

Living in Cupertino gives us the privilege to experience numerous cultures and celebrate diversity. In continuing to further appreciate our diverse culture and the unity therein, our city council organized an expedition to Angel Island. The citizens of Cupertino thank Mayor Paul, director of the historical society Jennifer Furlong, and the Board of Historical society for organizing this trip. Furlong says, “Mayor Paul and I met with Justin Hoover, the director of the Chinese Historical Society of America. That day was so inspiring, and we were talking about potential ways of involving our community. This idea of coming to Angel Island came up, and Mayor Paul suggested we organize a delegation from Cupertino to go, and look at it with fresh eyes. I really want people to have their own experience. I hope people are moved.”

On Saturday, June 13, a delegation from our city took a ferry to Angel Island. Upon reaching the dock, we walked to the immigration station. Ed Tepporn, the Executive Director of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, was kind enough to give us an in depth tour, and what we learnt was eye opening. Unlike the immigration station in Ellis Island, the Angel Island Immigration Station has been forgotten by most people. In Ellis Island, European immigrants were subject to examination before beginning their lives in the United States. Opposingly, the Angel Island Immigration Station employed discriminatory policies that were used to prevent Asians from immigrating. Unlike Ellis Island, the Asian immigrants who entered through Angel Island were often detained for weeks in very unpleasant conditions. Throughout the tour, we got glimpses into the lives of the immigrants who once stayed here. We saw the poor conditions of the bedrooms. We saw Chinese poetry and messages carved into the walls, evident of the hopeless emotions many immigrants felt. Here is a poem that was deciphered from the walls last year:

“It’s been a long time since I left my home village.
Who could know I’d end up in prison in a wooden building.
I’m heartsick when I see my reflection. My handkerchief is soaked in tears.
I ask you, what crime did I commit to deserve this?”

– Signed by Li Hai

We learned about the picture brides whose only hope to immigrate to America was to marry someone they had never seen or met before. One of our city's community members, Alysa Sakkas shared her connection to Angel Island with us, "I didn't know I had a connection to Angel Island until Jennifer Furlong invited me to come along on this trip. While touring, and learning about how the picture brides were processed through Angel Island, I came to realize that I probably do have a connection here because both of my grandmothers were picture brides."

We also heard of a connection to Angel Island from Clifton Der Bing, "My ancestors came over to Angel Island. It means a lot to me because of our history and how we came here, and also to see what it was like for the immigrants. It is quite heartfelt, and I feel closer to my ancestors. It was really impactful seeing the chinese etchings on the walls, so for me it was like ghosts on the walls of my ancestors."

Executive director Tepporn shares what he hopes to impart to our community: "There are still so many people that have no idea that the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, and that over 500,000 immigrants, mostly from Asia and the Pacific, were processed and detained here on Angel island for days, weeks, and months. Knowing about that history is the first step in having an opportunity for all of over communities to recognizing that the racism and xenophobia that Asians and pacific islanders are currently expericing is not new. It traces its history to when immigrants first started coming to the U.S. We hope that whenever people think about immigration, they think not just about the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, but also about Angel Island."

The world before us was different. The world in the future will be different. But the world we live in now is where we can make a difference, we have to learn from the past, and take care of the present so we can build a better future together! That is what this trip was all about. Learning about Angel Island's history, going on this trip, has been beneficial to our community. As Tepporn said, acknowledging past mistakes is the first step for our community to make a change.



Clifton Der Bing honors his ancestor who immigrated to the U.S. through Angel Island.



This picture depicts the poor living situations of the immigrants.



Group Picture!



HOPE – The American Dream