Mapping Chinese on O`ahu: 1866 - 2010

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This summer I worked with Professor Riley creating visual representations of where Chinese have lived in O`ahu, Hawai`i over the last 150 years. This project, by the creation of maps, will enable us to better understand where Chinese in Hawai`i lived and, in turn, the differences among races and ethnicities on the island of O`ahu. By knowing where Chinese lived at various times, we will better be able to understand disparities amongst difference races on O`ahu.

By 1850, the sugar plantations in Hawai`i were operating on a large enough scale that the importation of labor became necessary. First Chinese, then Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos were all brought to Hawai`i to work on the plantations. As the Chinese migrant workers’ contracts expired, many decided to stay in Hawai`i rather than return to China. This project focuses on where they settled when they moved from the plantations.

I worked with ArcGis to create multiple maps of O`ahu every 10 years from 2010 to 1900 using census tracts, precincts, and enumeration districts as boundaries to discern where Chinese settled. From 1900 to 1866, maps were created using larger judicial districts, and were made for every 6 years. Because census tracts change every decade, much of the project involved finding/making appropriate shapefiles. When matched appropriately, the data accurately represented the changing boundaries through the years, making the maps comparable.

For the years 1900 – 1930, Professor Riley and I worked together examining earlier maps of Honolulu city that Professor Riley found earlier in archives in Honolulu. These maps very roughly drew boundaries of the enumeration districts that I needed to join the data appropriately. After determining where the boundaries were, I scanned and uploaded the maps. By making them slightly transparent, I could draw the polygons over the map, then associate each polygon with a piece of our data, completing the join properly.

Professor Riley will now begin to examine these maps to better understand how race has played a factor for Chinese on O`ahu.

Faculty Mentor: Nancy Riley

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