

“Life and Vigor to the Hair”

Grooming Practices of the Market Street  
Chinatown Residents

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of hair care in Victorian Period sites may seem the most esoteric research topic one could study in an Overseas Chinese site, but it is exactly this aspect of personal hair grooming that has spurred my research into grooming practices of the Market Street Chinatown. My research project focused on the identification of Euro-American embossed bottles at the Market Street Chinatown site in an effort to discover hair care grooming practices of the Chinatown residents. Based on the relatively low amount of information available on Chinese grooming practices, deciphering what customs and norms were performed for hair care in the Chinatown was hard to isolate. Therefore, a study of Euro-American grooming products, recorded as having hair care utility, was undertaken to gauge the conceivable cultural influence of American and European neighbors on Market Street Chinese. Chinese grooming practices were considered but due to lack of information available on Chinese hair care no comparative analysis with Chinese hair care products was carried out in the study.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Chinese in California have had a long and often arduous history in California. From involvement with the Gold Rush of 1849 to the Railroad construction of the 1860's through 1870's, the Chinese have often been characterized as "heathen" with foreign values, dress, and language (Yu 2001: 20). Using this characterization anti-Chinese sentiment and activity abounded, ostracizing and forcing the segregation of the Chinese into their separate communities, the Chinatowns. In San Jose alone, there have existed four Chinatowns: Market Street, Vine Street, Woolen Mills, and Heinlerville Chinatown, created to foster Chinese customs and traditions in response to external harassment. Of the San Jose Chinatowns, one in particular will be examined, the Market Street Chinatown of San Jose.

The Market Street Chinatown grew from the large numbers of Chinese immigrants that had settled in or around the Santa Clara Valley. The Chinatown acted as a hub for local Chinese, accommodating shops, restaurants, lodging houses, gambling houses and other businesses (Yu 2001: 21). This Chinatown came to represent a cultural haven for the immigrant Chinese; a place of Chinese heritage, it preserved the values and

traditions of China in an alien setting. This however did not mean that this overseas Chinese site was an insular and confined community kept away from the larger dominant society. Using the Market Street Chinatown we see that the Chinese were not culturally impermeable, but were true to their roots while still functioning within a larger and customarily different setting. Chinese identity was sustained within the Market Street Chinatown but evidence of non-Chinese products, like Euro-American produced goods, implies that the residents of Market Street were open to other customs.

Cultural retention was a very important part of the Chinese lifestyle in San Jose's Chinatown, but the residents of Market Street also acknowledged that they were living in another country, one with different customs, traditions, and therefore different commodities. As the study "Assimilation of Chinese in America" showed, as more Chinese immigrated and greater immersion and time was spent in the dominant white culture there was an increase in assimilation and internalization of American norms (Fong 1974: 39). This does not indicate a total acquittal of the original norms, just an incorporation of new ones.

In its existence (1860-1887) Market Street Chinatown was inhabited by hundreds of residents, peaking at more than 1000 inhabitants around 1880 and serving more than 2500 people across the county (Yu 2001: 19). Within their localized sphere Chinatown residents were able to purchase and exchange commodities from China, all depending on their availability. Even with such close connections to China and the San Francisco Chinatown- a major hub for Chinese imports (Chang 2003: 77) there existed the possibility of experimentation with local foreign goods. These goods varied between food, beverages, medicinal ointments, and other personal effects. The Chinese practiced their own form of medicine, exercised oral hygiene, and participated in grooming rituals. Evidence of all these was found in the Market Street Chinatown collection (Voss 2005: 427) with articles that were both Chinese and not. This find correlates with the notion that as years passed and more Chinese settled in Chinatown and surrounding areas, their habits would change and modify to the new culture (Chang 2003: 108). In addition, Census information for 1870 and 1880 provides insight into Chinese interaction and communication with their non-Chinese neighbors, specifically the existence of a reciprocal business relationship between the San Francisco Chinatown and the rest of the

city as a supply and demand for labor, goods, and other services (Chinese Historical Society of America 1976: 85). If the residents of San Francisco's Chinatown could have such a symbiotic relationship with the rest of the city, there is no indication that language and cultural behaviors were not interchanged, as well as customary goods. Of the prevailing goods in nineteenth century urban centers, popular culture items of the Victorian Era such as beverages (soda water), fashionable attire (Western style shoes and suits), and hair products (hair tonic) would have very easily made their way into Chinatown life.

While the perception of the Victorian Period's propriety is commonly associated with the very orderly and clean behavior relating to manner of dress, gender roles, and public behavior; hair grooming practices are almost never considered. But contrary to common belief Victorian Hair Care was a larger and more publicized aspect of nineteenth century society than is often acknowledged. The wealth of materials published in the 1800s relating to hair care abounds; there exist many pamphlets guiding women and men on the correct way to comb the hair, the adequate soap with which to wash the hair, the manner by which styling the hair should be carried out, the number of times the hair should be trimmed, and what type of products were fitting for the grooming of the hair (Hair Care 1890). Not only this but the extent of publications' focus on the hair's anatomy, instructing people on the breakdown of roots, follicles, glands, and skin was remarkable taking the low importance of other hygiene practices, like oral health care, of the time (Douglas, Madeleine: Class Presentation March 13, 2007). Included in these brochures were claims on the most effective and "best products" available to the public, which were often times gross misrepresentations of the goods. These products would claim restoration of natural hair color from graying, "cures for balding", supplies of "energy and nourishment to the scalp" (Hair-Loss-Remedies) and other amazing treatments, while in effect were made up of mostly alcohol and vegetable based oils that irritated the skin more so than soothing it. For example, Lyon's Kathairon Hair Tonic consisted of 75% alcohol, 25% castor oil, with 240 grams of tincture of cantharides, and small amounts of tannin, and fragrant oils (Lyon's Kathairon Page). Products available in the Victorian Period and consequently in Chinatown, were manufactured prior to the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938, meaning that producers were under no

obligation to disclose actual product ingredients and could advertise freely on what their product claimed to do. The unknowing public, subject to Victorian pressures, readily bought these products in an effort to conform to period ideals.

In addition to false advertisement, the Victorian Era saw the advent of the patent office and the wide-use of patenting inventions, especially hair care creations (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia).

More so than simple washing and drying techniques the abundance of instructions, lessons, and products available for Victorian Hair was astounding and therefore finding evidence of hair care bottles in the Market Street Chinatown was a remarkable step towards deciphering the extent of Euro-American and Victorian Period influence on the San Jose Chinese.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This project aims to gain an understanding of the day-to-day life of the Market Street Chinese, with the intent to decipher the values and ideas associated with personal grooming and how these figure into the perception of Chinese by outsiders during that period. This research also aims to answer questions of assimilation by residents of Chinatown who perhaps incorporated certain methods or products of personal grooming into their lifestyle. My primary questions lie in the personal grooming activities of the Chinatown Chinese, specifically:

- What were the grooming practices like among the residents of Chinatown?
- What type of products did they use? Domestic or imports?
- How did these practices, if in any way, differ from practices from China?
- Where there any Euro-American influences on grooming practices in the Chinatown?

While these questions guided my approach to the collection they were not readily answerable through the finds, thus alternate background research into manufacture and hair care rituals was done to supplement the material data.

### METHODOLOGY

My research concentrated on locating and identifying Euro-American bottles, distinctive by their embossed labels imprinted on the bottles themselves. These bottles are notable for their resemblance to Euro-American 19<sup>th</sup> century sites. These bottles were markers for grooming, which was defined as: a method to keep a clean and maintained appearance, in regards to the hair. Bottles included in the search were any product that can be used on the hair either to revitalize, as a stimulant, as a sweet-smelling balm, or as an ointment. The research focused on hair tonic bottles, a Vaseline bottle, and a Florida Water bottle, and specifically on these products' hair maintenance qualities. Artifacts purposefully not considered for the project were: perfume bottles labeled for grooming but with no conclusive evidence of their use on the hair; medicine bottles-of which grooming bottles are often classified as; and tonic bottles that could be misrepresented as hair tonic products but are actually curative.

Both assemblages 85-31 and 86-36 of the site were searched in the pursuit for hair grooming bottles in the Market Street Chinatown. While at first the glass studied was only to be restricted to the 85-31 portion of the site, further analysis and little finds led me to expand my research boundaries and delve into the 86-36 assemblage. Of the bottles found, all of them came from the southern portion of the site, area labeled 85-31. Thus it can be assumed that the finds of this project include the entire site, and are comprehensive.

After identifying and cataloguing the bottles, I concentrated on exploring the bottle manufacturer, the history of the manufacturer, advertising technique, and manufacturing technique-mainly product composition and ingredients. Research into these was collected from historian and hobbyist publications and website postings.

The artifact locations were marked on the reference Sanborn Insurance Map, to detail concentration or lack of it within the Market Street. It also provided the position for certain grooming product consumption. Within this positioning, artifacts were compared to associated feature finds, that is, all grooming artifacts found in feature 24 were analyzed individually and in relation to other non-grooming finds. A count of the feature artifacts was made and from the percentage of grooming and grooming related artifacts was determined.

### ANALYSIS

The finds for the research consisted of seven bottles in the entire Market Street collection. All of which were found in the 85-31 half of the site. Figure 1 shows the location and dispersal of these. All items were found in wood-lined pits, classified by Archaeological Resource Services (ARS) as containing predominantly Chinese products. Based on the relatively low numbers of these bottles and the wide distribution pattern of them, it cannot be conclusively defined that there was an accumulation or patterning in the use of hair grooming products. In addition the marginal error of the Feature-Sanborn overlay map was 1 inch, which meant that it was not certain a feature was directly associated with its equivalent Sanborn building. Even without conclusive mapping evidence, not having an area of congregation of hair grooming bottles means that these products were used throughout 85-31, in an unrestricted pattern. The lack of an accumulation could indicate use by different members of the Chinatown in various locations across the southern portion.

In further analysis of the glass assemblage, manufacturer history and advertising technique was studied for each of the prevailing glass bottles. These were: the Lyon's Kathairon Hair Tonic bottles, the Chesebrough Vaseline bottle, and the Murray and Lanman Florida Water bottle. Interestingly enough the searches on these were conducted almost entirely through historical websites, where historians and collectors have posted a wealth of information and secondary sources have corroborated.

Lyon's hair tonic bottle for example was advertised as a cure for baldness and a product for the prevention of graying, all while producing soft and shiny hair (Hair-Loss-Remedies 2007). This product was invented by Emanuel Thomas Lyon in the year 1850 and later passed hands to Demas Barnes & Co (Lyon's Kathairon 2007).

The product was advertised as a cheap and effective way to cure many of the most common hair ailments, including itchy scalp, but after careful examination of the ingredient list, I found that this product did more to further irritate the skin than to actually alleviate it. For example in 1893 the Pharmaceutical Era printed two recipes for "Lyon's Kathairon." One formula of which was mentioned above contained much of the same ingredients as the following second recipe: 3 ounces of alcohol, 1 ounce of castor oil, 1 fluid dram of tincture cantharides, 20 minims of oil of bergamot, and 1 drop of

stronger water of ammonia (Lyon's Kathairon 2007). The presence of cantharides and tannin, which were dried beetle remains that produced blisters/redness and astringent plants used to tan leather, were contrarily adding to the problem rather than solving it. This could explain the relative dearth of hair tonic bottles in the site, even if Lyon's Kathairon was the most abundant Euro-American hair care product in the Market Street Chinatown, it may not have been an effective product for the Chinese.

Chesebrough Vaseline was first introduced to the market by chemist Robert Chesebrough, who in 1859 was the first to extract the key ingredient of petroleum jelly, petrolatum, from a substance left on oil drill rigs (Vaseline 2007). He later went on to name his find, Vaseline and proceeded to sell it as a cure for medicinal problems and a variety of other uses, one of which was pomade for the hair. Because of its odorless and colorless composition, Vaseline acted a great pomade, leaving no odd tint, smell or mark on the hair, aside from the its intended purpose of styling it.

Florida Water is a 19th century formula that blends an array of floral essential oils in a water-alcohol base. Recipes for Florida Water varied, but key ingredients such as rose water and alcohol were a staple to the formulas (Yronwode 2003). This product was used to as a perfume, while additionally scenting and refreshing the hair.

The bottle in our assemblage was a Murray and Lanman Florida Water Cologne bottle, fully embossed detailing manufacturer, product name, and production center (New York). Unfortunately the archaeological record was only able to recover the bottle without the heavily ornate label, but information from the label could easily be found through other sources. This Florida Water was mentioned in conjunction to a Chinese company competitor, the Two Girls Florida Water (Yronwode 2003). It was interesting to note that such a product existed in China, but was not found in the Market Street Chinatown.

The Florida Water bottle was found in the same feature (Feature 24) as most of the Lyon's Hair Tonic bottles, for a total of 222 artifacts found within Feature 24. Within this feature there were 5 classified grooming bottles-including those that were analyzed, making these 2.25% of the total assemblage, and 8.77% of glass assemblage. ARS described this feature as being made up of mostly ceramic fragments, but also including leather, glass and ferrous materials. It was interesting to find that of the 222 items only 5

items were explicitly labeled as “Anglo”, and did not include embossed bottles in this characterization. It is understandable why it was marked a Chinese feature.

Feature 24 was the largest of the features studied for this project, with Feature 27 second with 186 items and Feature 21 with 5 items. The associated grooming bottles found in each feature are listed in Table 1.

### INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

Due to the little knowledge of Chinese hair care it cannot be conclusively determined what grooming practices in the Market Street Chinatown were like. Given the low frequency of Euro-American embossed hair care bottles, it can be assumed that Victorian hair care products were integrated into Chinatown life, but were probably not important aspects of daily life. Seeing the amount of literature and attention given to Victorian Hair it was surprising to find that not much literature exists on Chinese hair care and that such a very small impact was made by Victorian hair products.

As I stated before the relative wide-dispersal of the artifacts across 85-31 is not conclusive as to product use patterns, but it does hint at the equal chance by all residents of the Chinatown of having access to these Euro-American goods. As an example Feature 24, the feature with the most grooming artifacts, a relation to housing or tenement presence is not conclusive but indication by the Sanborn map is strong that the area was most likely less commercial and more residential, letting me determine that of the bottles found more were used in a likely residential setting.

These finds compare to other work on overseas Chinese sites, mainly the Woolen Mills Chinatown of San Jose, one of the two successors of the Market Street Chinatown. The Woolen Mills Chinatown was in existence from 1887-1902, built after arson fire destroyed the Market Street Chinatown. Woolen Mills could be considered a contemporary of the Market Street, and models much of the same customs and behaviors of the Market Street Chinatown. This site was excavated in 2002.

Of the artifacts found in the Woolen Mills excavation 29 items were classified as Grooming Containers (Allen 2002: 169); I made use of all of their listed containers including those listed as intrusive and post-Chinatown because these may not have been

properly dated. Within the glass assemblage found at the Woolen Mills, both Chinese vials and American embossed bottles were found. This led to the conclusion that Woolen Mills was not an isolated and exotic community, but one that was complex and diversified incorporating Chinese and non-Chinese products into day-to-day life (Baxter and Allen 2002: 396). If a parallel can be drawn to the Woolen Mills collection, it is that Market Street was a complex community as well; made up of predominantly Chinese artifacts, but with inclusions of new and non-Chinese goods. While not stating that Market Street or Woolen Mills were integrated with their surroundings, it does hint at the communication between Chinese and non-Chinese customs, and using bottles could be one avenue of studying such an argument.

From excavations at the Riverside Chinatown, a study of ethnic bottle assemblages was carried out, with intent to decipher if bottles found at overseas Chinese sites were different from non-Chinese sites (Blanford 1987: 382). This study centered mainly on food and beverage bottle assemblages, but the findings can be applied to other glass bottle studies, such as grooming bottle studies. All assemblages studied were American overseas Chinese sites. The study came to the conclusion that in effect bottle assemblages are different in Chinese sites but do not conclusively state if sites were either ethnically stronger in Chinese behavior or showed a propensity for Chinese-American behavior (Blanford 1987: 228). Using these finds I would say that the same is true for the Market Street Chinatown; while a diverse assemblage and the presence of Euro-American goods hints at the possibility of assimilation, no conclusive argument can be stated about the empowerment of Chinese ethnic behavior (due to low frequency of bottles) or the move to assimilation into the American culture (due to the presence at all of Euro-American bottles).

My finds therefore show that the Chinese of Market Street were not impermeable to outside influence, but were open and had access to Euro-American goods. Chinatown was a sanctuary for Santa Clara Valley Chinese (Yu 2001: 20); a place of congregation and cultural expression for those people living inside and outside of its borders. Drawing from both the Woolen Mills and Riverside Chinatowns, Chinese overseas communities were not shielded communities but open districts of cultural preservation with communication with surrounding areas. Nothing can be said of the move towards

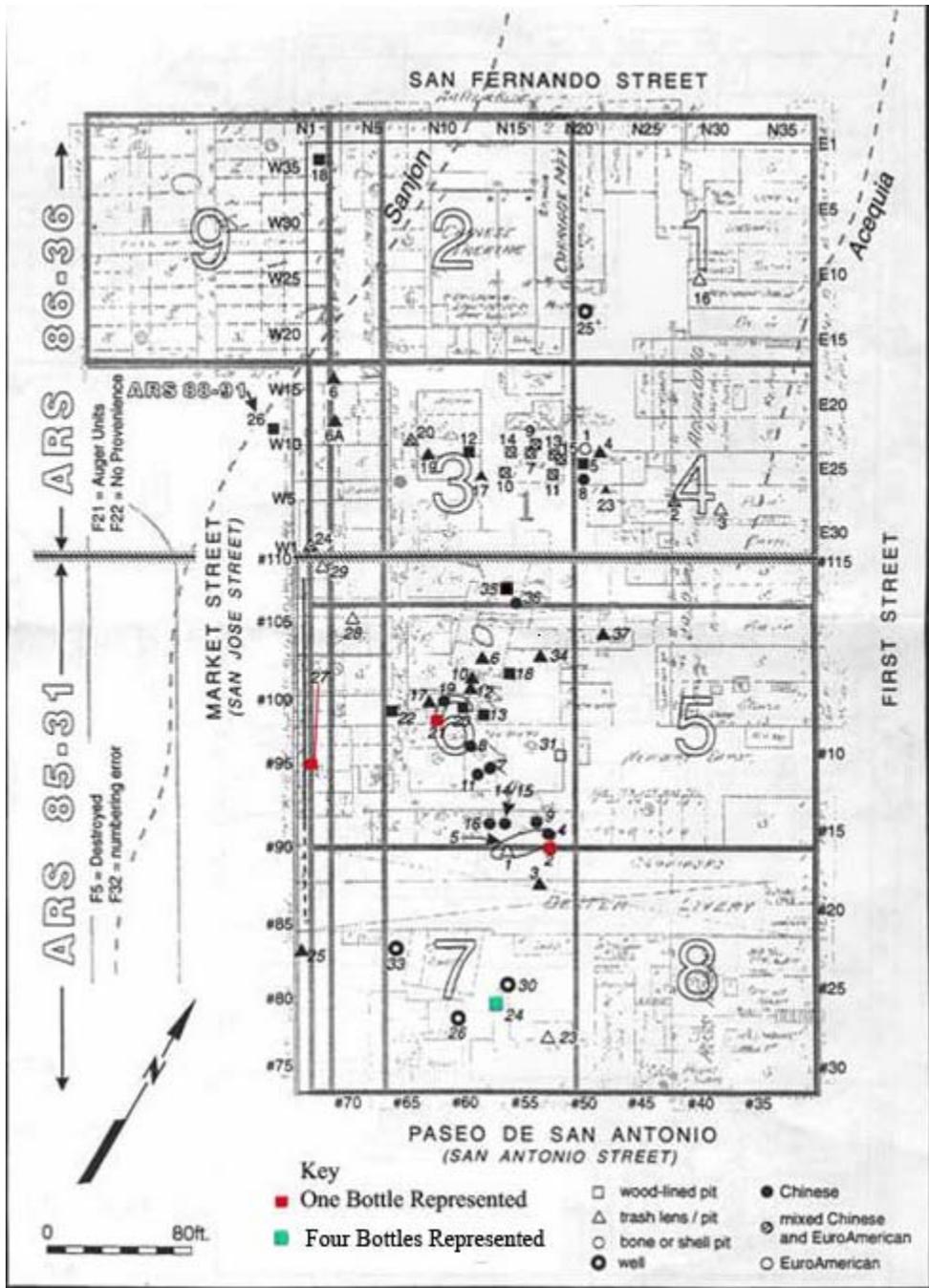
assimilation and the extent of Euro-American influence on the Chinese, but the record shows that the Chinese were using these grooming goods, in as small quantities as these may be.

For more conclusive analyses, more research needs to be conducted on the Chinese grooming practices, specifically what traditional hair care practices were like. The relative dearth of information leaves no reference for comparison. In addition research into Chinese vials and their many uses could also lend insight into Chinese grooming patterns, as some of these vials could have been recycled for an array of purposes.

A useful research project would also be a comparative analysis of the Market Street grooming artifact pieces to those of contemporary societies, including ethnic minority sites and Euro-American sites. There are many avenues that this research could go, but because of frequent misclassification of grooming bottles as medicinal glass and the scarcity in available material, research into grooming bottles has been slim. Perhaps future work on grooming bottles and practices can concretely answer questions of assimilation and Chinatown resident behavior, but as of now the first step has been taken towards understanding Chinese hair care and grooming customs in the nineteenth century.

Figure 1: Artifact Location on Site

The Key represents embossed bottles of differing fragmentary states, from whole bottles to fragments of these.



*Figure 2: Artifact Listing and Descriptions*

## 85-31 Grooming Artifacts

### Surface Collection (Feature 0)

85-31-0-955

### Feature 21

85-31-21-2

### Feature 24

85-31-24-28

85-31-24-29

85-31-24-30

85-31-24-33

### Feature 27

85-31-27-49

*Table 1: Artifacts used for analysis*

Feature Number	Lyon's Hair Tonic	Vaseline	Florida Water	Other Grooming Product
Surface Collection (Feature 0)		1		
Feature 21	1			
Feature 24	3		1	
Feature 27				1

*Figure 3: Lyon's Kathairon Hair Tonic Bottle Artifact 85-31-21-2*



*Figure 4: Chesebrough Vaseline Bottle Artifact 85-31-0-955*



*Figure 5: Murray and Lanman Florida Water Artifact 85-31-24-28*



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