

Chinese Community Organizations in San Diego: Structure and Function

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Abstract: As a nation of immigrants, the United States has welcomed a significant number of Chinese immigrants who have settled across the country. San Diego, a region in California, has seen a growing Chinese population and, consequently, an increase in Chinese community organizations dedicated to protecting their interests. These organizations in San Diego have evolved from the traditional “Five-relationship Culture” model to include groups based on geographic origin, profession, religion, education, politics, charity, arts, national unity, history, and comprehensive interests. Their organizational structure is increasingly localized to the U.S., with enhanced functions. They serve as intermediaries connecting new and established immigrants, primarily safeguarding the political and economic interests of the Chinese community. Furthermore, they act as platforms for promoting and preserving Chinese culture and are committed to philanthropic endeavors. In-depth research on these organizations can enhance the understanding of Chinese affairs in San Diego and help foster multifaceted relations for the amicable development of China-U.S. relations.

Keywords: United States; San Diego; Chinese Immigrants; Chinese Community Organizations

1. Introduction

In 1542, Portuguese explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo first arrived at the port of San Diego [1], marking the region's introduction to the world. Since its discovery, San Diego has undergone three significant phases: from 1542 to 1821 under Spanish rule, from 1821 to 1850 under Mexican control, and from 1850 onwards as part of the United States. Present-day San Diego County is located in the southernmost part of California, covering an area of 11,721 square kilometers with a population of 3,298,643

according to the 2020 U.S. Census [2]. It encompasses 18 cities [3], with San Diego being the most populous. As of the 2018 Census, San Diego had a population of 1,425,976 [4], making it the second-largest city in California and the eighth-largest in the U.S. This paper focuses on San Diego County. Known as one of North America's most beautiful travel destinations, San Diego boasts 112 kilometers of stunning coastline and numerous historical and world-renowned attractions, including Old Town San Diego, Cabrillo National Monument, SeaWorld San Diego, San Diego Zoo, San Diego Zoo Safari Park, LEGOLAND California Resort, and the USS Midway Museum [5]. Additionally, San Diego is a significant U.S. military base.

The identity of the first Chinese person in San Diego is unknown, but the history of Chinese immigrants in the area dates back to the 1850s. Many Chinese came to California during the Gold Rush, and as the gold industry declined, they sought other opportunities, spreading to places like San Diego. And they controlled the San Diego fishing industry until 1890. In 1880, San Diego's population was 8,600, with 230 Chinese residents [6]. The first generation of Chinese immigrants was small in number and had limited education, predominantly working in manual labor. They formed family, regional, and commercial associations, relying on the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, established in the late 19th century, to support Chinese laborers during the Gold Rush.

According to the 2010 Census, San Diego County had a population of 3,095,313, with Asians comprising 10.9% and Chinese 1.6% [7], showing a notable increase. New immigrants generally have higher education levels and diverse professions, leading to a growth in the variety and functions of Chinese community organizations.

Compared to research on Chinese communities in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York, studies on San Diego's Chinese population are scarce. Currently, only two studies use surveys

to analyze the identity of new professional immigrants and Chinese students in San Diego [8]. Further research is needed to analyze the Chinese community and their organizations in San Diego. This paper aims to study San Diego's Chinese community from the perspective of their organizations, seeking insights and contributions from other experts in the field.

2. Categories and Characteristics of Chinese Community Organizations in San Diego

Wherever there are Chinese communities around the world, there are also numerous Chinese organizations. These organizations vary in type and serve multiple functions, primarily adapting to integrate into their host countries and protect the interests of the Chinese diaspora.

2.1 Categories of Chinese Community Organizations

Overseas Chinese organizations are diverse. In San Diego, these organizations can be classified based on the bonds among their members into nine categories: geographic-based organizations, profession-based organizations, religion-based organizations, education-based organizations, political organizations, charitable organizations, cultural and arts organizations, organizations for the preservation of national unity and history, and comprehensive organizations.

2.1.1 Geographic-Based Organizations

Geographic-based organizations are formed through connections based on native place and hometown ties, commonly referred to as "fellow townsmen" or "compatriots" [9]. San Diego's geographic Chinese organizations are typically based on ancestral ties to regions in China. Their purpose is often to exchange information through various activities, enhance understanding of changes in China, foster relationships, and develop friendships. Members usually share a strong attachment to their hometown, speak the same dialect, and have similar cultural backgrounds. Early-established associations in San Diego include the San Diego TY Cultural Association founded in 1975, comprising mainly immigrants and students from Taipei, with a mission to understand and promote the local culture, customs, arts, music, and literature of Taipei. The San Diego Fujian Association, originating from the "Fujian Group" in 1985, was established in 1990 and holds a membership conference every four years to democratically elect a new president and

council members [10]. Additionally, the San Diego Hunanese Association, founded in May 2005, and the Sichuan-Chongqing Association, established in October 2004, are large and influential organizations. Their members primarily consist of students, scholars, and professionals from Hunan Province, Sichuan Province, and Chongqing City, who regularly hold various activities to strengthen hometown connections and friendships.

2.1.2 Profession-Based Organizations

Faced with internal and external challenges in modern China, many Chinese sought new opportunities and wealth abroad. Confronted by harsh discrimination and pressures in foreign lands, they established organizations to protect their economic interests, facilitate production activities, and promote mutual assistance and information exchange, leading to the formation of profession-based Chinese organizations.

In San Diego, one of the oldest professional organizations is the Ying On Merchants & Labor Benevolent Association, which originated from the Sui Yat Tong established in 1881 and the Tsui Ying Tong in 1891. The two merged in 1918, forming the "Ying On Merchants & Labor Benevolent Association" [11]. This association has nine branches in the U.S., with six located in California, including one in San Diego. The San Diego Chinese Taipei Chamber of Commerce, established in 1984, is one of the earlier organizations in San Diego. Initially composed of students and workers, it has grown to include numerous successful entrepreneurs and professionals in high-tech industries as immigration increased. Other notable non-governmental and non-profit organizations include the Chinese Association for Science and Technology San Diego (founded in August 1992), the US-China Entrepreneurs Association (established in April 1994), the San Diego Chinese American Science & Engineering Association (founded in 1999), the Sino-American Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Professionals Association (established in 2002), and the San Diego Chinese Attorneys Association (founded in 2008). Most members of these organizations are from universities, research institutions, high-tech companies, and local businesses.

2.2.3 Religion-Based Organizations

Religion-based organizations are formed through interpersonal relationships grounded in shared religious beliefs. These organizations are

established by Chinese communities based on a common faith [12]. The earliest forms of overseas Chinese community organizations were often temples. Scholars studying Chinese diaspora communities invariably note the various deities worshipped by these groups and the temples, shrines, palaces, and pavilions dedicated to them [13]. Early Chinese immigrants often connected through religious beliefs, with examples like the Kofuku Temple in Nagasaki, Japan, established in 1623, and the Qingyun Pavilion in Malacca in 1673, both dedicated to deities such as Guanyin, Mazu, and Guan Gong. There were also Confucian-based organizations, such as the Chinese Assembly Hall founded in Batavia in 1900.

The first Chinese Buddhist temple in San Diego is the Hsi Fang Temple, covering an area of 13,698 square meters. [14] The primary purpose of its construction is to provide a dedicated practice center for Buddhists in San Diego, grounded in the Three Jewels of Buddhism—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This enables more followers to delve into the Buddhist scriptures and gain greater opportunities for spiritual cultivation. The main structures include the Buddha Hall, Western Buddhist Artifacts Center, classrooms, library, offices, Five Kinship Hall, and kitchen. Bread of Life Christian Church in San Diego is a Christian church originating from the Ling Liang World Evangelical Mission, founded by Chinese evangelist Pastor Zhao Shiguang in Shanghai in 1943. It was established in San Diego by Pastor Liu Tong in December 1998 [15]. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a mainstream Protestant denomination with approximately 19 million members worldwide, over 1 million of whom are in North America.

The San Diego Chinese Seventh-Day Adventist Fellowship is dedicated to spreading God's gospel and truth in the San Diego area, offering Sabbath school classes and worship services in a bilingual format of English and Chinese [16]. Other notable religious organizations include the Chinese Evangelical Church of San Diego, founded on July 2, 1978, and the Chinese Bible Church of San Diego, established in April 2001.

2.1.4 Alumni-Based Organizations

Alumni-based organizations are formed through the common connection of having graduated from the same institution [17]. Alumni associations are prevalent wherever there are Chinese communities worldwide. The

Association of Alumni and Alumnae of Tsinghua University in San Diego, established in 1978 [18], includes alumni from both Beijing Tsinghua and Hsinchu Tsinghua. It aims to foster connections among Tsinghua alumni, provide a platform for exchanges, and facilitate interactions with other organizations and schools in San Diego, as well as with the alma maters in Beijing and Hsinchu.

The Nanjing University Alumni Association in San Diego was founded on September 26, 1999, with several hundred alumni working in fields such as biochemistry, telecommunications, computing, finance, and accounting. Their WeChat group has over 130 members [19]. The Chinese Union established in 2005, was the first non-profit organization in the U.S. formed by Chinese students that expanded nationwide [20]. The San Diego Peking University Alumni Association, founded on April 5, 2010, is dedicated to serving alumni and promoting fellowship through several major annual events, such as the "May Meeting" during Peking University's anniversary, the "Fall Picnic," dragon boat races, and a Chinese New Year gala. Other alumni associations in San Diego include those for Fudan University, Xiamen University, Zhejiang University, and Tunghai University.

2.1.5 Political Organizations

As the Chinese population in San Diego grows, their political and other rights have gained attention. This led to the creation of the San Diego Asian Americans for Equality (SDAAFE). Founded in 2013 during the statewide opposition to SCA5 [21], SDAAFE is a non-partisan political action organization [22]. Its primary goal is to protect the rights of Chinese Americans by encouraging their participation in community activities, increasing involvement in public affairs, enhancing political engagement, and establishing good relationships with elected officials in San Diego.

2.1.6 Charitable Organizations

In San Diego, many Chinese organizations actively participate in charitable activities, though not all are classified strictly as charitable organizations. However, several can be distinctly categorized as such. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of San Diego traces its roots back to the 1880s in San Francisco. Its mission is to provide charity and social welfare services while preserving Chinese culture and traditions. It offers three scholarships annually: the Roger Lee Memorial Scholarship, the Dennis

Avery Memorial Scholarship, and the Rollie Quon Memorial Scholarship [23].

The San Diego Chinese Women's Association is a vibrant organization dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of Chinese culture, history, art, literature, customs, and traditions in San Diego. It supports other charitable organizations, particularly those benefiting the Chinese community, and offers the San Diego Chinese Women's Association (SDCWA) Scholarship to outstanding Chinese high school students in San Diego County. The scholarship is open to applicants with at least one-quarter Chinese heritage [24].

The American Chinese Culture and Education Foundation (ACCEF) was established in July 2004 in California. It is a non-profit, non-political, non-religious organization focused on promoting Chinese culture and education in the U.S. and assisting children in poverty-stricken rural areas of China to complete their education. Notable efforts include sponsoring 35 impoverished students in Guangxi, China, in September 2004, establishing the first ACCEF Xuan Chun Scholarship in Liaoning, China, in September 2005, building six schools in Sichuan and Guangxi in December 2006, and fundraising for Sichuan earthquake victims in May 2008 [25].

2.1.7 Cultural and Artistic Organizations

Chinese culture, rich and profound, is spread globally by communities adapting to various cultural contexts, aided by organizations dedicated to preserving and promoting Chinese art and culture. Founded in 1991 by art enthusiast and educator Daisy Kuan and Chinese friends in San Diego, the San Diego Chinese Art & Cultural Society (SDCACS) aims to raise awareness of Chinese art and culture through art education, special exhibitions, and year-round performances [26]. It offers scholarships to encourage young people in art and music, with the annual International Music and Art Festival being a major event. Similarly, the San Diego Chinese Arts & Music Association (SDCAMA), established in 2002 by Chinese music and art enthusiasts, focuses on enhancing members' artistic skills, supporting expatriate artists, fostering community cultural activities, and promoting intercultural exchange [27]. Other artistic organizations include the San Diego Peking Opera Society (established in 1992), the Red Cotton Cantonese Opera Troupe (founded in 1999), and the San Diego Chinese Folk Dance

Ensemble (established in 2000).

2.1.8 Organizations for Chinese Unification and Historical Preservation

The San Diego Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification was founded on April 24, 2005, after two years of preparation, to contribute to the cause of China's reunification [28]. The Association for Preserving Historical Accuracy of Foreign Invasions in China (APHAFIC), officially established on July 23, 2002, is dedicated to preserving the accurate history of foreign invasions in China from the 19th century to the end of World War II. Prior to its founding, key members actively commemorated events like the Nanking Massacre and lobbied the U.S. Congress to condemn wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese military, while also advocating for the recovery of Chinese cultural relics lost overseas [29]. After its establishment, APHAFIC organized events such as hosting the Fifth Conference of the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia in November 2002 and its first annual meeting in July 2003, featuring lectures by Professor Ding Yuan and exhibits on Japanese biological warfare [30].

2.1.9 Comprehensive Chinese Organizations

Beyond those categorized by specific connections, San Diego hosts comprehensive Chinese organizations. The San Diego Chinese American Association, founded in 1993, promotes education, cultural exchange, scientific and business collaboration, personal and professional development, and the health and well-being of its members in the greater San Diego area. Established in 2017, the Alliance of Chinese Americans San Diego is a non-partisan, non-profit organization aimed at serving Asian Americans by advocating for equality, freedom, and justice in the U.S., fostering a diverse, inclusive, and harmonious society, and facilitating community service [31]. The Alliance also opposes discrimination and prejudice, advocating for every citizen's right to a fulfilling and equal life.

2.2 Characteristics of Chinese Organizations in San Diego

2.2.1 Diverse Categories

Early studies on overseas Chinese associations classified them based on the "Five-relationship Culture": geographical, kinship, religious, occupational, and material ties. However, as the Chinese diaspora expanded, classifications have

evolved beyond these categories. San Diego's Chinese organizations, in addition to those based on the traditional "Five-relationship Culture" include charitable, cultural, and comprehensive groups. The diverse affiliations reflect the internal relationships within these organizations. For instance, geographical associations often foster closer ties due to shared language, customs, and culture. The variety of connections underpins the diversity of Chinese organizations in San Diego.

2.2.2 Varied Membership Sizes

The membership sizes of San Diego's Chinese organizations vary significantly. For example, the Nanjing University Alumni Association has over a hundred WeChat members, whereas the Hsi Fang Temple boasts over a thousand followers and a complex spanning 13,698 square meters. Smaller organizations typically host fewer events and wield less influence compared to larger ones. Despite these differences, all organizations have seen membership growth and increased influence over time as their structures have matured.

2.2.3 Localization of Organizational Structure

The localization of San Diego's Chinese organizations is evident in their democratic election processes. For instance, the San Diego Fujian Association holds a membership meeting every four years to elect new leaders; the San Diego Ying On Merchants & Labor Benevolent Association also conducts elections every four years, with a leadership transition ceremony; the board members of the San Diego Asian Americans for Equality serve two-year terms, followed by democratic re-elections [32]. Furthermore, the missions and objectives of these organizations reflect local adaptation. The San Diego Asian Americans for Equality aims to promote civic engagement, uphold Asian American values, defend community interests, and mobilize to address community concerns [33]. Similarly, the San Diego Chinese Arts and Music Association seeks to enhance members' artistic skills, support expatriate artists, and foster cultural exchange. These goals highlight the organizations' roles in helping Chinese expatriates integrate and adapt locally, while showcasing their increasing localization.

2.2.4 Strong Sense of National Identity

Despite residing in San Diego, the Chinese community maintains a strong connection to China. The Association for Preserving Historical Accuracy of Foreign Invasions in China

annually hosts events to raise awareness about historical injustices against China, reminding the community not to forget past national humiliations. They actively organize commemorations during wartime victory anniversaries. For instance, in 2005, they hosted the "Global Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Victory in the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945)," supported by various Chinese organizations. This event honored WWII victims and veterans, and commemorated Iris Chang, author of "The Rape of Nanking." Additionally, Chinese National Day is a significant celebration, marked by performances and banquets. Chinese political, economic, and cultural developments are closely followed by these organizations, which actively engage in discussions and express their views.

3. Functions of Chinese Organizations in San Diego

Compared to other regions in the U.S., where Chinese immigrants are often laborers or refugees, San Diego's Chinese population largely consists of elite individuals, many of whom remained in San Diego after studying abroad or through skilled migration post-China's economic reforms. These high-caliber individuals have created well-organized associations that form a network primarily aimed at protecting the interests of the Chinese community.

3.1 Facilitating Integration into San Diego

The primary aim of all Chinese organizations in San Diego is to facilitate connection among Chinese residents and safeguard their interests. As the influx of Chinese immigrants continues, newcomers may initially feel disoriented. Chinese organizations play a critical role in guiding these new arrivals. Established immigrants often assist newcomers by sharing information and support, utilizing their extensive knowledge of local Chinese organizations and their resources. This intermediary role helps new immigrants quickly acclimate. Senior immigrants assist with learning English, job hunting, offering medical consultation, and providing tax and citizenship advice. For instance, in December 2004, Dr. Lin Jian, a graduate of Zhejiang College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, gave a health and happiness talk at the Hsi Fang Temple, addressing common health issues [34]. The San Diego Chinese

American Association regularly holds free health consultation events to overcome language barriers and improve health access for the Chinese community [35]. The San Diego Chinese Union provides comprehensive support to students, from airport pickups to bank account setups, and collaborates with local businesses for student discounts [36].

3.2 Advocacy for Political and Economic Interests

After aiding in adaptation, Chinese organizations actively defend the community's interests, particularly politically and economically. San Diego Asian Americans For Equality is a leading political entity advocating for Chinese participation in public affairs to strengthen ties with local officials and enhance political engagement. Beginning with protests against ABC's Jimmy Kimmel in 2013 and the opposition to California's SCA5 legislation in 2014, they have been at the forefront of such initiatives. During the 2014 California elections, they successfully increased Chinese voter turnout to 29%, the highest among minority groups, according to the San Diego Registrar of Voters [38]. The foundation also organizes cultural events to improve Chinese representation and encourages community involvement through lobbying, demonstrations, and elections.

In addition to political efforts, the foundation collaborates with various organizations such as the Alliance of Chinese Americans San Diego and professional associations to protect economic interests. These associations often host seminars and workshops to provide industry-specific guidance and offer solutions to economic disputes, ensuring the protection of legal economic rights. They also foster economic cooperation between chambers of commerce and China, enhancing Sino-American business relations.

3.3 Promoting Chinese Culture

While each organization may have different focuses, all contribute to promoting Chinese history and culture through their activities. Cultural groups like the San Diego Chinese Art & Cultural Society and the San Diego Chinese Arts & Music Association focus on cultural exchange and awareness through events and performances. For every Chinese traditional festival, organizations host celebrations, such as

Chinese New Year festivities with activities like dumpling-making and dragon dances. Events like the "Lunar New Year Cultural and Food Fair" feature traditional performances and cuisine [40]. Organizations also conduct events for other festivals like the Lantern Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, enhancing cultural engagement.

The promotion of Chinese culture is also supported by organizations like the San Diego Chinese Women's Association, which strives to increase public appreciation of Chinese culture. The San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, established in 1996, plays a vital role in showcasing Chinese-American history and culture. Chinese organizations collaborate with local Chinese schools, thereby expanding Chinese language education and cultural transmission, aiding in students' understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture.

3.4 Supporting Social Welfare and Charity

Engagement in social and charitable activities is a crucial function of San Diego's Chinese organizations, significantly contributing to local and Chinese philanthropy. For instance, the San Diego Hunanese Association operates the Spark Foundation which provides educational support and encouragement to underprivileged students in China, serving as a bridge for charitable contributions from around the world [44].

This Table 1 compares the number of students sponsored in various regions during the academic years 2018-2019 and 2020-2021, noting changes in sponsorship and any special circumstances related to funding.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Chinese Association for Science and Technology San Diego, under President Zhou Junying, has actively organized donations of medical supplies. By May 1, 2020, they had donated over 40,000 pieces of medical and protective equipment to local hospitals, care centers, police departments, elderly communities, and student groups, enhancing the Chinese community's positive image in the U.S. [45]. The Chinese Union also raised significant funds and organized donations for Wuhan during the outbreak, contributing nearly 150,000 RMB/USD and 1 million RMB in materials [46]. Additionally, the San Diego Chinese Women's Association annually donates to various organizations and families, promoting Chinese culture and community service, and offers the SDCWA Charity Award based on

available funds and recipients [47]. The American Chinese Culture and Education Foundation has focused its charitable efforts on education in regions like Sichuan, Yunnan, and

Guangxi, organizing fundraising events like the "Hearts and Hands Charity Gala" during the Lunar New Year.

Table 1. Student Sponsorship Data Comparison: 2018-2019 vs. 2020-2021

Academic Year	Region	Number of Students	Academic Year	Region	number of students
2018-2019	Minle, Gansu	12	2020-2021	Minle, Gansu	5
2018-2019	Wenchang, Hainan	12	2020-2021	Wenchang, Hainan	13
2018-2019	Taoyuan, Hunan	20	2020-2021	Taoyuan, Hunan	20
2018-2019	Guzhang, Hunan	4	2020-2021	Guzhang, Hunan	3
2018-2019	Yiyang, Hunan	23 (1 new university student not receiving original sponsor support)	2020-2021	Yiyang, Hunan	30 (1 sponsorship paid directly by sponsor)
2018-2019	Hongjiang, Hunan	12	2020-2021	Hongjiang, Hunan	6
2018-2019	Anren, Hunan	2	2020-2021	Huaihua, Hunan	11
2018-2019	Shiqian, Guizhou	5	2020-2021	Anren, Hunan	2
	Totat: 90 students		2020-2021	Hengyang County, Hunan	3 (2 sponsorships paid directly by sponsors)
				Total: 93 students	

San Diego's Chinese organizations primarily focus their charitable efforts on healthcare and education in China, demonstrating a strong connection to their homeland despite being overseas. Their contributions aid vulnerable groups, foster development, and enhance ties between San Diego's Chinese community and their homeland, promoting a positive image and aiding their integration into the local community.

4. Conclusion

With the growth of Chinese immigration driven by China's economic reforms and global economic development, the diversity and reach of Chinese organizations in San Diego have expanded. These organizations range from those focused on geographical and professional ties to those dedicated to cultural, charitable, and political activities. Unique among these are groups like the San Diego Association for Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification and the Association for Preserving Historical Accuracy of Foreign Invasions in China, which advocate for Chinese unification and historical awareness.

As they grow, Chinese organizations in San Diego are increasingly localized, reflecting their adaptation to American society. In the modern era, these organizations not only serve as intermediaries for connection and solidarity but also encourage political engagement and cultural exchange. Their charitable efforts have

improved the perception of the Chinese community, overcome previous stereotypes and aiding in their integration.

Mobilizing overseas Chinese to contribute to China's rejuvenation is a priority for the Chinese government [48]. The diverse origins of San Diego's Chinese organizations support these efforts, as they understand the local community's strengths and weaknesses and can bolster ties with China. These organizations act as bridges, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between China and the world [49].

San Diego's Chinese organizations celebrate Chinese National Day and actively promote Chinese culture. Following the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China's overseas Chinese policy has evolved to support national goals and the "Chinese Dream" [50]. These policies enhance the role of Chinese expatriates in fostering national unity and development. In a multicultural setting like San Diego, these organizations are vital for maintaining ties between overseas Chinese and their homeland, promoting mutual benefits across political, economic, and cultural fronts, and nurturing positive Sino-American relations [51].

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