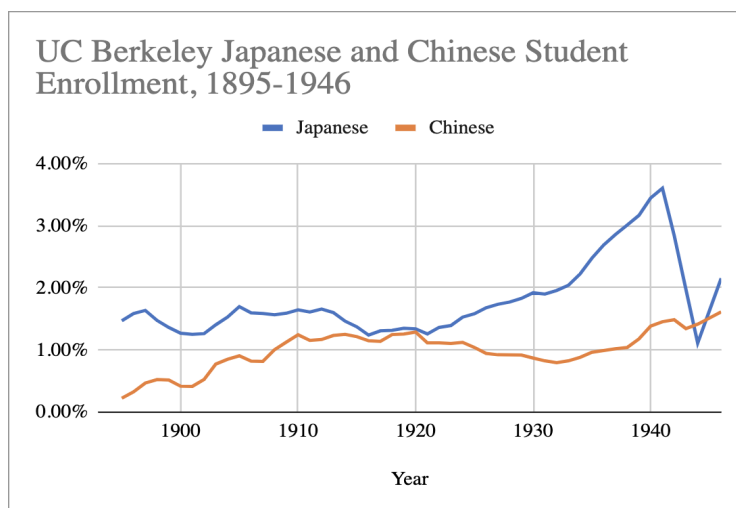
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JAPANESE AND CHINESE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AT BERKELEY
FROM 1900 TO 1946: FINDING COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF
EXCLUSION

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In 1872, University of California Regent Edward Tompkins endowed forty-seven acres of land in Oakland to eventually be sold to fund a professorship of “Oriental” languages and literature (Chun 1). Tompkins recognized the growing commerce between the United States and Asia, especially China and Japan. He believed it was important not only to improve American students’ understanding of East Asia for commercial purposes, but also to attract Asian students to study at the University of California. In 1896, the Englishman John Fryer was appointed as the first “Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature” (Chun 1). During his eighteen-year career at Berkeley, he taught courses such as introductory Mandarin and Cantonese and Chinese literature in translation. By 1900, there were small numbers of Japanese and Chinese students, enough to form the Oriental Union of Japanese and Chinese students, sponsored by Professor Fryer. Given that the “Oriental” studies department grouped Japanese and Chinese cultures under one department, and given the still small number of students of both ethnicities combined, it seemed natural to form a joint Japanese and Chinese organization.

Figure 1: UC Berkeley Japanese and Chinese Student Enrollment, 1895-1946



Source: Bleemer, Zachary. 2018. . "The UC ClioMetric History Project and Formatted Optical Character Recognition". CSHE Research and Occasional Papers Series 3.18.

The Oriental Union was active for only about two years, but it was the first of the many organizations for Japanese and Chinese students that followed. While some also participated in mainstream, white-dominated campus organizations, Japanese and Chinese students founded their own organizations. This essay will chronicle their development during the first half of the twentieth century, glancing only briefly at later developments in conclusion. This paper focuses on organizations founded on the Berkeley campus, but it will also touch on Berkeley chapters of national organizations, a few city-wide organizations unaffiliated with campus, and organizations founded at other California universities which found prominence at Berkeley. Only in its conclusion does this paper mention pan-Asian and other Asian organizations. Separate studies are necessary to detail the history of other Asian ethnic groups on campus.

Given that there is little scholarship on Chinese and Japanese student organizations at Berkeley, much less on Chinese and Japanese women's organizations, this essay will cover clubs which were initially predominantly male and later coeducational. Although the University of California enrolled "the highest number of American-born Chinese in the country" in the 1920s, not many Chinese women pursued college before World War II (Yung 130). There were 493 students of Japanese ancestry attending college in California in 1929, and only eighty-six of them were women (Takahashi 2). The Oriental Union and other early organizations, such as the Chinese Students Club and the Japanese Students Club, were, at least initially, male-dominated organizations. Despite their small numbers at Berkeley in the early 20th century, and despite often being excluded from both mainstream white-dominated organizations and Chinese and Japanese male-dominated organizations, Chinese and Japanese women sometimes held leadership roles in coeducational clubs, and they founded separate women's clubs. This essay will observe when women became part of these existing clubs when and if they became coeducational, as well as when women created women-only organizations.

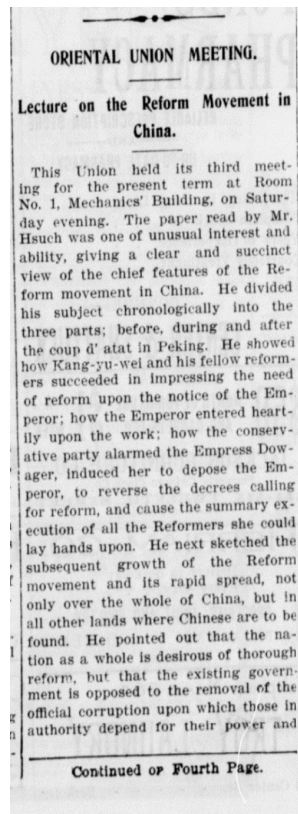
Beginning in the 1910s, Chinese and Japanese students participated in their own separate student organizations, largely unaffiliated with each other or with "Oriental" studies or other academic departments. Both Japanese and Chinese students faced housing discrimination in the city of Berkeley and exclusion from mainstream campus activities, but they also found support from Berkeley faculty members and student organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association. In some instances, Japanese student groups participated in collegiate athletics, where they played against white student organizations. Many Japanese and Chinese individuals were also part of popular student organizations such as the *Daily Californian*. There was little interest in inter-Asian organizations such as the Oriental Union.

During World War II, Japanese and Chinese people were pitted against each other as Japanese Americans became the victims of American hostility and Chinese people sought to differentiate themselves from Japanese people. Only in the late 1960s would Chinese, Japanese, and students of many other Asian ethnicities join to create a pan-Asian coalition and Asian American identity. This identity would have no relation to the previous Western study of the “Orient” and would instead focus on self-determination and student-based Ethnic Studies departments.

The Oriental Union

Given their small numbers, Asian students’ activities received little attention in mainstream university publications such as *The Daily Californian* and the *Blue and Gold* yearbooks. But nonetheless, they are occasionally mentioned. A column in the November 26th, 1900 issue of *The Daily Cal* reads: “ORIENTAL UNION FORMED. Japanese and Chinese Students Organize for Mutual Advancement” (“Oriental Union Formed” 1). The Oriental Union was founded at UC Berkeley but was open to high schoolers and other college students. The union was led by John Fryer and had “upwards of thirty” students in it by 1902 (*1902 Biennial Report of the President* 32- 33). At its meetings, Japanese and Chinese students, and any “Occidental” students who were interested, socialized and heard lectures on such topics as “The Reform Movement in China,” engaging in discussion afterwards (“Oriental Union Meeting” 1). White, Japanese, and Chinese students seem to have shared an interest in discussing the contemporary domestic affairs of both Japan and China.

Figure 2: “Oriental Union Meeting: Lecture on the Reform Movement in China”



Source: *The Daily Californian*, Tue Oct. 1, 1901

Though Fryer described having high expectations for the organization's future growth, the Oriental Union was apparently short-lived. A 1904 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* discusses interest in reviving the Oriental Union ("Revive Oriental Union" 13), so it must have ended after just a few years. Nevertheless, its founding shows unity and dialogue between Japanese and Chinese students, which became uncommon during the rest of the early-20th-century. Its multi-ethnic nature reflected the organization's ties with the young department of "Oriental" studies, in which John Fryer was the one professor hired to teach both Chinese and Japanese culture. Given that there was a single department for both cultures and a small number of Chinese and Japanese students, the Oriental Union was the natural product of a collaboration between the only Asian-affiliated professor and the only Asians at the university.

In the 1900 issue of the *Blue and Gold* yearbook, Fryer describes the scarcity of Japanese and Chinese students at the University of California, and he calls for the university to take initiative in attracting “Oriental” students (*The Blue and Gold* v26 26). A number of Japanese and Chinese students were affiliated with the Oriental Department as teachers of language courses, but as shown by the establishment of the Oriental Union and by listings in the student register, there were also Asian students in other departments (Berkeley, University of California, *Register* 1901).

Chinese Students Organizations

Most or all of the members of the Oriental Union’s executive committee were men, and those mentioned in the Daily Cal as participants in discussion were male. Another organization, the Berkeley Chinese Students’ Association, existed by 1910. It is similarly unclear whether this was a co-educational association or exclusively male, but it was almost certainly predominantly male. The Association established the Chinese House Club in 1910 to build a permanent residence for male club members, and membership included students in Berkeley preparatory schools (“House Club is Formed” 3). The Oriental Union and the Chinese Students’ Association’s inclusion of local high school students indicates the integration of Chinese university students’ social life with that of the surrounding Chinese community.



Figure 3: "House Club is Formed by Chinese Students" Source: *The Daily Californian*, Thu Oct. 20, 1910

In 1902, "twenty-three students from Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco met" and organized the Pacific Coast Chinese Students' Alliance. (Bieler, "*Patriots: or 'Traitors'*" 171). This is the first Chinese or Japanese American student organization we can identify as coeducational; both women and men students assumed leadership positions. Among many other female leaders, there was a woman from the University of California in the editorial department of the CSA's publication, *The Chinese Students' Monthly*, in 1913 ("Editorial Department," *The Chinese Students' Monthly* 1913 10) and a woman Vice President of the UC chapter in 1923 ("University of California," *The Chinese Students' Monthly* 1923, 73). This bay area organization was the first of multiple regional Chinese Students' Alliance chapters, and a Berkeley city club was established in 1904 (Bieler, *Patriots or Traitors* 171). A nationwide alliance between these regional chapters was established in 1911. By 1914, there was a University of California Chapter (*The Chinese Students' Monthly* 1914, 316) and an "Annual Conference of Orientals" ("Chinese Students Now in Convention" 18). The nationwide alliance ended in 1931, "leaving only local clubs as a residue" (Bieler, *Patriots or Traitors* 172).

Another organization, the Chinese Students Club, founded in 1913, initially had only male members, but included women by 1921 (“Other Voices” 101). The 1922 *Blue and Gold* yearbook gives the address of the club on Etna Street and includes pictures of 42 members, including six women (*The Blue and Gold* v48 596-597). In the face of housing discrimination, the club gathered support and purchased a house from future University of California President, General David Barrows, in 1919. The clubhouse continued to provide low-cost housing to Chinese students until the early 1960s, when it was sold as housing discrimination abated. (“Chapter History,” Chinese Chapter, Cal Alumni Association).

Figure 4: “Chinese Students Club”



Source: *The Blue and Gold* v28, 1922, page 597

In the *Chinese Students Monthly*, it appears that the Chinese Students Club worked closely with the Chinese Students Alliance, often hosting delegates to the conferences of the Western chapter, which were held at Berkeley. President Wheeler showed support by allowing the use of the Campus.

Figure 5: “An Open Letter to the Delegates to the Annual Conference of Western Section of the Alliance”

An Open Letter to the Delegates to the Annual Conference of Western Section of the Alliance

Members of the University of California Club have been most active in Alliance Work and past conferences; in fact, among them have been some of the pioneers of the Chinese Students' Alliance in the United States of America. Inspired by such precedents, the local Chinese Students' Club appreciates the honor of being host to delegates to the Conference of the Western Section, which will be held at Berkeley, Cal., from August 5 to 8, inclusive. We rejoice in this privilege, especially as this is the first Conference held outside the busy city of San Francisco. On hearing of this gathering, President Wheeler of the University sent us his heartiest wishes of success, besides privilege to use the Campus.

Source: The Chinese Students' Monthly. Chinese Students' Alliance, 1914, 629

Facing exclusion from white fraternities and sororities, Chinese students created their own organizations which emulated Greek life by adopting letters and forming their own chapters and traditions. Six Chinese men established Pi Alpha Phi at UC Berkeley in 1929, emphasizing “Asian American Awareness” as one of their core values (“History,” Pi Alpha Phi). The first Chinese women’s student organization in the region, Sigma Omicron Pi, was established in 1930 at San Francisco State University. A sorority for Chinese women, Sigma Omicron Pi became inactive in 1941. It was reestablished at Berkeley in 1946, and it is currently a pan-Asian sorority, made up of women from many different ethnic backgrounds. Its founding members at San Francisco State University were all Chinese (“Our Story”), and it is unclear when the

sorority shifted to include other ethnicities. In 1953, it was still a Chinese women's sorority ("Other Voices" 101). There is very little archival material that indicates the early activities of the sorority (Lim 229).

The Chinese student organizations practiced self-help while fundraising for their clubhouses and organizing events and conferences, but they also found support from faculty members such as John Fryer in the earlier years of the 20th century, university President Barrows when he sold the Chinese Students Club a house in 1919, and President Wheeler in his approval of campus use for the Chinese Students' Alliance conference. It seems that as the population of Chinese women student increased, their presence in existing student clubs increased as well.

The YWCA

The Young Women's Christian Association also showed support for Asian students, and they were able to directly petition the student government against housing discrimination. Initially focused on activities such as Bible studies for students, the Young Women's Christian Association came to concentrate on service for the Berkeley community. In 1915, a foreign students' group was established, centered on Christian activities. As this was before the building of International House, this "Foreign Foyer" was an important center for minority students, especially Asians, including both newcomers to the U.S. and second and third generation students. In 1924, the National YWCA decided that rather than having the "Foreign Foyer" as a separate chapter, the organization as a whole should consider itself an international student association (Clemens 15). In 1941, YWCA members advocated against racist real estate covenants and boarding houses which refused to serve minorities, and they "convinced the ASUC [Associated Students University of California] to endorse a resolution opposing racist and

religious discrimination in student housing” (Dorn 557). They were one of the few early, mainstream organizations to sponsor activities which included Asian students, and they were vocal against the racist housing discrimination which consistently impacted Asian students.

Japanese Student Organizations

The Japanese Students Club, like its Chinese counterpart, was also organized in 1913, was predominantly male, and raised funds for a clubhouse. Euclid Hall became their center for housing and socialization in the 1920s. A 1919 volume of the monthly journal, *The Japan Review*, reported that the club was “as thriving as ever.” It is unclear whether the club welcomed female members, but the article reports that the university enrolled 23 new Japanese freshmen, 3 of whom were women (“Japanese Students In America” 27). The club was included in campus-wide fraternity activities, such as scholarly rankings and inter-fraternity baseball tournaments (“Phi Pi Phi Defaults to Phi Psis” 3). One member describes calling themselves “Jappa Sappa Chi” and wanting to fit in with the Hellenic societies, which excluded them (“From the first dorms in 1929”).

Daily Cal articles from September of 1923 describe solidarity between the Japanese Students Club and the rest of the campus as students raised funds to send aid to Japan after the... Tokyo-Yokohama earthquake (“Japan Gave to Us in 1906”). *The Chinese Students’ Monthly* reported that the Chinese Students Club cooperated with campus organizations in “contributing all it could” towards the Japanese Relief Fund (*The Chinese Students’ Monthly* 1923, 72). The university community sympathized with Japanese students whose studies were disrupted by the crisis back home.

While the Chinese Students Club became coeducational, Japanese women founded their own club in the 1920s. Lillian Matsumoto, Class of 1933, reported in an oral history that there were about fifteen to twenty Nisei women students during her time at Berkeley. A Japanese Women's Students Club was founded in 1928. Matsumoto was in a group of five or six Japanese women who were part of the emerging club in 1929 (Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women"). "The club hosted presentations and held discussions; at one meeting, for example, Alice G. Hoyt, assistant to the dean of women, gave a talk about vocations open to Japanese women. While this discussion recognized the limited opportunities for Japanese women and demonstrated an effort by a member of administration to support them, it also reinforced the idea that only certain fields were suitable for Japanese women (*The Daily Californian*, Fri. Oct. 3).

Figure 6: "Japanese Women to Discuss Vocations"



Source: *The Daily Californian*, Fri Oct. 3

Members of JWSC participated in other popular campus organizations. They took part in activities offered by the Women's Athletic Association and International House and were members of organizations such as *The Daily Californian*. Yuriko Domoto '35 was 'a member of the JWSC, YWCA, and Prytanean [women's honor society]' and she "served on the WAA Council..." ("Other Voices" 103). Just as the Japanese Students' Club participated in collegiate athletics, the JWSC participated as a team in competitions with other members of the Women's Basketball league. Though the teams were not racially integrated, the Japanese students played on the same court as the white students and were apparently considered equal competitors.

Figure 7: "Basketball League to Compete Today"



Source: The Daily Californian, Tue March 1, 1938

By 1929, JWSC had started gathering funds to establish a chapter house on Hearst Avenue. In the early '30s, they purchased "the former Filipino Student Clubhouse on 2509 Hearst Street" (Takahashi 6) to establish a Japanese American women's dormitory, which

accommodated ten to twelve women (Matsumoto 9-11). By 1940, there were ninety-one members in JWSC (“Other Voices” 102).

Figure 8: UC Berkeley Japanese Women's Club Fall 1938



Source: “Japanese American Confinement Sites”

Within the Japanese community of the city of Berkeley, there was also a Nisei Students’ Club and a Young Women’s Buddhist Association, which merged with the Young Men’s Buddhist Association in 1934 to become “Berkeley Bussei.” In 1937, a dormitory called “Jichiryo” was established for Buddhist students (Berkeley Buddhist Temple, “Our Temple History”). Also city-wide, the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* mentions a 1940 game of basketball between the California School for the Deaf and the “Nissei Club” in “Berkeley City League play” (Franks 51).

The Japanese Women Students Club and the Chinese Students Club were distinct organizations, as were other Asian student organizations such as the Filipino Students Club. The early interest in revamping the Oriental Union and in a pan-East-Asian association was not evident at Berkeley in the 30s. Nationwide, as well, the Chinese students connected through their own publications, such as the *Chinese Students Monthly*, and the Japanese students with publications such as the *Japan Review*. However, the two groups faced similar struggles with

housing discrimination. They found some support along the way and fundraised to provide their own clubhouses or dormitories for Japanese and Chinese students in need.

World War II and Japanese Internment

Shortly after the war started between Japan and the US, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. This order allowed the military to declare the west coast a military zone and issue an order to all residents of Japanese descent, including American citizens, into internment camps. The order cut short about 500 Berkeley students' educations and confined them to remote locations (Kell). Internment impacted campus organizations, including the YWCA: by the time Roosevelt signed the order, "there were Japanese women in programs and on the advisory board" (Clemens 16) of the YWCA who were interned, among them advisory board member T.T. Hayashi (Dorn 557). YWCA students showed support for the Japanese students: they volunteered at the "registration and assembly point" at the Berkeley First Congregational Church at the beginning of the process, helping with childcare and paperwork (Clemens 16). White students from other campus organizations showed their support as well. The editor-in-chief of *The Daily Cal*, Mary Ogg, rebutted the American Legion Post Commander Leon Happell's calls for harsher treatment of the interned Japanese Americans. On the editorial page of the *Daily Cal*, she criticized the "intolerance, bigotry, and emotionalism" of the American Legion, calling it a "potentially dangerous organization" (Dorn 549).

The media promoted Chinese Americans, and other Asian ethnic groups, as the "good" Asians, loyal allies to the United States (Yung 250). In their oral histories, Yoshiko Uchida, a Japanese student, and Maggie Gee, a Chinese student, both describe how many Chinese students chose to wear small badges which read, "I am Chinese" (Gee and Uchida). Uchida and other

Japanese students asserted their identities as Americans in efforts to prove their loyalty. Some Chinese students as well went in for displays of American patriotism in efforts to prove their loyalty and differentiate themselves from the Japanese Americans. There was also increased tension between the Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans because of the Japanese invasions of China, and some Chinese Americans increased their solidarity with the Chinese people back in their or their parents' home country. Whether they were emphasizing their solidarity with America or China, Chinese people sought to present themselves to white Americans as the "good" Asians. Amidst this tension between the Chinese and the Japanese populations, and, more significantly, in the absence of Japanese students, there could be no such organization as the "Oriental Union."

After the war, many Japanese students had re-enrolled to finish their degrees by 1946. Both the Japanese and Chinese student populations continued to grow. The US was heading towards social changes which would welcome more Asian students onto college campuses, and by the mid-1950s, large-scale Asian immigration restrictions had been mostly repealed. The 1968 Civil Rights Act barred race-based housing discrimination (Wei 12). In 1970, 83% of 107,366 Asian Americans enrolled in higher education institutions were Chinese or Japanese (Wei 2). Asian American student activists joined other ethnic groups to create a coalition with liberal white Americans to form the Third World Liberation Front. Inspired by the militant Black Power movement, the TWLF fought against institutional racism which it claimed was the source of oppressed people's suffering both outside the U.S. and within. These students participated in Third World Strikes at San Francisco State College and at Berkeley (19 January 1969 to 27 March 1969) (Wei 15). The students fought to establish Ethnic Studies programs, including an Asian American studies program, which would challenge traditions of Eurocentric curriculum by

providing education on topics specifically relevant to people of color. Chinese and Japanese students recognized *Oriental* as a derogatory term (Yung xi).

Participation in the Asian American Movement, antiwar movements, and other grassroots organizations such as the Asian American Political Alliance (founded at Berkeley in 1968) unified Asian ethnic groups. Concurrently, the Asian American women's movement developed with few roots in the mainstream Western women's liberation movement. The Asian women's movement had arisen to challenge patriarchal structures present in the Asian American Movement, and it was able to endure because it welcomed women from many different Asian ethnic groups, including Pacific Islander women (Wei 72-100). By the 1970s, efforts to establish a pan-Asian community and political consciousness had become much more than the short-lived effort of the Oriental Union of 1900. Not only did the movements of the 60s and 70s welcome students of many more ethnicities than Chinese and Japanese, "Asian American" became its own political and personal identity. Clubs centered around specific ethnic groups continued to thrive, but pan-Asian identity became central to Asian students' participation in campus movements and organizations. This time, pan-Asian unity did not occur through a department of "Oriental" studies, but through student-created Ethnic Studies departments and dedication to self-empowerment and education which combatted Eurocentric intellectual imperialism.

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