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Paper Sons and Chosen Families

Blurry Archives and Non-Biological Kinship in the Chong Family Album

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Professor Laura Wexler and TF: Kohar Avakian
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Introduction

Approaching photographic archives can be a difficult task. Museums often lack context for the works they keep; the people documented in their archives may be unnamed, uncredited, or otherwise unknown. While these people can sometimes be found by their descendants\(^1\), more often than not, historical subjects are left stranded and unconnected to their lineages. This is how I encountered the Chong family album in Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The photo album depicts the lives of a Chinese American family who lived in San Francisco during the early 1900s. Besides these basic details, I had little information with which to interpret its contents. While I found lots of related archival material, these sources and the photos alone couldn’t provide a full answer who this family was. I began to rely on speculation, using the historical context of the era of Chinese exclusion to fill the gaps in the historical record. Speculation and imagination are necessary to bring the aspirations and emotions back to archival subjects. To engage with the photos of the Chong family purely at face value or to treat them as forensic evidence would be to deny these subjects their agency. The stories of marginalized people are often absent from archives, as Gaiutra Bahadur describes in the case of indentured South Asian women who were involved in transnational migrations during the same time period as the Chong family. In her speculative historiography *Coolie Woman*, Bahadur follows the traces of her great-grandmother through the archive, using this lens to explain the experiences of indenture and to better understand how structural processes such as colonization, racial exclusion, and migration affect people on the individual level. She questions whether the gaps in the archive may have been intentional, asking if it is “possible that my great-grandmother would

\(^1\)The case of Tamara Lanier and the daguerreotype of her enslaved ancestor Renty provides an example of how a living descendant may make connections to archival materials. However, Lanier is still engaged in an ongoing legal battle with Harvard to return the images of her ancestor back to her family. See David Grubin *Free Renty* (2021).
not want me to know why and how she left? Would she deliberately disappear behind a curtain to escape questions about her past?"\(^2\) By asking questions such as these, Bahadur is able to reassert the agency denied to subjects such as her ancestor. In this essay I hope to build off the work of scholars like Bahadur to ask questions about the Chong family, interrogating what they aimed to promote and hide in the construction of this album. Speculation is not the creation of pure fiction, rather these conjectures are based on the scholarship of social and cultural historians. In this paper I do not attempt to provide the ultimate truth of the Chong family. Instead, by engaging the thoughts and assumptions of the researcher, this speculative approach to archives offers new ways to understand the past while revealing how histories continue to influence our current events.

This paper is loosely divided into five sections. In each, the uncertainties of the archive will be used to speculate on how the Chongs responded to immigration law, public health and policing of Chinese domesticities in ways that created diverse notions of family and kinship. The Chong album does not divide subjects clearly into family units, leaving the viewer to wonder which people in the photos are actually the Chong family. Thus, the first section describes two possible narratives of the Chong family that emerge from the album and the historical record. This section also describes the gendered immigration policies that made the Chinese familial relations heavily scrutinized by the nation-state. The second section analyzes how restrictions on immigration and belonging impacted the ways Chongs presented their heritage and national identity. Just as the Chong album presents unclear lines of paternity, the subjects of the album lay claim to multiple heritages, appealing to the Chinese government as well as displaying signifiers of American assimilation. However, the confusion around the biological family does

\(^2\)Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman* (2013), 31
not simply emerge from the Chong album, as sections three and four describe how the US immigration apparatus was responsible for the creation of non-biological family formations that were subsequently policed, criminalized, and pathologized. The third section describes how white institutions were simultaneously defining race and citizenship along with normative gender roles and sexual behaviors that cast residents of Chinatown as both queer and unfit for citizenship. The fourth section describes how evasion of immigration law created “paper families” and relationships between people that were not necessarily defined by biology or marriage. By returning to the shifting portrayals of family in the Chong album, section five explores how the blurry boundaries of family mark a departure from the heteronuclear, revealing a potential for queer desire in the archive. Ending with this section explains the potential for speculative archival approaches to change how we view the past as well as allowing us to recontextualize our current experiences.

**Two Stories of the Chong Family**

After looking through the album multiple times as well as consulting archives for the Chong family, I found two possible narratives for who this family was. The first narrative of the Chong family exists mainly in the paper trail they left, from immigration documents, census data, ship logs, and business directories. The second family comes to light only through a close examination of the album’s contents. While this second narrative doesn’t have support from paper archives, the photos in the album tell a convincing story as to who this family was. Neither of these narratives of family are without their uncertainties, and is possible that neither of these narratives accurately describe the people in this album. However, considering these two narratives allows us to see the blurriness in the archives. Perhaps sitting with the unknowability and unanswered questions can lead to new conclusions about Chinese American identities and
methods for engaging with the archives.

The Family in the Paper Trail

The first narrative of the Chong family is based on the archival documents from 1915 San Francisco. The Chong family album was purchased by the Beinecke library in 2010 from an auction house³. The auction house provided little information as to how they acquired the album or the history of this family—the only identifying information included was the family name “Chong”. However, the visual content from the album provides more clues. Photos depict people visiting the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco, which only ran for one year in 1915. All the families in the album had young children, ranging from about 3 to maybe 10 years old. This information narrowed down the possible Chongs present in digitized records sourced from Ancestry.com. Searching through San Francisco census records, ship logs and immigration records, I only found one family with the Chong name that had young children in this time period. The 1920 US census reveals Sing and York Shee Chong, the father and mother of two young children. Sing, the father, had lived in San Francisco since before 1870 when he was a teenager. In 1882 he left for China, returning in 1883⁴. Sing traveled back to China once more, married a woman by the name of York Shee and returned to San Francisco at the end of 1890⁵. Seven years later, Sing and York Shee had their first child, a daughter named Moy, followed four years later by a son who they named Quong⁶. The general ages for these children match the photos from the album, with the daughter around the age of 8 in 1915.

The other major piece of information the album provides is the stamp and seal from

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³ “Lot 90 of: S.F. Chinese Family Photograph Album c.1915” (2010).
⁵ “Lists of Chinese Passenger Arrivals at San Francisco, California” (1890), 252 and “1900 United States Federal Census” (1900) 1.
⁶ “1920 United States Federal Census” (1920) 15b.
“Ying Chong and Co”. This seal suggests that the Chong family owned some form of company in San Francisco, which suggests that they are a merchant family. Early census documents list Sing Chong’s occupation as a laborer, but in 1910 and 1920, he is described as a merchant in the hardware and dry goods industries, supporting the assumption that the Chong’s were a merchant family. However, when searching city records and business directories, I could find no mention of this specific company until 1935. The auction house did not list a year that the seal was manufactured, so it may not have come from the same time period as the album. Perhaps the seal belonged to the 1935 Ying Chong company that the Chong children may have founded once they grew up. While the details of this company are uncertain, there were many other merchant companies that existed, as early as 1876 with the Chung Kee and Co clothing and slipper manufacturers. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the Chong family owned or worked for a similar company before founding Ying Chong and Co. The family’s status as merchants is worth noting as this was the specific class of immigrants that received the most exceptions from legal barriers to mobility.

The visual contents of the album could also support the claim that these Chongs from the records were the same family in the album. There are multiple photos of a young girl with a boy who seems to be her brother. They often appear together, taking studio portraits as a pair, or sitting with a woman in a field. They also appear together with a man who carries the young boy in his arms while the girl stands next to him. The family relations between the two children are made quite obvious through the repetition of photographic connections. Based on these

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7 1920 Census and “1910 United States Federal Census” (1910) 31a.
8 “Crocker-Langley San Francisco directory...” (1915); “Polk's San Francisco city directory” (1953); and Fred S Leon, “Numerical telephone directory: 1935-6” (1935).
9 “San Francisco Directory, 1876″ (1876) 288.
10 See appendix, Images # 1 and 2.
11 See appendix, Image # 3.
photos and the information from historical documents, a story emerges of a merchant couple who established themselves in the US during the era of exclusion to raise their two children as US citizens. However, after taking another look through the album, I began to notice another family narrative appearing in the photos. This family was slightly different from the Chongs that I had originally imagined, and by attempting to find the “real” Chongs, my theories of how to interpret archival sources changed.

The Family in the Album

Despite the convincing paper documentation of the two-child Chong family, approaching the album focused solely on the content of photos reveals a new second narrative that contradicts the written archive. By piecing together the familiar faces and following one person throughout the album, a new story of the Chong family comes to light. The basis for this second family narrative came from the only written words in the whole album\(^\text{12}\). Under a photo of a woman with a young boy and girl at her lap are the words “me and my mother and Sister”. Written in shaky cursive with the capital “S” for sister, it seems likely to be the writing of the young boy in the photo. I assume that he was the one constructing this album, or at least with the help of his parents. Either way, this boy, his mother, and his sister were likely the owners of this album—they were the Chongs I was searching for.

\(^\text{12}\)The front page of the album has “Chong Family - San Francisco” written across it in pencil, but I assumed that this was the writing of the auction house or another archivist. This one note seems very disjointed from the rest of the album, and the handwriting is in all capital letters and seems to be written delicately so it could be erased if necessary.
Based on the guidance of this one annotated photo, I followed all the photos of this young boy, his sister, and his mom, tracking them throughout the album. However, I soon realized that this boy was not the same brother that I had assumed to be Quong Chong. While there are many photos of just the girl and a younger boy in the album, the boy who annotated the photo was not the same young boy who often appeared next to the girl. Upon realizing this, I revisited the album and saw a new family appear. This time it was a family of six, with two brothers older than the kids I assumed to be Moy and Quong. No Chong family with four children exists in the 1920 census, nor were they recorded in any other digitized records from this time period.

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13Compare the boy in the photo above to image #1 in the Appendix. It also appears that the boy in the annotated photo is older than the girl, while the written records describe a family with a daughter 5 years older than her brother.
However, there are many photos that suggest that this family with four children were the main subjects of the album. The album opens with a photo of the mother standing in the backyard with four children, including the two children in the annotated photo\textsuperscript{14}. By paying attention to when these four children appeared together, I was also able to find a possible father for this family. Although this man does not appear often in the album, he is in one of the only photos of the four children and their mother.

The photo of the four children with their potential parents is blurry, with the focus trained on the buildings in the background rather than the subjects standing in front. However, it is just barely possible to make out the faces of the children to tell that these are the same subjects as in

\textsuperscript{14}See appendix Image #4.
the annotated photo. Here we see the family together for the only time in the whole album. There is also a younger man standing beside the father, in addition to the four children. In my attempts to understand who this young man could be, the line between the two family narratives, the Chongs of the paper trail and the Chongs of the album, begins to blur. In the 1920 Census, the Chongs claim to live with a boarder, a Chinese man by the name of Poy Dong with no disclosed relation to the family. Perhaps the man in the photo could be this boarder, a friend of the family or distant relative staying with the Chongs. However, without more archival documents or information about this album, these questions of who the Chongs really were cannot be answered. Accepting that the relationships between the people in these albums cannot be fully deciphered reveals a shifting and uncertain boundary on family. It is impossible to match child to parent. In this way the Chong album denies the neat grouping of a nuclear family within one house or one photo, the blurriness of this photo representing to the inability to view archives with 100% clarity.

The ambiguity of family identity is particular to the history of racialized migrants. In addition to the literal blurriness of the photos and the uncertainty of the family album, there is confusion between names and people in the written archives. Ancestry.com, the source I used to access the digital archives, links related pages together, allowing you to track an individual based on similarities of age, birthplace, and given name. This allowed me to gather the information of Sing Chong through the multiple different censuses and immigration records. However, while this man had the last name Chong in the 1920 census, Ancestry.com links him with a man in the 1910 census who bears the last name Ching. In fact, between the 6 censuses that Ancestry lists for Sing, his last name appears as Chong, Ching, Chang, and Chung, while his given name, age.

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15 1920 Census, 15b.
16 “1870 United States Federal Census” (1870), 529b; 1900 Census, 1; 1910 Census, 31a; and 1920 Census, 15b.
and birthplace all remain the same. It is unclear whether these records actually refer to the same person, or if Ancestry.com falsely grouped these individuals together.

My efforts to investigate these relations came up inconclusive. There is a lot of evidence suggesting these Sings are not the same man, as their occupation and residence change every year. Furthermore, Sing in 1910 claims he is living with his business partners and other Chinese boarders—without the wife and daughter who he lives with at the time of the 1920 Census. It is possible that York Shee and 3-year-old Moy were living somewhere without Sing, but neither of them could be located in the 1910 census. Similarly, no birth records for a Moy Chong born in 1907 exist in the digitized records. Both mother and daughter only appear in the 1920 census. It is clear that the census cannot adequately document Chinese people in the US, and digitized records still leave unanswered questions about who the Chongs were. However, the confusion in the archives may not only be the ineptitude of census enumerators and immigration officials, the family may have intentionally obscured their relations to create an archive less legible to the state.

This “family album” is unique in that it does not solely represent a single nuclear family. At least 5 or 6 different Chinese American families are photographed in this album, with no clear family at the center. There also seems to be little structure to the album, for example the photos do not follow a chronological order. Photos that were clearly taken at the same time end up at opposite ends of the album, Furthermore, the same photo may appear again and again, printed in different sizes or pasted into the album with part of the photo cut out. Not only does the album not follow a linear temporal progression, there seems to be no other organization at all. The album does not focus on one individual nor does it separate out sections by family. Photos of one

17Compare appendix Image #5 to the annotated photo.
family may be next to a photo of a different family, which would be next to a group photo\textsuperscript{18}. Given the lack of organization of the album, it is hard to imagine the rebuking of strict definitions of family was not intentional. To understand why the family may have represented fluid family structures that might destabilize heteronuclear conceptions of domesticity, one must first understand the larger contexts of Chinese American immigration.

\textbf{Race, Class, and Gender in the Immigration Law}

During the era that the Chongs lived in San Francisco, the US instituted racially targeted immigration laws that placed restraints on Chinese migration and greatly impacted Chinese American family formation. During the mid-19th and early 20th century, the regulation of Chinese family dynamics was a major aim of the state, with the specific goal of separating people by gender, race, and class. The Page Act of 1875 barred entry to those deemed likely to become a public charge, as well as any women who were seen as “prostitutes”\textsuperscript{19}. In practice, this law was employed to exclude the majority of Chinese women who were not accompanied by a merchant husband. Soon after the Page Act, the Chinese Exclusion Act expanded limitations on Chinese migration to the US, preventing the entrance of all people who weren’t merchants, diplomats, teachers, or students. These exemptions separated working class laborers from the middle and upper classes, as well as further marginalizing women were only able to enter the US as the wife of someone with exempted status. By restricting the immigration of Chinese women, the state attempted to control the reproduction of working-class Chinese communities. Single Chinese men were essential to the expansion of industrialism in the US, as a migratory working class that could easily be removed and divided from the rest of society. Through immigration

\textsuperscript{18}See appendix Image #6.
\textsuperscript{19}Erika Lee, \textit{At Americas Gates}, (2003), 36-7.
policies as well as “anti-miscegenation” laws that prevented interracial marriage\textsuperscript{20}, the US legal system separated Chinese men from all other women. These laws constitute the “biopolitics of settler-colonialism”\textsuperscript{21}, where the US government attempted to control the reproduction of certain races to benefit its projects of industrialization and imperial expansion. In this context of hyper-attention to Chinese reproduction, the performance of family becomes an essential part of life for the Chinese American families that were able to form during the age of exclusion.

**Multiple Mothers, Multiple Motherlands**

The performance of family and heritage within the album reveals the larger processes of self-identification for wealthy Chinese Americans such as the Chong family. The family had to maneuver through the politics of assimilation and national identity in order to affirm their belonging and status within the US. Focusing on the 1915 World’s Fair in San Francisco as well as the larger discriminatory practices targeting Chinese immigrants reveals the hybridized self-representation of the Chong family. Through visual representations, the Chongs maintained relations to the Chinese government while also assimilating to certain American values around the presentation of wealth and family.

**The Chinese Government at the World’s Fair**

An important site for performed identity in the album is the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition. Also known as the 1915 World’s Fair, this exhibition was set up throughout multiple blocks of San Francisco, and like other world fairs\textsuperscript{22}, showcased the global cultures and technological advancements of the time. Cultural and social historians often use World’s Fairs as

\textsuperscript{20} Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, (2012), 137.
case studies to reveal the attitudes and goals of the nation-state, arguing that the racist portrayals of non-white people often serve to celebrate the US’s imperial achievements. The Chong family album provides an opportunity to analyse how racialized peoples create their own representations in the context of racial exclusion. Foreign nations and people were present in multiple parts of the fair, such as the Avenue of Nations, where buildings representing various countries lined a large promenade for visitors to explore. The Chinese Pavilion at the World’s Fair seems to hold special significance for the Chongs and their Chinese community, as photos from the exhibition appear on around a third of the pages in the album. In the blurry family photo, the Chongs stand packed together, their bodies contained neatly within the silhouette of the Chinese Pavilion.

By taking photos in front of the Chinese Pavilion, this Chinese community claims an identity related to the nation of China. The blurry photo of the Chong family demonstrates a foregrounding of nation over family. While likely taken in error, the photographer has muffled the presence of the physical family, while the Chinese Pavilion takes a sharp focus. The family and direct blood relations become hazy while heritage to China is emphasized. As facial features become impossible to make out, the viewer is drawn to the detailed architecture of the Pavilion. Here the photographer has portrayed the subjects not as individuals, but as members to a specifically extravagant and wealthy Chinese identity. While the photographer may not have intended this blurry focus, the Chongs decided that this moment had to be documented, chose to stand alongside the Pavilion, and included these photos as a central part of their album.

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23 Analyn Salvador-Amores, “Re-Examining Igorot Representation” (2020); Christina Welch, “Savagery on Show” (2011); and Adria Imada “Modern Desires and Counter-Colonial Tactics” (2012).
24 See Appendix Image #7.
25 See page 9.
At the same time the Chong family posed in front of the Chinese Pavilion at the exhibition, a different reproduction of Chinese American identity was on display at the fairgrounds. Less than a mile away in the “Joy Zone” portion of the World’s Fair, an exhibit originally named “Underground Chinatown” recreated white perceptions of San Francisco’s Chinatown. This exhibit featured wax figures reenacting stereotyped scenes of immoral and criminal behavior, such as opium dens and gambling\(^{26}\). However, this representation was quickly contested by the Chinese government. The country’s leaders played an active role in moderating both national and diasporic identity in the San Francisco World’s Fair. Not only did they construct the pavilion on the Avenue of Nations, the Chinese government also opposed the naming of the “Underground Chinatown” exhibit, ultimately resulting in the rebranding of the exhibit as “Underground Slumming”\(^{27}\). While the racially charged stereotypes about Chinese Americans remained in the exhibit, the direct reference to China was removed, due to China’s political influence. In this way, the Chong family was able to preserve their morality by relying on the Chinese government to both construct the Pavilion as well as eliminate the association of wealthy Chinese immigrants with the vice of Chinatown. By renaming the exhibition, the focus becomes not only on race, but rather class. The term “slum” has clear socioeconomic implications, connecting the perceived depravity and immorality of Chinatown not with all Chinese people, but specifically the Chinese working class. However, this does not mean the Chong family and merchants like them were completely exempt from the discrimination and violence at the hands of the US government. As a merchant family, the Chongs attained a precarious form of belonging that required them to undertake certain outward portrayals of identity more aligned with American values.

\(^{26}\)Carl Nolte, “Pan-Pacific expo also showcased city’s dark side”, (2015).
\(^{27}\)Nolte, (2015).
Precarious Belonging and Assimilation

Anti-Chinese sentiment did not end with stereotyped portrayals at the world’s fair. The Exclusion Act was used to justify multiple practices of surveillance and violence against Chinese American communities. Immigration raids were carried out on many Chinese businesses, often without motive or warrants\(^\text{28}\), while police used the perceptions of Chinatown as a site of vice to surveil and control behaviors of Chinese people\(^\text{29}\). According to the 1920 census, the Chong family’s house lay outside of the bounds of Chinatown, but even that did not protect them from state surveillance. While immigration raids mainly occurred within Chinatown, any place of Chinese existence became grounds for police harassment and searches\(^\text{30}\). Deportation was not an uncommon practice, and often was the goal of police raids. Chinese residents who were deemed illegal or who lost their status as merchants could be deported, even those who were born in the United States could have their citizenships revoked in certain circumstances\(^\text{31}\). In fact, the Chong family I encountered in the archives could have faced similar threats. While Sing Chong originally brought his wife and family to the country legally as a merchant, exemptions for merchants were continually restricted and by 1924 only Chinese merchants who were involved in international trade were allowed reentry into the US\(^\text{32}\). In the face of these tightening restrictions, it is possible that Sing Chong and his family would not have fit into changing immigration laws, and knew that they wouldn’t be able to return to the US should they ever leave the country. This may explain why Sing never returned to China after marrying York Shee.

While he frequently travelled between China and the US in the 1800s, there are no records of his

\(^{28}\text{Lee, 202.}\)
\(^{29}\text{Lui, Chinatown Trunk Mystery, 65.}\)
\(^{30}\text{Lui, 78.}\)
\(^{31}\text{Lee, 206 and 210.}\)
\(^{32}\text{Lee, 87-8.}\)
travels after immigration laws tightened in 1901. Even in their relatively privileged position as merchants, the Chongs were still left vulnerable to the sinophobic immigration apparatus.

Understanding the Chong album under the circumstances of precarious belonging and threat of deportation challenges the assumptions that this source is merely a collection of frivolous photos taken by a wealthy family. To exist in the exclusion era, the Chongs had to navigate an identity that simultaneously appealed to American values and maintained their ties to the Chinese government. Thy Phu describes how studio portraits portrayed the hybridity of Chinese Americans, “blend[ing] of Chinese and American styles, to resignify these bodies as proper and modest” using visual signifiers of domestic order, familial relations, and marriage. The Chong album can be an example of how amateur photographers and Chinese American communities constructed similar hybrid identities that affirmed their morality. Under this light, family photos become insurance; by proving family relations and status, Chinese Americans deter any challenge to their belonging and safeguard themselves from the threat of deportation.

The way the subjects of the photo album choose to dress is an example of how the Chongs asserted their belonging and protected their Chinese American identity. Chinese arrivals to the US claiming to be merchants were often denied if they did not openly display their wealth. Erika Lee describes one case where someone claiming to be a merchant was denied entry to the US due to their poor quality of clothing. Thus, the decision of what to wear becomes an extremely political action, as these immigration practices tie clothing to the right of citizenship.

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34 Phu, 38.
35 Lee, 86 and 101. While Lee describes one case of a migrant who was denied entry because of “poor quality” of clothes on page 86, she also provides examples of people who were admitted because of their nice clothing on page 101.
Another photo of the Chongs at Panama-Pacific International Exhibition reveals how the politics of clothing, family relations, and nationhood present within the album. In the photo below, the Chong daughter is pictured wearing a luxurious white fur scarf over a long overcoat and dress. At first, I dismissed this outfit as an unnecessary display of riches. However, in the context of immigration policies, the quality of clothing is not only a symbol of wealth, it is a sign of the family’s legal residence in the city. More than just pieces of fabric, their clothing mimics the function of a flag, a display of national pride and belonging. If this girl is indeed Moy Chong, she would have been born in the US and have citizenship status, however even her place within the country was not assured. Perhaps the child understands this as she looks at the camera without excitement. She seems to know this photo is not meant to capture a fun outing at the World’s Fair, rather this act of photography intends to create a record legible to the nation-state.
There is one detail in this image that has continued to catch my attention. While many photos in the album showcase the architecture of the Pavilion, this photo is the only one that also captures the string of flags above the buildings. The Pavilion and the couple are set to the side of the photo, allowing the flags to take center stage. The alternating American and Chinese Beiyang flags demonstrate a shared national identity of the pair depicted here. Strong winds have caused the flags to twist and furl; the American flag crumples and falls over the Chinese, which then bends and folds to accommodate the US flag. Some flags are so distorted by the wind that it is hard to tell if they bear the 13 stripes of the US flag or the 5 stripes of the Beiyang flag. This photo demonstrates a fluid identity: the ability to be Chinese, American, or Chinese American. This metaphorical reading of these flags can be applied to the Chong family, whose status as merchants allowed them to navigate the social dynamics of 20th century San Francisco with more mobility and liberties than working-class Chinese immigrants.

The multiple national heritages represented by the flags are also mimicked in the multiplicity of parenthood. In the photo the girl stands beside a woman who is not her mom36. The album contains ambiguity of family relations as children move fluidly between families, posing next to an auntie, relative, or family friend as one would pose next to their own mother. This inability to decipher the relationships between parent and child leaves the lingering impression that these children have multiple mothers, multiple adults who could use these photos to lay claim to paternity. At the same time that parental relationships are unclear, so are the relationships to nations. The families in the album benefit from the protection of the Chinese government, whose involvement in the Panama Pacific International Exhibition separates the wealthy Chongs from the stereotypes of working class Chinese American laborers. The photos in

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36At least according to the annotated photo shown at that beginning of the paper, the woman in the annotated photos is not the woman who poses with the young girl here in front of the Pavilion.
front of the Pavilion assert the connection to Chinese heritage while the photo under the flags emphasize the links to the Chinese national government. However, at the same time the Chongs and their community proclaim these connections, they also abide by American standards for immigrants, dressing in fine clothes and a mix of Chinese and Western styles. The presentation of the young girl represents this hybrid identity. She poses next to the woman who could be her mother, but isn’t her mother, beneath the flags that tangle in the wind. Captured in this moment is the possibility for multiplicity; the Chinese and American flags blur together as Moy Chong becomes the daughter of two mothers and two motherlands.

Constructing Queerness: Legal Definitions of Race, Disease, and Desire

Through hybridized portrayals of identity, the Chong family claims citizenship and belonging in the US despite their race. As the Chongs assembled their album, the boundaries of race and citizenship were also being constructed through legal battles throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. Asian immigrants fought court cases arguing their right to the privileges of whiteness, revealing the ongoing definition of race at this time. These applicants were eventually denied the right to citizenship, their cases forging a clearer and codified demarcation of Asians as outsiders, aliens unfit for citizenship. The Chong family album reflects similar appeals to citizenship. In addition to the style of dress and displays of wealth, language and cultures of consumption work in the album to make ties to American identity. The annotation of the Chong boy, the only words present in the whole album, are in English rather than Chinese. This emphasizes the family’s relationship to the US, as English fluency tests were often given to

37See the cases of Ozawa v. United States (1922) and Bhagat Singh Thind (1923) in Mae Ngai “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law”, (1999), 85; and Sucheng Chan “Hostility and Conflict” (1991), 47.
returning immigrants to evaluate claims of citizenship\textsuperscript{38}. Other visuals show more appeals to American culture. In one photo, the youngest Chong boy appears on the steps of a large house, dressed in western clothing as he enjoys an ice cream cone\textsuperscript{39}. As a scholar of Chinese American cultural history, Mary Lui describes the importance of similar visual representations of assimilation in her discussion of rebrands of Chinatown in the mid 20th century\textsuperscript{40}. While the Chongs in the album may have been able to successfully claim American identities, the same was not true for all Chinese Americans, especially for working class immigrants in Chinatown. However, in my attempts to find the Chong family in Ancestry.com’s archives, I encountered many historical subjects that would have experienced the pressures of white institutions more acutely than the album’s subjects. The blurred lines between family names creates a broader network of ancestry that has widened my search beyond the Chongs in the album to include the Chongs, Chings, and other similarly named Chinese residents of San Francisco’s Chinatown. By incorporating their stories alongside the album, I utilize the idea of broad ancestries to tell a more comprehensive histories of Chinese family relations during the era of exclusion.

**Subversive Potential of Queer Domesticity**

The living arrangements and habitation practices of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown was an important arena in which white institutions framed Chinese communities as immoral. While the skewed gender demographics of Chinatown was created by immigration laws, the resulting living situations challenged the strict boundaries of race, class and gender instituted by the state. Nayan Shah explains how the dynamics of urban San Francisco Chinatown fostered “queer domesticity”, relations that lay outside the emerging definitions of heterosexuality\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{38}Lee, 101.
\textsuperscript{39}Appendix Image #8
\textsuperscript{40}Mary Lui, “Rehabilitating Chinatown at Mid-Century” (2011), 89.
Leisure spaces such as opium dens opened possibilities to the intermingling of white and Chinese residents in intimate settings. Opium users shared communal rooms with beds provided for relaxation and may even share smoking devices\textsuperscript{42}. Chinese domestic living situations, such as female-lead households, or male boarding houses offered alternatives to heteronuclear single-family homes, thus destabilizing and threatening white modes of being. Queer intimacies in these gender-segregated communities are often recognized for their subversive potential to upend norms that benefit the state and other dominant institutions\textsuperscript{43}.

**Criminalizing Chinatown Domestic Life**

While the diversity of habitation and intimacy of Chinatown offered various ways of being that could blur the divisions between Chinese and white San Franciscans, these domesticities were eventually marked as queer\textsuperscript{44}, criminalized or pathologized by the state and other institutions. Just as the formation of racial citizenship was being defined in the courts, white institutions used the domestic practices of Chinatown to exemplify deviant behavior, and construct the ideal morally-upstanding heteronuclear family. Queer domesticities of Chinatown that challenged white heterosexual moralities were made to be criminal and immoral through the census categorizations, definitions of disease, and policing.

The making of the Chinese working-class as queer and other can be first seen in the changing categorization of Chinese households in census records. The census and immigration documents that tracked Chinese immigrants such as Sing Chong and his family were not passive

\textsuperscript{42}Shah, “Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity”, 91.

\textsuperscript{43}In *Defiant Braceros*, Mireya Loza describes how the homosocial living conditions of male-dominated Mexican labor immigration to the US left room for queer intimacy – redefining the norms of living arrangements, recreation, and pleasure.

\textsuperscript{44}In this paper I use the term “queer” in expansive ways that refer to all practices and modes of being deemed “other” or non-normative rather than the specific application to specific gender and sexual identities. This choice is reflective of scholarship that applies queer frameworks in expansive ways (Queer in Keywords, Siobhan Somerville)
documents, rather they were actively involved in determining the boundaries of family and prescribing immorality upon Chinatown’s domesticities. Due to the predominance of “bachelor societies”, many men would rent a single house and live together as boarders. Archival records reveal a man by the name of Sam Chong who lived in one such house, performing duties as a cook. Despite being a direct product of racialized and gender-specific immigration laws, these same-gender living situations were deemed queer by the very people who created the system that forced migrants to form these homosocial societies. In 1880 the US Census Bureau changed the definition of “family” to exclude the broader household arrangements common among the Chinese working-class. By placing a priority on marriage and blood relations, the Census set the multifamily living situations of many Chinese laborers in a category clearly separate from the white heteronuclear families. While this change may seem semantical, the distinction emphasized the differences between the Chinese bachelor communities and white residents of San Francisco. This identification of difference paved the way for critiques and racial stereotypes about Chinese communities. Furthermore, census takers prescribed certain amoralities upon Chinese women living within the US. Unaccompanied women above the age of 12 were often recorded as “prostitutes” no matter their actual occupation. This distinction criminalized the mobility and independence of unmarried Chinese women who did not fit white ideals of proper behavior and living environments. The example of census practices reveals how the definitions of family and gender norms were actively built to exclude the domestic life of Chinese migrants.

In addition to the census, the state promoted the connection of Chinese identity with immorality through the policies of public health and policing. While leisure environments such

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47 Shah, 82.
as opium dens may have offered opportunities for cross-racial mixing, they were quickly
criminalized and associated with disease. Common medical understandings of the time linked
leprosy and syphilis with Chinese migrants and sexual deviance. Through the narrative of
public health and safety, Chinatown became suspect, with specific gendered stereotypes applied
to Chinese men and women, allowing for police surveillance of Chinese immigrants. Single
women were targeted by police as prostitutes, while police suspicion of interracial couples and
fears of men abducting or otherwise engaging in violence against white women were common in
Chinatowns across the country. Beyond criminal violence, the association of diseases further
isolated Chinese immigrants. A common occupation for Chinese men was the role of “house-
boys”, working in the homes of white families as housekeepers or nannies. Another member of
the broader Chong genealogy, a man by the name of Lee Ching, worked in this position for the
Clayburgh family alongside the Irish immigrant Margret O’Malley. By inhabiting close
quarters with white San Franciscans, this man demonstrates the potential for cross-racial
solidarity and intimacy that could jeopardize the state’s isolation of Chinese men. By associating
Chinese immigrants with diseases, members of the medical establishment created barriers that
would eliminate the transformative potential of these interracial living conditions. Physicians
spread fears that Chinese men working for white families would bring the dangers of Chinatown
into the white household, warning that Chinese domestic workers may be vectors of syphilis and
be a physical danger to white children. These stereotyped fears combined racial prejudice with
certain moral arguments around gender roles and sexual desire, creating a specific racialized and

48 Shah, Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity”, 87.
49 Shah, 85; and Lui, Chinatown Trunk Mystery, 143 and 69.
50 1920 Census, 4a, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-
content/view/98529170:6061?tid=&pid=&queryId=7c84cc94cfdad4abb44b89594eae5027d&psrc=WKT6&phstar
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51 Shah, “Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity”, 89.
gendered landscape that Chinese families had to navigate to avoid harassment and violence. Here, the Chong album allows us to see how Chinese immigrants avoided accusations of immorality through a performance of heteronuclear family.

**Performing the Heteronuclear Family**

The photo below shows the Chong son posing with a young woman and man in what appears to be someone’s backyard. However, referring back to the “me and my mother and Sister” photo and the blurry pavilion photo – we can assume that neither of these adults are the boy’s parents. Thus, this photo is two adults and a boy, none of whom are part of a nuclear family. However, the position of their bodies mimics the traditional mother, father, son position replicated throughout album\(^{52}\). The man and woman stand shoulder to shoulder, the young boy nestled between them. Perhaps there is nothing especially unusual about the boy posing with older relatives or family friends in this manner. However, reading this photo in the context of the rest of the album leaves me with many questions on what narrative this photo promotes. At first glance it appears to be two parents and their child. This structure affirms the morality of each person in the

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\(^{52}\) See Appendix Image #6.
photo by alluding to the heterosexuality of the adults and legitimacy for the boy’s birth. But perhaps there is a potential to speculate on the underlying queernesses that motivated this photo. To understand the impact that a queer reading of this photo provides, it is necessary to first discuss the definitions of family beyond the bloodlines, and the history of queer archives.

**Broad Genealogies: Non-Biological Kinship**

**Paper Families: Evading Exclusion Laws**

Just as the photos in the Chong album disorient boundaries of family, many Chinese immigrants also underwent a similar act of obscuring the biological family during the era of exclusion. To circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Act, arrivals to the US often had to lie about their identities and join new families to enter the country. Under immigration law at the time, Chinese American citizens were allowed to sponsor the migration of their family members. This was a relatively straightforward process until the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire, which destroyed many immigration records and allowed new migrants to make fabricated claims of kinship in order to come to the US. Under this process, many Chinese people arrived in the US under fake names with false identities. These immigrants became known as “paper sons” as mainly men used this loophole to enter the country through paper documents. Scholars such as Lili Johnson have broadened this definition to discuss the “paper family”, a term used that emphasizes the new connections immigrants forged within the United States.

Lying about one’s identity was not a simple process. Upon arrival to the US, state officials would submit all Chinese persons to intensive questioning attempting to uncover

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53 Lee, 180.  
54 Lee, 178.  
56 Lee, 181
migrants entering with false pretenses. Immigration officials would not hesitate to use the slightest discrepancy to deny entry to Chinese immigrants. This risk of deportation continued as immigration raids on Chinatowns aimed to remove immigrants who had entered with false documents or who were otherwise deemed unfit for residence within the US. Photo records were an essential part of subverting immigration restrictions, as affidavits and other photo-documentation were used to prove family relations. Considering the dangers of being a paper family member, it was easier for some to retain the fabricated names and identities they used to enter the country. Furthermore, if someone who achieved US citizenship through fraudulent identities wanted to bring their relatives to the country, they had to apply under their false family names. Existing within these complicated genealogies upset existing definitions of family, creating a “split personality of fractured identity” for migrants who had to hide their own name and identity and to play a new role in a new country. In this way, Chinese migrants had to adopt new genealogies to bypass restrictive immigration laws.

This idea of fractured or multitudinous identities provides a deeper meaning to the ambiguous depictions of family in the Chong album. Just as photos proved relationships for immigration records, family photos could be taken outside the context of the Chong album to affirm the validity of the Chinese subjects depicted. The performance of family could be extremely useful in proving the morality of single Chinese women who could have been criminalized as prostitutes or to dissuade accusations of predatory or queer behavior made against Chinese men. Furthermore, the depictions of varying families may have been needed as evidence to corroborate the paper families on record, which may not align with actual bloodlines.

57Lee, 202
58Johnson, 116.
59Lee, 211.
60Lee, 211.
The albums photos of children with adults other than their parents may have been a strategy to confuse and evade police and immigration officials in order to protect the residence and morality of the people within the album.

Despite the protection they may have offered, these confusing and concealed genealogies had negative emotional and legal ramifications for the Chinese communities. Children who came from paper families often were not told of their true identities, leading to emotional turmoil when these truths were revealed\(^61\). In order to protect their immigration status, some Chinese opted to forego all interaction outside of the Chinese community, further isolating immigrants from US society\(^62\). However, a lens of queer scholarship and the narratives of chosen families provides another lens to view the trauma of severed genealogies and perhaps emphasize the broad networks of relations that were woven between immigrants.

**Chosen Families and Queer Kinship**

Understanding this more expansive definition of genealogy allows us to think about heritage and ancestry in new ways. By evading the exclusion act, Chinese families were disconnected from bloodlines, as new identities were forged through in paper and in names. The shared experience of migration binds people together as much as their shared names. The blurred lines of family in the Chong photo album perhaps reflect this step away from a family identity based on strict ideas of parenthood and progeny. While paper family formation can be viewed under the lens of adoption, this process can also be connected to queer studies specifically the ideas of chosen families, or chosen ancestors. The idea of chosen families is attributed to the 1997 work of anthropologist Kath Weston\(^63\). She describes the formation of “chosen families”

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\(^{61}\) Lee, 212  
\(^{63}\) Nina Jackson Levin, “‘We Just Take Care of Each Other’” (2020) 7346.
among queer and transgender individuals as kinship networks outside of biological or legal family definitions. These chosen families offer queer people deeper support networks and communities of care. The experiences of queer communities in many ways resemble the struggles of Chinese Americans during the exclusion era. Government institutions and medical industries who actively targeted and discriminated against Chinese immigrants now refuse to recognize the legal rights of LGBTQ people. Just as Chinese immigrants formed new family networks to evade and subvert immigration laws, queer people continue to contest the definitions of family by building communities based on shared experiences rather than biology. While the terms used to describe queerness may be relatively new, people who would not fit into modern cisgender heterosexual categories have existed throughout time. The album’s flexible family boundaries create opportunities for queerness to be read in the archive.

**Queer Desire in the Archives**

While the formations of race and citizenship were widely contested by Asian Americans during this time period, it is more difficult to find accounts of how queer Asian migrants contested these categorizations of gender and sexuality. Resistance to race-based discrimination is evidenced by legal battles about things such as school attendance, interracial relationships, and aforementioned court cases contesting Asian exclusion from citizenship. Despite the racialized nature of queerness, where Asian bodies were marked as biologically queer, legal battles over queer intimacy and living circumstances seem to be absent from the archives. In general, defense of queer desire is difficult to find in archives; often queerness only is present

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65Jackson Levin, 7362.
66Chan, 57.
67Chan, 60.
when it is criminalized or pathologized. For example, in 20th century British Columbia, police regularly surveilled and questioned the morality of South Asian migrant workers. Through police reports and court notes, Nayan Shah reconstructs a detailed picture of state control over South Asian desires, where the spectacle of sodomy was used to further isolate and otherize Asian migrant communities. The same weaponization of morality and fear was also utilized against Chinese American communities, as the narrative of sodomy and disease was leveraged against Chinese men in attempt to place limits on their immigration. Despite the litany of evidence from white immigration officers and policemen, first hand representations and accounts from queer people are rarely present. However, photo albums may be one place where subjects navigating the hyper-policed and scrutinized rules on desire and domestic life can present their own self-perceptions. The need to read queerness in the archives feels urgent, as I find myself looking for clues, hints of intimacy that can be read in photos. Although archival photos explicitly depicting queer relationships between Chinese immigrants may not exist, the impacts of queerness and intimacies can still be heard and felt. The gaps in archive and the absence of self-representations of queerness speaks loudly; its echoes heard in every archival image that may just barely hint at concealed queer intimacies. The Chong album contains some such photos, specifically of the man who appears in the backyard photo. By following his role within the album, I hope to show how speculation can reveal potential queer archives.

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69 Shah, Stranger Intimacy, 81.
71 Even in Loza’s accounts of queer intimacy in Bracero communities, testimony only comes from witnesses, rather than the people engaged in homosexual or queer acts.
Speculation of Queer Intimacies

The man who appears as the father in the backyard photo also plays a large role in the album. While he is noticeably absent from the photos at the World’s Fair, photos of him in various locations appear consistently throughout the album. Photos that look like headshots fill the first few pages, as he seems to smile and joke with the camera. Later in the album the man reappears, often posing alongside other men. In these photos, the man is accompanied by one or two men, the slight suggestion of intimacy between him and other men barely palpable beneath the surface. At the beach he gestures with his cane off into the distance as another man leans in close to look where he points. In another photo he sits reclined on a chair in a busy street, while another man sits on the edge of the chair, draping his hand behind the man’s shoulder. The other man mirrors his body positioning, their left legs crossed while their right arms rest in their own lap. The man seems to have a playful half-smile while brandishing a cigar in his left hand. The closeness of these two men cannot be ignored, they seem to be comfortable in each other’s presence as they pose for the camera.

72 Appendix Images #9-12
73 Appendix image #13
It is impossible to know the true relationships between these men, perhaps they were simply relatives or family friends. There is no explicit reason to believe these photos capture any relationships beyond the platonic. At the same time, there is no evidence that there isn’t any form of queer desire or relationship between these men. It is important to push back against a heteronormative reading of the archive that would only further erase any possibility of love, desire, or pleasure shared between men or other queer subjects. As the police files from British Columbia reveal, forms of queer subcultures existed in urban immigrant communities, and thus could also exist within the Chong album. While the stereotypes of sodomy were used to prove the immorality of Chinese men, we cannot be too swift is dismissing these claims, despite their racist and homophobic origin. The criminalization and public shaming of queer sexual behaviors can be evidence that non-heterosexual encounters and relationships were occurring during this time period.

The man’s performance of family in the album perhaps provides him some freedom to live as he wishes without the fear of state reproach or public shaming. Even if this man may not have sexual desire for other men, he embodies a form of queerness as a Chinese bachelor during this time. Besides the backyard photo with the woman and boy, the man never appears with a woman, suggesting that he is single, or his wife may not be in the US. While stereotypes around Chinese bachelors were virulent and violent at this time, by performing family in this album, the man fulfills a debt to the requirements of morality and “proper” behavior. The backyard photo and his relation to the Chongs visually recreate a heteronormative nuclear family, protecting him from any possible allegations. In this way the blurry definitions and depictions of family in this album again serve as a form of protection. Marginalized identities that would be criminalized by the state are shielded through ambiguous and fluid conceptions of family.
Understanding the performance of family as protection connects this man to Chinese immigrants arriving as under false identities. Just as paper families were pressured into adopting new kinships, the man here may have faced societal pressures to play the role of father figure in this photo. Neither the boy nor the man looks particularly happy in the backyard photo, just like the girl at the World Fair. As I speculated before, perhaps the tension in their faces is the acknowledgement of the roles they are playing here, maybe they are upset with being forced to take this picture to prove something they know is false–or maybe they were just having a bad day. There is only so much that we can learn from these photos, without the proper context or testimonies from these subjects, we can never know what their true relations are. However, not knowing for sure should not stop us from speculating, as that may be the only way to read queerness in the archives. And yet, it is difficult to try to prove something about someone’s identity that they may have been actively hiding from history.

The Role of the Researcher

Throughout this paper I have tried to make a case for speculation, using imagination and the visual clues to construct a story about the Chong family’s potential identities and aspirations. I have combed through documents like a detective, looking for discrepancies and contradictions between photos. While I had hoped to view history through the perspective of the Chong family, I found myself imitating the actions of their aggressors. I felt as though I was playing the role of immigration agent, attempting to catch the family in the smallest lie to tear apart their proclaimed family relations. Discussing queerness in relation to man in the backyard photo, my speculations may mirror the actions of the police; I followed him around through the album just as police stalked South Asian migrants, waiting for the first sign of sexual deviance to convict them. Perhaps I played my role as researcher a little too well, revealing things this family would rather
remain hidden. Concerned with my approach to this album, I turned to other works by queer Chinese diasporic artists in order to understand what benefits result from speculation that may reveal long buried family secrets.

Archival Fiction: Connecting Archival Histories to the Present

Richard Fung’s movie, Dirty Laundry, engages in speculative archival fiction, imagining what a queer archive could look like. The short film blurs temporalities and allows us to consider the impacts that queer archival research has on the modern day. In the movie Fung presents real archival images that hint to male intimacy between 20th century Chinese migrants. I imagine how he encountered these photos in the archives-with no context to understand the relationships in the photo, Fung invents his own fictive imagining of this photograph, recreating it and situating it within a family story that spans multiple temporalities. The movie describes the fictional experience of a Chinese Canadian researcher who, while on a cross-country train ride, discovered a portrait of his great-grandfather holding hands with another man. The protagonist seeks help from a train worker, another Chinese man. As the men discuss the possibilities of the great-grandfather’s sexuality, a mutual attraction develops between them. Fung’s inclusion of a queer Chinese sexual encounter along a transcontinental railroad trip hints at the historical queer encounters, desires, and relationships that may have occurred among the Chinese bachelor communities who constructed the railroads in Canada as well as the United States. At the end of Fung’s imagined storyline, the researcher decides to ask his living relatives about the photo he found, hoping to discover more about the relationship between his great-grandfather and the other man in the photo. While the film ends before his questions are answered, Fung leaves the viewer with the hope that current kinship networks could provide answers for the past. However,
this is only an imagined story, whereas the relatives and people who knew the men in the real archival photos were not found or identified. The viewer is left with the unknown, only our imaginations can reconstruct what these men meant to one another.

I see reimaginings of these archival encounters as providing some form of closure or historical context for current queer Chinese diasporic communities. While queer desire and expression may have been criminalized and actively hidden in archives\(^{76}\), the role of speculation allows current scholars to reclaim these histories, to project themselves into the past and connect to queer ancestors. Fung does so literally, by casting the same actors to play the men on the train as well as the great-grandfather and his imagined partner in family photo. Here I want to return to the idea of broad ancestries and relations created through similar experiences rather than blood. By imagining a queer researcher with family ties to archival photos, Fung’s movie fabricates a family connection between queer ancestors and current queer communities. Perhaps my investigation into the Chong family can serve a similar purpose.

Writing about this album as a Chinese American, born and raised in the Bay Area was an extremely difficult but rewarding process. I was able to put so much of my own ideas and emotional into my analysis of the Chong family album. My Chinese family name is Ching, which as the ancestry records show, is not too far removed from the Chongs. If I allow myself to imagine, I can see myself as part of this extended familial network. I see family resemblance in the young girl standing in front of the Chinese Pavilion at the world fair and the smiling man sitting in the busy Chinatown street. In this way the people of in these photos have become part of a broader ancestry for me. The Chinese families who gathered on a cold San Francisco morning to travel to the World’s Fair to take these photos can no longer look back through their

album. The work of the children and parents who carefully constructed this album now lies in the library archives at the Beinecke; their blood descendants may never be able to learn about their heritage through these photos, as the figures in the album are permanently detached from their names. While this album may have severed from its context, I hope that by rediscovering these photos and writing the Chongs’ stories into my thesis I have been able to restore some links between the past and the present. I would like to think that the Chongs have adopted me into their family; that while not related by blood we still have gone through related experiences. We have both walked the streets of San Francisco Chinatown, sat by the edge of the waters surrounding the Palace of Fine Arts, and had to navigate the structures that aim to constrain our identities. Perhaps this thesis can be as healing for the subjects in the Chong album as much as it has been for me.

Conclusion

While I still do not know who the Chongs really were, I have accepted that not knowing for certain does not mean that nothing can be learned. The two narratives of the Chong album reveal that a true understanding of this family cannot be made through archival research alone. Recognizing the uncertainty in this archive reveals how Chongs destabilized the boundaries of family, allowing for more expansive genealogies to develop. The album denies a simple reading of paternity, so many photos resemble family portraits it is difficult to decipher who are the parents and who are only performing family for the camera. Like the photo under the Chinese and American flags, pictures that pose children with their extended relatives can create broader community ties and complicate portrayals of heritage. While racialized immigration policies may have disrupted biological families, new forms of Chinese kinship networks developed. The Chong album demonstrates how Chinese Americans employed flexible definitions of family to
create hybridized national identity, circumvent restrictive immigration practices, and conceal queer or criminalized identities. Under this notion of broad ancestry, non-biological forms of family emerge, drawing relations between paper families and queer ancestries. Fung, along with other Chinese diasporic artists use the method of family photos to challenge biological definitions of kinship by “remix[ing] the family album”\textsuperscript{77}. Similarly, the Chong album itself engages in this act of cutting apart and stitching together, representing multiple performances of family made by pairing children with multiple different fathers and mothers. By employing notions of blurriness and queering the archive, I hope to present an alternate method for scholars to engage with archives that restores agency to marginalized subjects while still suggesting the possible hidden histories of illegal immigration and queer desires. The work of speculation bridges history with current experiences, which allows for community healing and contextualizes modern intersections of migration, race, and queerness.

My investigations are not aimed to discredit or defame the Chong family, rather I hope to build connections between the experience of the immigration apparatus in the 20th century to ongoing racially exclusive immigration policies. The pandemic of COVID-19 has revealed how narratives of disease continue to instigate racial othering and restrictions of mobility. This can be seen with the rise of sinophobia and anti-Asian violence as well as current travel bans targeting African countries in relation to the Omicron variant\textsuperscript{78}. Constructing lineages and telling stories about the Chong family album may not fit within the rigorous structure demanded by academia; however, this speculation could provide new perspectives to analyse past histories and injustices as well as current dynamics of race, mobility, and disease in present politics.

\textsuperscript{77}Goffe, 39.
\textsuperscript{78}Oumar Seydi “Southern Africa: Last in line for vaccines, first in line for travel bans” (2021) and Emma Bowman, “As omicron spreads, studies suggest that travel bans alone don't do much good” (2021).
Appendix

Image #1
Image #2
Image #6

https://i.pinimg.com/originals/c9/94/cc/c994cc3e4e93077615facb3a54cf1893.jpg
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