

THRIVE OR SURVIVE:
EVOLUTION AND PRESERVATION OF CHINATOWNS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

FANGLAN CHEN

(Under the Direction of MARK REINBERGER)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the evolution of built environments in American Chinatowns under influence of a hybridized culture and examine local efforts in Chinatown preservation. Chinatown is an integral part of Chinese Americans' cultural heritage and an important page of American public history. As urban renewal and economic development programs transformed downtowns in the global era, many Chinatowns are on the verge of disappearing. Using a methodology that combines archive research and field observation, the author chose three Chinatowns located in the metropolitan cities New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, District of Columbia as case studies. Their different circumstances indicated that there is no single Chinatown model but rather multiple Chinese-American immigrant neighborhoods with various experiences of spatial evolution and ethnic preservation. Their comparison contributed to the understanding of current preservation issues. It also provided insights into how to maintain the place-identity of ethnic places as Chinatowns.

INDEX WORDS: Historic preservation, Chinatown, Ethnic place, Place-identity

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My research interests in American Chinatowns started in the summer of 2013 when I interned at the Octagon Museum in Washington, D.C. Two of my friends came for a short visit and we decided to meet in the city's Chinatown. A gigantic Chinese archway, architectural facades with oriental-style motifs, storefronts marked by Chinese characters, bustling streets, all of these elements made Chinatown both familiar and unfamiliar to me. Since then, a question kept haunting my mind: what made Chinatown a Chinatown? Digging through all kinds of sources, I stepped into the history of American Chinatowns and felt connected with the stories of many Chinese Americans. Even after this thesis is finished, I will still try to picture the future of Chinatowns.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chinatowns, as the gateways for thousands of Chinese immigrants into the United States since the mid-nineteenth century, have played an important role in the history of Chinese Americans. In response to restrictive policies and hostile immigration laws, early Chinatowns were established as self-sustaining communities to protect immigrant Chinese from racial discrimination.¹ Relying on internal institutions and kinship networks, Chinatowns provided their residents with fresh groceries, affordable housing, job opportunities, and most importantly a sense of home. Yet as changing economic and social dynamics transform downtowns in the United States, Chinatowns' future as Chinese-American communities is threatened. Located within urban core areas, Chinatowns have become the targets of large-scale public projects and undesirable land uses.² Under the pressure of urban renewal programs and economic development, will historic Chinatowns turn into anachronisms that are doomed to fade away like many other ethnic neighborhoods? How can Chinatowns maintain the identity of immigrant neighborhoods even if many of them have lost their initial mission in the twenty-first century?

In the United States, existing Chinatowns are mainly distributed on the East and West Coasts (see **Figure 1.1**). According to their establishment time and location, there are four distinctive types of Chinatowns: *traditional Chinatowns* are immigrant neighborhoods established before World War II by immigration Chinese as a means for survival and typically

¹ Chuo Li, "Chinatown and Urban Redevelopment: A Spatial Narrative of Race, Identity, and Urban Policies 1950-2000," (PHD Dissertation, The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011), 1.

² Bethany Y. Li et al, "Chinatown Then and Now: Gentrification in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia," Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), 6-7, assessed March 16, 2015, <http://aaldef.org/Chinatown%20Then%20and%20Now%20AALDEF.pdf>.

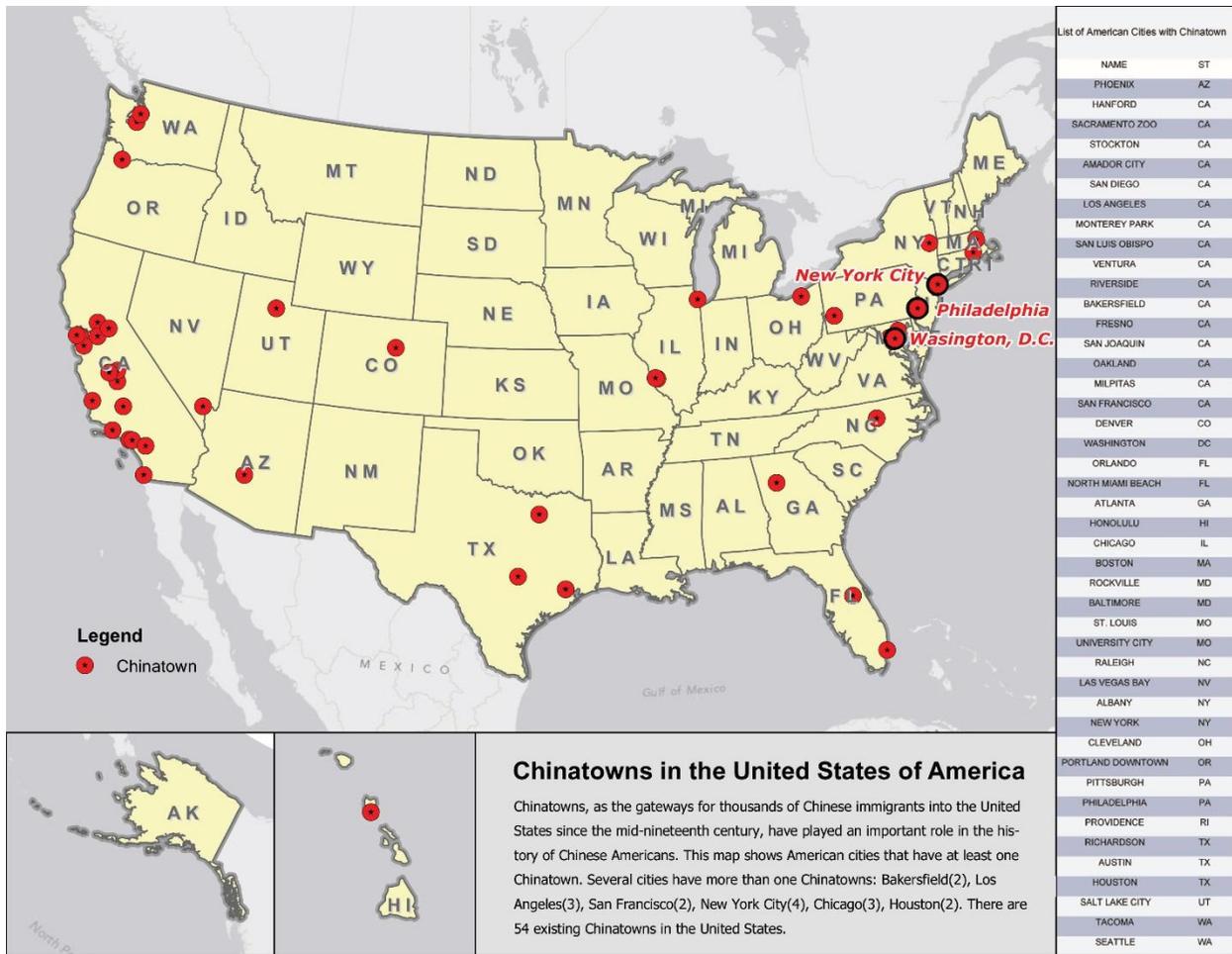


Figure 1.1: Chinatowns in the United States of America. (Illustration by the author.)

are located in urban centers; *satellite Chinatowns* merged as secondary Chinatowns after the 1965 Immigration Act which brought in an influx of newly arrived Chinese immigrants, and the convenient locations of these Chinatowns provided their residents with easy access to traditional Chinatowns for essential goods and services; *ethnoburbs* are suburban concentrations of immigrant settlement and business districts in large metropolitan areas, the emergence of which is enabled by immigrants’ ability to spread out from central cities and parallel large numbers of middle-class Chinese Americans’ pursuit for a better quality of life; finally, the *new Chinatown* is a recent concept marked by the forge of Las Vegas’s Chinatown Plaza in 1995 and chiefly

made for leisure and consumption.³ To explore historic resources in American Chinatowns and reveal some current preservation issues, this thesis mainly focuses on the study of traditional Chinatowns.

Many important studies have contributed to emphasize the emergence of Chinatowns in the United States. Early research on this topic perceived Chinatowns as natural outcomes of ethnicity and immigration settlements. The formation of Chinatowns in early years interwove with the kinship migration network and aggregative instincts of Chinese immigrants.⁴ This scholarship line stated that the immigrant Chinese found it difficult to merge into mainstream American society because they lacked English proficiency and were unwilling to assimilate. As David Lai described, “[c]hinetown in North America is characterized by a concentration of Chinese people and economic activities in one or more city blocks which forms a unique component of urban fabric. It is basically an idiosyncratic oriental community amidst an occidental urban environment.”⁵ According to this line of scholarship, ethnic identity was inscribed into the places where a group of immigrants clustered.⁶ During the last decade of the twentieth century, scholars in different disciplines developed another line of Chinatown studies. Instead of viewing Chinatowns as natural products of clustered Chinese immigrants, they underlined the significant role of Western society in shaping the place and identity of Chinatowns. The Western external forces included anti-Chinese laws and regulations, discriminatory policies, and capitalism that made Chinatowns as places of “otherness.”⁷ John Kuo Wei Tchen, for example, explained that the establishment of Chinatowns revealed the

³ Michael Liu and Kim Geron, “Changing Neighborhood: Ethnic Enclaves and the Struggle for Social Justice,” *Social Justice* Vol. 35, No. 2 (2008): 19-20. This article developed a taxonomy of Asian-American enclaves into four types: traditional enclaves, satellite enclaves, new enclaves, and ethnoburbs. Liu’s taxonomy is altered by the author in categorizing Chinatowns.

⁴ Mary Ting Yi Lui, “Race and Disease in Urban Geography,” *Reviews in American History* 30, no. 3 (2002): 453-454.

⁵ David Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 101.

⁶ Lui, 453-454.

⁷ *Ibid*, 453-454.

systematic definition and creation of the racial category of “Chinese” by the authorized white institutions rather than the actual living experiences of Chinese immigrants.⁸ Later, a scholarship line of Chinatown studies occurred, arguing the formation of Chinatowns was associated with both internal needs and external forces of immigrant neighborhoods. Min Zhou, drawn from D.Y. Yuan’s classic study on segregation in Chinatowns, concluded, “[t]he emergence of Chinatowns in the United States involves both an involuntary and a voluntary process.”⁹ Despite these important studies that examine Chinatown within comprehensive contexts, few works highlight the salient role that subculture played in place-making. For Chinatown studies in the United States, the hybridity of Chinese-American culture is also very important to understand the evolution of built environments in Chinatown neighborhoods. This thesis contributes to explore Chinatowns’ built environments under the influence of a hybridized culture and identify historic resources and characteristics that make American Chinatowns distinctive.

Also, there is a lack of scholarly attention to east coast Chinatowns. Because of certain historical background, the initial Chinatowns were built in the Western United States. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a rising tide of extreme anti-Chinese violence on the west coast drove Chinese immigrants to other regions of the country. Many major cities on the east coast (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, D.C.) became the new destinations for immigration Chinese, which brought about the formation of east coast Chinatowns.¹⁰ Chinese-American historians have successfully broadened public understanding of the legacy of Chinese immigration on the west coast. The stories of Chinese immigrants into the mining and railroad industries and how they endured hostile environments have been

⁸ John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture 1776-1882* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁹ Min Zhou, *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 33.

¹⁰ Calvin Lee, *Chinatown, U.S.A.* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 122-126.

unveiled.¹¹ However, the east coast was treated as a backdrop to the west coast story until the late 1960s, when “globalization” brought a large number of Chinese laborers and Manhattan’s Chinatown expanded to become the largest Chinese enclave in the United States.¹² Books, journals and presentations at conferences have contributed to research on Chinatown as a metaphor of the racialization processes or the unequal labor and economic relations in North America, while there is not much study about actual space in Chinatowns.¹³

With roots in the historical events that drove thousands of Chinese from the west coast, east coast Chinatowns were established in the 1870s. However, their current circumstances are widely varied: one of them thrives to become the nation’s largest Chinese-American neighborhood and provide its residents with essential supplies and services (Chinatown in Lower Manhattan); some maintain as vibrant tight-knit communities while offering new opportunities and exotic experiences within cities (Chinatowns in Philadelphia and Boston); some largely shrink over time and struggle for survival (Chinatowns in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore). These different stories reveal that there is no single Chinatown model but rather multiple Chinese-American communities with various experiences of spatial evolution and ethnic preservation. It is worth research to probe how they responded to forces both inside and outside the communities and better understand how different sets of local efforts shape their existing environments. Specifically using three case studies of east coast Chinatowns located in metropolitan cities -- New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., the study examines local preservation practices of both tangible and intangible elements in the three neighborhoods and discusses what works and what does not.

¹¹ See for examples, Chalsa M. Loo, *Chinatown: Most Time, Hard Time* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991); Peter Kwong and Dusanka Miscevic, *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America’s Oldest New Community* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

¹² Jan Lin, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 2.

¹³ See for examples, Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987).

This thesis focuses on the following questions: 1) What is the contemporary significance of ethnic places as Chinatowns? 2) What makes a traditional Chinatown? 3) What is the key issue in current Chinatown preservation efforts? 4) How can cities better maintain the place-identity of Chinatowns in the future?

The research has benefited from a combination of sources including newspapers, neighborhood newsletters, institution publications, community projects, and academic works. The concepts of *ethnic places*, theories on place-identity, ethnic historic preservation movements, and historic contexts of Chinatown formation are largely based upon a thorough literature review of applicable scholarly materials. Both current Chinatown environment studies and the author's knowledge of Chinese architecture and traditional culture contribute to identify historic resources and characteristics in American Chinatowns. Conducted in the cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., research is based on historical newspapers and some secondary sources, bolstered by the author's field observation of different Chinese-American neighborhoods. A comparative research methodology is used for analyzing the overall findings to arrive at the suggestions of what improved practices could be conducted to preserve Chinatowns as immigrant neighborhoods in the future. Restricted by research time and work load, the author did not have the chance to conduct personal interviews in three Chinatown case studies. Profiles of Chinatown oral history projects and interviews by local newspapers provided the author with an idea of the important events occurred in different neighborhoods over the decades.

The organization of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 raises research questions, introduces research background, and explains the methodology of this study. Chapter 2 describes ethnic places within the contexts of the national scene and outlines ethnic historic preservation movements in American urban history. Chapter 3 digs into the early history of Chinese

immigration to the United States and analyses both involuntary and voluntary factors that affect the emergence of American Chinatowns. This chapter also identifies historic resources and characteristics that make Chinatowns distinctive. Chapter 4 looks into the case studies of three different Chinese-American neighborhoods. In the conclusion chapter, issues in current Chinatown preservation are discussed and some closing thoughts on improving local practices are provided.

CHAPTER 2

ETHNIC PLACES AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Robert Park, an American urban sociologist, once depicted the city as “a mosaic of little worlds that touch but do not interpenetrate.”¹⁴ At the mention of urban mobility, he pointed out that the mosaic of little worlds “makes it possible for individuals to pass quickly and easily from one moral milieu to another, and encourages the fascinating but dangerous experiment of living at the same time in several different contiguous, but otherwise widely separated, worlds.”¹⁵ Using this “mosaic” theory, Park vividly expounded the heterogeneity of American cities, not only when he completed his work in the 1920s, but even today.

Neighborhoods are fundamental units in urban life. Shaped by a range of cultural, social, economic, and physical factors, neighborhoods have developed their unique characters. Neighborhoods seem like small pieces in a large-scale mosaic named the city. However, the formation of urban fabric is a far more complicated process than ordinary permutation and combination -- it is dynamic and continually changing. The circulation of people is one of the major catalysts for urban mobility: firstly, people travel, and traveling experiences expose them to new ideas which could be used to modify their native places; secondly, people migrate, and by migration they apply their conversant practices to shape other places.¹⁶ During this circulating process, one urban unit inevitably has numerous interactions with others. In that sense, a kaleidoscope might be a more proper metaphor to characterize the image of a city.

¹⁴ Robert E. Park, “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment,” in *The City*, ed. Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹⁶ Michael Guggenheim and Ola Soderstrom, “Mobility and the Transformation of Built Form,” in *Re-shaping cities: how global mobility transforms architecture and urban form*, ed. Michael Guggenheim and Ola Soderstrom (New York: Routledge, 2010), 4.

The Concept of “Ethnic Place”

The segregation of the “little worlds” described by Park unveils a common phenomenon in different American cities: distinctive ethnic groups tended to live close together and socialize with others who share similar cultural values. The way ethnic clusters grow is just like how magnets work: the immigrant pioneers serve as magnet cores that attract other members from the same ethnic group.¹⁷ Along with the accumulation of years of history and culture, particular residential and commercial areas occupied by different ethnic groups become the center of their inhabitants’ daily life and embed as important components in their identities.¹⁸ Examples include Chinatowns, Little Italies, Mexican barrios, etc.

The term *ethnic* is derived from a Greek word which refers to people of the same race or nationality but also implies otherness. It is believed by many that there is a standard or mainstream American culture. People who could not merge into the mainstream culture are considered as *ethnics*, especially immigrant groups that came to the United States after the Civil War.¹⁹ While defining both “sameness” and “otherness”, the word *ethnic* draws a demarcation line between insiders and outsiders, creating some obstacles that can never be crossed. In short, this concept comes very close to “us” versus “them” or “self” versus “other.”²⁰

Based on common cultural, national, religious, and social experiences, ethnicity is an expression of shared traditional patterns that distinguish one group from another. How is ethnicity expressed in the built environment? Ethnic groups bring their special cultural practices to shape landscapes in migration stops and destinations or create some new architectural forms that never existed before. Inspired by factors such as available resources, topographic conditions

¹⁷ Mark Abrahamson, *Urban Enclaves: Identity and Place in America* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996), 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁹ Dell Upton, “Introduction,” In *America’s Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 7.

²⁰ Anre Venter, “Self Versus Other; ‘US’ Versus ‘Them’: The Self as Basis for Conflict,” in *Global Community: Global Security*, ed. Randall E. Osborne and Paul Kriese (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008), 69-70.

and climate characteristics in local settlements, most of their built efforts are neither simply transplanted nor accurately reproduced, but rather adapting old forms to new settings.²¹ The outcomes are known as hybridized built environments. For example, the French in the United States contributed a new variety of Creole architecture – combining Federal decorative features, Georgian geometry characteristics, and Creole chimneys, roofs, walls and galleries;²² the Creole style still flourishes in Louisiana in the elegant recreations of inspired architects who are willing to adapt their architecture heritage to new environments. In another example, after more than a century of cultural assimilation, the pitched-roof dwelling on a raised platform with decorative motifs is a Japanese-inspired building type still prevalent in Hawaii.²³ Such hybrid places created by distinctive ethnic groups greatly enrich the American scene.

To use the term *ethnic places* for this thesis requires some clarification of its scope and related concepts. While touching the topic of actual space occupied by ethnic groups, the term *ethnic enclaves* has also been widely used by scholars. As a sociology term, *ethnic enclaves* especially refers to the economic dimension of ethnic sub-economies and their role in immigrant adaptation and social mobility to the host society.²⁴ This usage fails to consider non-economic features such as the power of institutions in shaping the built environment, which is of equal importance. Compared with the above terminology, the scope of *ethnic places* has broader customary referents. In the geographic field, the concept of *ethnic places* includes the spatial territory of immigrant communities in terms of landmarks, buildings, and heritage sites, as well as an examination of sharing values and cultural practices which closely relate to the questions to be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

²¹ Ibid, 7-9.

²² Jay Edwards, "French," In *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 62-65.

²³ Ronald K. K. Lee, "Japanese," In *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 136-138.

²⁴ Lin, 26.

Place and Identity

To understand the complex relationship between place and identity, it is necessary to become more familiar with the theme of identity. In the field of social psychology, *identity* refers to individuals' definitions of their social selves and the linkage to societal roles and status.²⁵ Most people occupy several roles and thus have more than one identity in the real world. The switch of various roles is based on characters' awareness of what roles they need to play in different situations: parent or child roles at home; teacher or student roles in school; boss and subordinate roles in the workplace, etc.²⁶ To extend this point, not only the sameness of members in some regard is essential but also the awareness of their commonality and shared values is indispensable in the establishment of a social group's identity. Numerous factors combine to influence the formation of distinctive groups' identity: genetic, social, cultural, as well as the physical environment. The built environment is just one among the others but plays a significant role in shaping identity. As an example, individuals living in Chinatowns are strongly conscious of their identities as Chinese; likewise, the places become a fundamental part of their self-concepts.

Since the late 1970s, geographers, social scientists, environmental psychologists, and architectural theorists have tried to decipher the link between place and identity. As a result, they developed a variety of concepts such as "place attachment," "place-identity," and "place identification."²⁷ Based on a comparison of three influential identity theories (place-identity theory, social identity theory, and identity process theory) to explain the impact of place on identity, Norwegian architect Ashild Lappegard Hauge demonstrated his finding that the power

²⁵ Abrahamson, 5.

²⁶ Blake E. Ashforth, Glen E. Kreiner, and Mel Fugate, "All in a Day's Work: Boundaries and Micro Role Transitions," *Academy of Management Review* 25, No.3, (2000): 472.

²⁷ Ashild Lappegard Hauge, "Identity and place: a critical comparison of three identity theories," *Architectural Science Review* 50, issue 1 (2007): 45.

of places in shaping people's identity was enabled by the symbolic meaning of the environment itself. Places are prominent carriers of personal and social memories. Also, Hauge concluded that "[p]laces are not only contexts or backdrops, but also an integral part of identity."²⁸

The way an individual's identity is tied to places is intricate and multi-layered. According to Turkish architect Humeyra Birol Akkurt's summary of other scholars' studies, the link between people and places is based on cognition and emotion which guarantee the distinctiveness and continuity of living environment in time. Different kinds of symbolic forms tie people to the land: history, family lineage, religion, cultural events, and narrative links. Consequently, there are as many place identities of a particular place as distinctive groups that occupy it.²⁹

Although there seems no consensus regarding the definition of related concepts or how exactly the connection between identity and places works, an overwhelming majority of scholars agree with the notion that physical environments are crucial for people to develop and maintain the continuity of self. In addition, the process is not static, but interactive. Place and identity are co-created when different groups consciously identify where they live, how to develop it, and are in turn shaped by built environments as collective memories.³⁰ From this perspective, places are fundamental components in establishing people's identities. If the places meaningful to individuals' are threatened, faded or lost, people's identities are damaged. Concerning ethnic places in American metropolitan areas, a series of emotional aftereffects to distinctive ethnic groups could occur when outer or inner forces such as urban renewal projects, unfavored

²⁸ Ibid, 10.

²⁹ Humeyra Birol Akkurt, "Reconstitution of the Place Identity within the Intervention Efforts in the Historic Built Environment," in *The Role of Place Identity in the Perception, Understanding, and Design of Built Environments*, ed. Casakin, Hernan and Fátima Bernardo (Sharjah: Bentham Science Publishers, 2012), 64.

³⁰ Tom Mayes, "Why Do Old Places Matter? Individual Identity," Preservation Leadership Forum Blog, last modified January 8, 2014, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://blog.preservationleadershipforum.org/2014/01/08/old-places-matter-identity-1/>.

land-use policies or racial and economic shifts in communities drive them out of their former residential places.³¹

As sharpening land-use conflicts and shifting sociopolitical powers dramatically change downtowns throughout the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, the identity of many urban ethnic-concentration places has been greatly weakened. Can such places still maintain a strong tie with ethnic groups? Can they avoid their destiny to be erased from American urban landscape? To be able to answer these questions, it is necessary to give a brief overview of historic preservation and the changing roles of ethnic communities in American history.

Historic Preservation and Ethnic Communities in Urban History

In the United States, the idea of preserving a nation's past emerged in the mid-nineteenth century with efforts to save historic resources associated with significant figures. As in many other countries, the beginning of preservation in the United States was evoked by patriotism with urgent demand and hope for establishing a national identity.³² There is no denying the fact that early American public history was written by a middle- to upper-class white elite. In front of the backdrop of war and sacrifice, the elite as founding fathers, outstanding statesmen, and local heroes have been commemorated by the public. The legacy of these figures was the unifying focus of early preservation efforts.³³ Examples include George Washington's birthplace at Mount Vernon, Thomas Jefferson's plantation Monticello, and the Unknown Soldier's tomb at Arlington National Cemetery.

³¹ Abrahamson, 6.

³² "Historic Preservation in the United States," US/ICOMOS, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.usicomos.org/preservation>.

³³ Lin, 25.

With a growing social movement in the last fifty years, historic preservation in America has come into a more democratized era. In 1984, urban historian Dolores Hayden launched a small nonprofit corporation aimed at situating ethnic and women's history in public space. In her book *The Power of Place*, Hayden indicated the trend of the new social history through a series of experimental projects of museumization and architectural preservation, especially building types associated with the daily life of society's marginalized groups. Instead of merely focusing on societal elite, Hayden called attention to previously neglected groups, including women, immigrants, and racial-ethnic minorities. Based on extensive experience of both research and practice in urban communities, Hayden provides new perspectives on gender, race, and ethnicity, thus gave visibility to those groups' crucial roles in broadening public history and urban preservation.³⁴

Since the industrial era (1840-1920), which saw a particularly large influx of immigrants into the United States, the public's attitudes towards ethnic communities have changed dramatically over time, and served as the weather vane to the life and death of ethnic places. In the 1890s, many middle- and upper-class citizens were unaware of the harsh conditions in the slums where immigrants lived. An article written by Jacob Riis successfully attracted the public attention to the squalid conditions of slums in New York City in 1889 (see **Figure 2.1**). Riis's photographs in *Scribner's Magazine* caused a sensation and he spent a year extending it into the book *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*, published in 1890.³⁵ Using his words and photographs, Riis introduced not only unbearable living conditions in Lower East Side slums, but also the implausibly low salary rate in some sweatshops (see **Figure 2.2**). To improve life quality of immigrants, governing urban elites tore down the worst

³⁴ "Section 3: Place and Identity," in *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, ed. Jen Jack Giesecking et al, assessed January 14 2015, <http://peopleplacespace.org/toc/section-3/>.

³⁵ Janet B. Pascal, *Jacob Riis: Reporter and Reformer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 84-87.



Figure 2.1: Dens of Death, New York City, circa 1889.
(Photograph by Jacob Riis. Courtesy of Museum Syndicate.)



Figure 2.2: The sweatshop in a Ludlow Street tenement, New York City, circa 1905.
(Photograph by Jacob Riis. Courtesy of Museum Syndicate.)

tenements and sweatshops in the city.³⁶ As a huge success, this book led to the demolishing of New York City's worst tenements and sweatshops, and its following effect was a decade of infrastructure improvements in Lower East Side slums, including sewer system, garbage collection, and indoor plumbing.

Influenced by the City Beautiful Movement in the 1890s and early 1900s, sympathy from the public towards ethnic clusters turned into aversion. Under the high aesthetic standards proposed by advocates, slums came to be regarded as “unhealthy” places in urban environments, thus a burden to city planners and elected officials. Beginning at the turn of the century, ethnic places were subjected to slum clearance and removed to promote a harmonious social order. During the 1950s and 1960s, another wave of urban renewal swept cities in the United States. The public goal of “healthy” cities offered governments a convenient excuse to use the eminent domain power to clear “blighted” cityscapes.³⁷ In the process of remaking downtowns, federal, state and city officials actively started bulldozing and relocating ethnic places to make way for luxury housing, expressways, government office complexes, and expansion of central business districts (CBD). Ethnic communities were historically perceived as notorious slums and thus naturally became the targets of large public projects. In the Lower East Side of Manhattan, riverfront tenements were demolished to make room for public housing and the East River Drive. Portions of Philadelphia's Chinatown were razed for the projects of the Vine Street Expressway and the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In downtown Washington, D.C., Chinatown was relocated to facilitate the construction of the Federal Triangle office complex. The above are only a small portion of representative cases regarding ethnic communities that struggled in the urban regeneration process.

³⁶ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

³⁷ Li, 11.

Gan's seminal study *The Urban Villagers* (1962) marked the emergence of a new scholarship and perspective that challenged the affirmative and organization functions of the Italian American society in dealing with problems of urban poverty. Moreover, this book criticized federal slum clearance programs on a number of counts: lack of community input in the renewal process; insufficient of financial compensation to minority property owners in the eminent domain process; the absence of or inadequate assistance to relocate displaced families; and the evaluative, rather than analytic, utility of terms such as "slum" in labeling ethnic places as dysfunctional and undesirable.³⁸ The activated civil rights and ethnic power movements of the 1960s through the 1970s bred a series of heritage reclamation projects and community action in American ethnic places. Cultural renewal efforts by ethnic communities during the nadir era of the post-Watergate Recession greatly boosted the respectability and significance of long neglected ethnic history. Practices such as building immigration history museums and preserving ethnic heritage sites were made by local communities.³⁹ To take the efforts in Manhattan's Lower East Side as an example, a number of ethnic museums were constructed in the period, including the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the Chinatown History Museum, and the Eldridge Street Synagogue.

Another wave of urban renewal took place in the 1970s and 1980s, which was characterized by federally inspired and locally implemented economic reconstruction. The inner core of American cities experienced rapid growth under increasing investments, and the direct product was rising real estate values.⁴⁰ Searching for new capital sources, cities applied different strategies to boost attractive and distinct city images. One of the most-used means to achieve this

³⁸ Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 321-326.

³⁹ Lin, 40-41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 15.

goal is through “a conscious and deliberate manipulation of culture in an effort to enhance the appeal and interest places.”⁴¹ Driven by economic concerns, previously undesired central-city ethnic places have become a tool of community marketing and the saviors in resisting homogenization and create local distinctiveness.

Significance of Ethnic Places

In the second half of the twentieth century, the world has entered into a global era. Affected by the explosion of information, many ethnic places are fading within the process of cultural assimilation. It is urgent to preserve ethnic places due to a number of reasons. Firstly, they play important roles in immigrants’ community life. Ethnic places not only provide essentials and services to facility ethnic groups’ adaption to the host society, but also build a sense of home which is crucial in their identity. Secondly, as expressions of cultural distinctiveness, ethnic places increase the diversity of cityscape and local commerce, which contribute to the vitality in urban districts. Last but not least, ethnic places serve as “street museums” of ethnic minorities’ history and experiences in American society, which is an indispensable part of the nation’s public history. With this three-fold significance, preservation of ethnic places can improve community life, boost vibrant city, and enrich public history.

⁴¹ Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo, “Culture, History, Capital: A Critical Introduction to the Selling of Places,” in *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, eds. Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo (Oxford: Pergamon, 1993), 3.

CHAPTER 3

CHINATOWNS NOW AND THEN

There appears to be a phenomenon that many American cities boast of having at least one Chinatown in their vibrant downtowns -- San Francisco, Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., etc. Chinatowns, as one category of ethnic places, greatly enhance the diversity of urban landscapes in the United States. Chinatowns to most Americans represent an ancient oriental country existing in their midst. They are mysterious places to explore and wonderful places to eat and shop. Early public impressions of the Chinese and Chinatowns in the United States were greatly influenced by newspapers, magazines, and movies.⁴² However, the media mostly told only a small part of the whole story so as to cater to its audience. Perceiving the built environment of Chinatowns as exotic and evil is the articulation of “Orientalism.”⁴³ This particular immigration group and their communities have rarely been understood by the Western world. This chapter aims to unveil some important facts about Chinatowns in the United States and probe the question of what makes Chinatown a Chinatown.

Historic Contexts

The immigration history of Chinese-Americans dates back to 1820, the year when the United States Immigration Commission reported arrival of the first Chinese in the United

⁴² See for examples, Charlie Chan Collection; Robert Towne, *Chinatown*, directed by Roman Polanski (1974; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 1999), DVD.

⁴³ The term “orientalism” is widely used by cultural studies scholars for the imitation or depiction of aspects in Eastern cultures. In 1978, Edward Said developed the concept in his book *Orientalism*. According to his research, the West essentializes Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian societies as static and undeveloped — thereby fabricating a scene of such culture that can be depicted and reproduced. In Chinatown cases, the whole concept of Chinatown is accurately a white idea, a projection of the Western imaginary that creates the intricate relations between place, ethnicity, and power.

States.⁴⁴ The first wave of Chinese immigrants came at a time of poverty and turmoil in feudal China. In the mid-nineteenth century, a nationwide stagnant economy with explosive population growth, compounded by grain harvest failure caused by droughts in the Pearl River Delta area triggered social unrest in southern China. Natural and man-made disasters drove many Chinese overseas to seek a better life.⁴⁵

When gold was found in 1848 near Sacramento, California, three Chinese workers (two men and one woman) were among the first ethnic group to arrive for the California gold rush.⁴⁶ Enticed by opportunities of becoming rich quickly, more Chinese immigrants followed in their pioneers' footsteps to the "Gum San."⁴⁷ According to the records, the number of Chinese laborers in California increased more than five times within one year and reached twenty-five thousand by 1851, most of them men.⁴⁸

The then thriving United States economy brought rapid development to the American West, leading to a high demand for cheap unskilled laborers. Chinese men were willing to work hard for low wages under hard and dangerous conditions, thus they filled the job spots unwanted by white workers. The employment of Chinese workers reached its peak during the Transcontinental Railroad construction in the 1860s. However, labor problems showed up during an economic recession, with Chinese laborers' successful performance in the construction sector becoming a sore point for unemployed whites, which set the scene for the later Anti-Chinese movement on the West Coast. Beginning in 1873, the Long Depression exacerbated unemployment problems in the West. As a minority group at the bottom of the social order,

⁴⁴ William L. Tung, *The Chinese in America, 1820-1973* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1974), 7.

⁴⁵ Ester N. Chow, "From Pennsylvania Avenue to H Street NW: the transformation of Washington's Chinatown" in *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, DC*, ed. Francine C. Cary (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 190.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 190.

⁴⁷ "Gold Mountain" in Cantonese. Used by early Chinese immigrants, this term initially refers to California, USA.

⁴⁸ Tung, 8.



Figure 3.1: Massacre of Chinese at Rock Springs, Wyoming, September 2, 1885.
(Source: engraving published in *Harper's Weekly*, September 26, 1885. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.)

Chinese laborers became the targets of both industrialists and labor unions. European-American workers blamed Chinese for hindering the national economy and “stealing” their jobs.⁴⁹ A series of exclusionary policies were passed to force “Chinese coolies”⁵⁰ out of mining, fishing, farming and other industries. Under the pressure applied by the white working class, Congress adopted the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, prohibiting Chinese laborers from further immigration and obtaining United States citizenship. As the anti-Chinese sentiment was out of control under the slumping economy, infuriated white laborers killed many Chinese and destroyed their communities in numerous riots and massacres during the last quarter of the nineteenth century (see **Figure 3.1**). Started in California, the anti-Chinese atrocities gradually

⁴⁹ Chow, 190.

⁵⁰ “Chinese Coolies” was a label applied to unskilled laborers hired by a company, mainly referred to those from Southern China.

spread to other western states, especially Oregon and Washington. To flee such hostile environments and pursue possible economic opportunities, a great number of Chinese immigrants who had settled on the West Coast migrated to other regions. Many big cities on the East Coast, the Midwest, and the South become new destinations of Chinese migrants.⁵¹

Segregation of Chinatowns

Under certain circumstances at the time, how to survive in the hostile American society became a big question for early Chinese-Americans. In response to systemic racism and legal exclusion, clustering in insulated enclaves seemed to be the only choice for them. Excluded from every aspect of American life - legal, economic, social, and political - most early Chinese immigrants lived their lives in the defined areas known as Chinatowns. The formation of Chinatowns in the United States was firstly and foremost related to the impacts of systemic racism and legal barriers against the Chinese, and secondly to pioneer immigrants' cultural framework. Hence, segregation of Chinatowns involved a process both involuntary and voluntary.⁵²

Overt hostility towards the Chinese immigrants began in California not long after their arrival and continued in the United States for almost a century. Numerous federal, state and local laws and ordinances constrained various aspects of Chinese Americans' life. In 1854, the State Supreme Court extended the California statutes of 1850 to prohibit Chinese-Americans from testifying against European-Americans in court. This ruling made for absolute inferiority for Chinese immigrants if they got involved in a civil or criminal proceeding with white persons.

⁵¹ Chow, 191.

⁵² Zhou, 33.

Loss of protection by the courts greatly weakened Chinese immigrants' legal status.⁵³ In this situation, clustering in Chinatowns seemed to be the safest mode of life for the ethnic group.

Systematic discrimination also restricted the employment of Chinese to a limited range of occupations. To remove Chinese laborers from mines during the Gold Rush, the California Legislature passed a series of acts to impose foreign miners' license taxes in the 1850s. Later, the same discouraging policy was applied to push the Chinese out of the fishing industry. Moreover, the California Constitution of 1879 blocked Chinese employment by any state, county, municipal governments, or other public works. As a result, Chinese workers had no choice but to take jobs that white men had no interests in, such as household service, restaurant work, clothing manufacture, and laundries.⁵⁴ That could explain why Chinatowns economy in early years was primarily based on hand laundries, restaurants, gift shops and other small businesses.

Furthermore, a series of laws were enacted to arrest the Chinese-American population growth. The California Constitution of 1879 prohibited the Chinese from further immigration and explicitly proscribed the boundary of certain urban areas so they could not relocate themselves. In addition, marriage between Chinese and European Americans was forbidden by state laws.⁵⁵ Beginning in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act made it extremely difficult for Chinese to get into the United States. The extension of this act in 1892 closed the gate for all Chinese laborers. The Act of 1924 dispossessed Chinese-Americans of their rights to bring their foreign-born spouses and children to the United States. Under its impact, the social structure of Chinatowns remained in the patterns of overwhelmingly male communities until the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943.⁵⁶ Another direct outcome of the exclusion era was that

⁵³ Christopher L. Yip, "California Chinatowns: Built Environments Expressing the Hybridized Culture of Chinese Americans," in *Hybrid Urbanism*, ed. Nezar Alsayyad (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 73-74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁵ Tung, 15.

⁵⁶ Yip (2001), 74

Chinatowns tended to be more consolidated, becoming self-sufficient immigrant communities isolated from mainstream American society.

There is no doubt that systematic discrimination towards Chinese immigrants had a significant impact on the formation of Chinatowns in the United States. In response to a hostile environment where most living resources became unavailable for the discriminated-against minority group, Chinatown developed its own reactive mechanism to provide immigrants with residential shelters, an employment network, and a social life. However, it was not merely a passive process. Chinese immigrants' own needs to cluster in Chinatowns should not be neglected. In other words, Chinese immigrants were willing to segregate themselves due to particular reasons.⁵⁷

In the first place, the early waves of Chinese immigrants came to the United States merely for acquiring wealth and not intending to stay for a long period. In other words, they initially planned on returning to their native land once they had established financial security for them and their family. The Chinese laborers who went through great risks in the "Gold Mountain" were mostly married young men whose wives and children were in home villages awaiting their return. In common cases, elder members of the family arranged a marriage for a single young man before he went abroad to seek his fortune, hoping this would strengthen his ties to the family, thus making him more likely to regularly remit money back and finally return home. A series of duties and responsibilities to their family in the home place made the United States more a temporary sojourn than a permanent home for early Chinese immigrants. Therefore, it can be concluded that their adaptation to the host society only aimed at a short-term goal.⁵⁸ Thus, the Chinese did not see it necessary to improve their English proficiency or integrate into the

⁵⁷ Zhou, 33.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 33-34.

mainstream of host society. Finding a job that enabled them to make some money was the first priority for them. When rejected by the society at large, Chinese immigrants developed an inner network and found their own niches in Chinatowns.⁵⁹

In the second place, early Chinese immigrants to the United States led a bachelor life during their stay. Most of them were young men who left their wives and children in home villages awaiting their successful return. Women and children were rarities in the first and second wave of Chinese immigration and remained a small portion of the population until the first quarter of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ The 1860 and 1900 United States Census reported the ratio of men to women among the Chinese-American population as about the same, nineteen to one.⁶¹ There were several reasons leading to the long-lasting imbalance of demographic structure in Chinese-American communities.

First, in Chinese traditional culture, it is common for married women to be confined at home to oblige the duty of a wife -- support a husband and teach children. Meanwhile, due to the high cost of travel overseas, it was reasonable for them to stay in the home and take family responsibilities when their husbands sought fortune abroad. Also, Chinese law specifically prohibited female emigration until 1911. This resulted in the phenomenon that women travelling to the United States by themselves were very rare.⁶² Almost all Chinese females who immigrated to the United States were hired domestic servants or wives reuniting with their husbands. Secondly, under the background of outright anti-Chinese sentiment, the jobs available for Chinese laborers on the “Gold Mountain” were arduous. Thousands of early Chinese immigrants did find work in the most dangerous and poor conditions: gold mining, railroad construction, and

⁵⁹ Ibid, 34.

⁶⁰ Yip (2001), 71.

⁶¹ Stanford M. Lyman, *The Asian in the West* (Las Vegas, NV: Western Studies Center, 1970), 27-32.

⁶² Yip (2001), 72.

agriculture field, etc. Those industries were significant challenges to strong young men, let alone for females. Last but not least, the federal Exclusion Acts made it increasingly difficult for Chinese women to join their husbands in the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Acts, beginning in 1882, forbade almost all immigration of Chinese to the United States. As its extension, the Act of 1924 went a step further to deprive the right of Chinese-Americans to bring their foreign-born wives and children with them. As a result of various discriminatory policies, the social structure in Chinese-American communities was frozen in patterns of overwhelmingly pioneering males for decades.⁶³ To sum up, fetters of feudal ethics and rites, severe working conditions, and the Chinese Exclusion Acts in the New West hindered Chinese female immigration in early years.⁶⁴ As a result, Chinese-American communities were well known as “bachelor” societies from the 1850s to the 1920s.⁶⁵ The imbalance of sex ratio in Chinese-American population greatly influenced the structure of Chinatowns.

As mentioned above, most early Chinese immigrants had no families with them during their temporary residence in the foreign land. Social life was therefore especially important to them. Without good English proficiency or understanding of American culture, it seemed impossible for them to find their own place in the melting pot. They needed customary living environments that resembled home to alleviate their homesickness. Hence, Chinatowns became the Promised Land outside of their homeland. While clustering in Chinatowns, Chinese immigrants could speak their own language, enjoy traditional cuisine, play familiar games together, and exchange news from home.⁶⁶ Besides spiritual comfort, Chinatowns also provided Chinese laborers with economic niches and an inner network. To avoid the direct confrontation

⁶³ Yip (2001), 71.

⁶⁴ Chow, 190.

⁶⁵ Christopher L. Yip, “Association, Residence, and Shop: An Appropriation of Commercial Blocks in North American Chinatowns,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 5, Gender, Class, and Shelter (1995): 109.

⁶⁶ Zhou, 34.

with the white working class, Chinatown developed its own businesses which were especially marginalized by the larger economy, such as hand laundries, gift shops and later restaurants. These business activities guaranteed Chinese immigrants' some standard of living. In addition, the Chinese were culturally clannish, and most early Chinese immigrants came to the United States through a kinship network. Chinatowns became their first destination to obtain available sources of necessities and job opportunities from early immigrants. Within Chinatowns, pioneering immigrants were bounded by cultural obligations and even family names to help the subgroups.⁶⁷

The emergence of Chinatowns in the United States was shaped by both discriminatory impacts and cultural factors. Constrained by a series of national, state and local laws and ordinances, as a highly discriminated-against minority group at the time, the immigrants' power to shape urban landscapes on the foreign land was limited. However, the Chinese immigrants applied their ideas of place-making to express the spatial organization, social order and community identification in isolated enclaves.⁶⁸ Both cultural traditions and human activities played significant roles in shaping Chinatowns' physical environment.

Historic Resources and Characteristics

The early Chinatowns were naturally the first destinations for Chinese new-comers into the United States, providing them with affordable housing, job opportunities, social services, and customary daily life. With the need to retain their language and culture, many Chinese-Americans have lived all their life in the clustered enclaves for several generations. As a result, various Chinatowns serve similar functions for the Chinese immigrants: living space, economic

⁶⁷ Ibid, 34.

⁶⁸ Christopher L. Yip, "Chinese," in *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America*, ed. Dell Upton (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), 107.

base, and social center.⁶⁹ In regard to their built environments, a narrow range of architectural forms tended to dominate Chinatowns, mostly characterized as simple, wood-framed, multistoried structures. The location of traditional Chinatowns can explain the presence of the blocks in the single style. Chinatowns tended to occupy the low-rent, mixed-use housing zone next to the central business district. There were two main reasons for that: firstly, a series of discriminatory laws outrightly banned Chinese-Americans from owning properties in the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, so the majority of pioneer immigrants could only live as renters at the time; secondly, as a “bachelor” society, the Chinese found themselves neither financially capable or socially necessary of moving to the suburbs, thus the mixed-use zones near the urban core were regarded as the most convenient location to them.⁷⁰ In short, the design scheme for a Chinatown environment constitutes an expression of both the Chinese immigrants’ experience and a hybridized culture in America society.

Commercial Structures and Residential Hotels

Early Chinatowns mostly occupied multistoried commercial blocks located between the central business district and residential zones in an urban area.⁷¹ Each multistoried commercial block was occupied as an activity unit of the Chinese community, with traditional businesses and residential space under one roof. Economic activities usually took place on the first floor. The facade of gift shops and other small businesses commonly had a large glass exhibition window to light the interior, and more importantly draw the attention of people passing by. Early shop fronts of small businesses opened directly to the street. Later commercial frontages in Chinatowns were influenced by the design of typical American glass fronts with a recessed entry

⁶⁹ Zhou, 34.

⁷⁰ Yip (1995), 111; Yip (2001), 75.

⁷¹ Yip (2001), 75.

placed in the central axis of the facade (see **Figure 3.2**).⁷² In early years, the dominant economy within Chinatowns was the laundry business. With an increasing need for hand washing in the late nineteenth century, many Chinese laborers took the laundry work to make a living. It was estimated that 37.5 percent of Chinese workers in New York City were devoted to laundry work in the 1920s.⁷³ The most important reason for the great number Chinese laborers into hand laundries was that this industry was one economic niche left vacant by the local economy which the white working class had no interest in. The laundry business remained an overwhelmingly Chinese-based economy until advanced steam and machinery took the place of hand washing.



Figure 3.2: Storefront of 38 Mott Street in historic Chinatown, New York City, circa 1903. (Source: <http://www.nychinatown.org/storefronts/mott/38mott.html>, accessed April 14, 2015.)

⁷² Yip (1995), 109.

⁷³ Jack Chen, *The Chinese of America*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 198.

Another then thriving Chinatown business was the restaurant. Unlike the hand laundry industry, which was aimed at non-Chinese customers, the emergence of Chinese restaurants was initially intended to serve the Chinese sojourners. Early Chinese laborers mostly engaged in arduous work all day and did not have time or energy to cook by themselves when they went back to their living places in Chinatowns. As more and more Chinese laborers clustered in Chinatowns, tea houses, bakeries, and restaurants sprang up to meet their needs. Later, as the laundry industry decreased and the public gradually accepted Chinese food, the Chinese-American cuisine was becoming popular in Chinatowns. Many Americanized Chinese dishes were served. Some of them adjusted their flavors to cater to larger customer groups, such examples include Kung Pao chicken, egg foo young, crab rangoon, etc. Others were absolutely new dishes that you could not find in any restaurants in China; famous General Tso's chicken and chop suey are included.

A residential hotel usually occupied the second floor of multistoried structures. Because the Chinese-American population was mainly composed of single males who sent most of their incomings back to home villages in China, there was no intention (or not enough money left) of this group to spend much money on house leasing.⁷⁴ Most early Chinese-Americans rented the cheapest rooms in residential hotels, or just slept at their working place. Generally, a typical bedroom in the hotels had multiple beds, and through sharing one bedroom, men could sleep in shifts to cut down their cost. It was common for more than one man to occupy one living unit of between six by eight to ten by fifteen feet in size.⁷⁵ Facilities such as toilet and washing space were usually compressed in a single cell at the end of the hallway. Large residential hotels sometimes provided residents with cooking facilities in designated rooms. Because property owners knew the Chinese could or would not find other living places, many residential hotels for

⁷⁴ Yip (2001), 71.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 77.

Chinese immigrants were out of maintenance, either dilapidated or roughly finished. On the facade of the story which residential hotels occupied, there was little decorative treatment, except for fire-escape balconies in some cases to meet the building codes (see **Figure 3.3**).



Figure 3.3: Mixed-use structures on Pell Street in Chinatown, New York City, 1900. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

Association Buildings

Within American Chinatowns, the most elaborate buildings were association headquarters. Common decorative elements included the use of curving eaves with pseudo temple bells dangling from the corners, red Chinese-style columns decorated with coiled dragons holding up the eaves of a top-floor loggia, and bright color schemes.⁷⁶ From the intricate exterior decoration, it is not difficult to tell that Chinese-American associations were indispensable elements of the Chinese community.

The social order in American Chinatowns differed from that in China. Merchants, as one of the few classes not banned from entering the United States during the exclusion era, formed the elite group of the community. This is the opposite of the situation in China, where scholar-officials (sometimes referred to as the literati) were regarded as the elite in society, while merchants were at the lowest status in the Confucian social hierarchy in Chinatown, especially in feudal society. However, merchants became the elite group among the overseas Chinese.⁷⁷ That contributed to a different social order of Chinatowns from that of China. Associations were engaged in every aspect of Chinese-American life, including economic, social, and even quasi-governmental ones. The network in clan, village and district-dialect associations assisted Chinese immigrants to find work to guarantee their acquiescence to the system. Moreover, associations helped newcomers get in touch with their families at home and facilitated their remittance of money back. Also, immigrants sought entertainment activities organized by the associations, such as the club house, traditional gaming, and even gambling. Last but not the least, the associates were the primary representatives in legal battles to defend Chinese-Americans rights.⁷⁸

Chinese-American associations often made efforts to modify leased buildings to

⁷⁶ Ibid, 78.

⁷⁷ Yip (1995), 110.

⁷⁸ Kuo, *Social and Political Change in New York's Chinatown* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977), 10-12.

accentuate their prominence. They hired designers to make changes to American commercial blocks to express the power and importance of their associations. However, there was no denying the fact that constrained by different building materials and different settings, traditional Chinese institutional buildings were almost impossible to be literally replicated in the American urban environment. Rather, the matching images of eastern and western places created an idea of hybrid place-making to meet their needs. In China, the design of traditional institutional buildings was greatly influenced by the spatial organization of a courtyard house, a vernacular architectural form that has a front gate with spaces of different importance aligned along a central axis (see **Figure 3.4**).⁷⁹ The further back a room is placed in the spatial order, the more

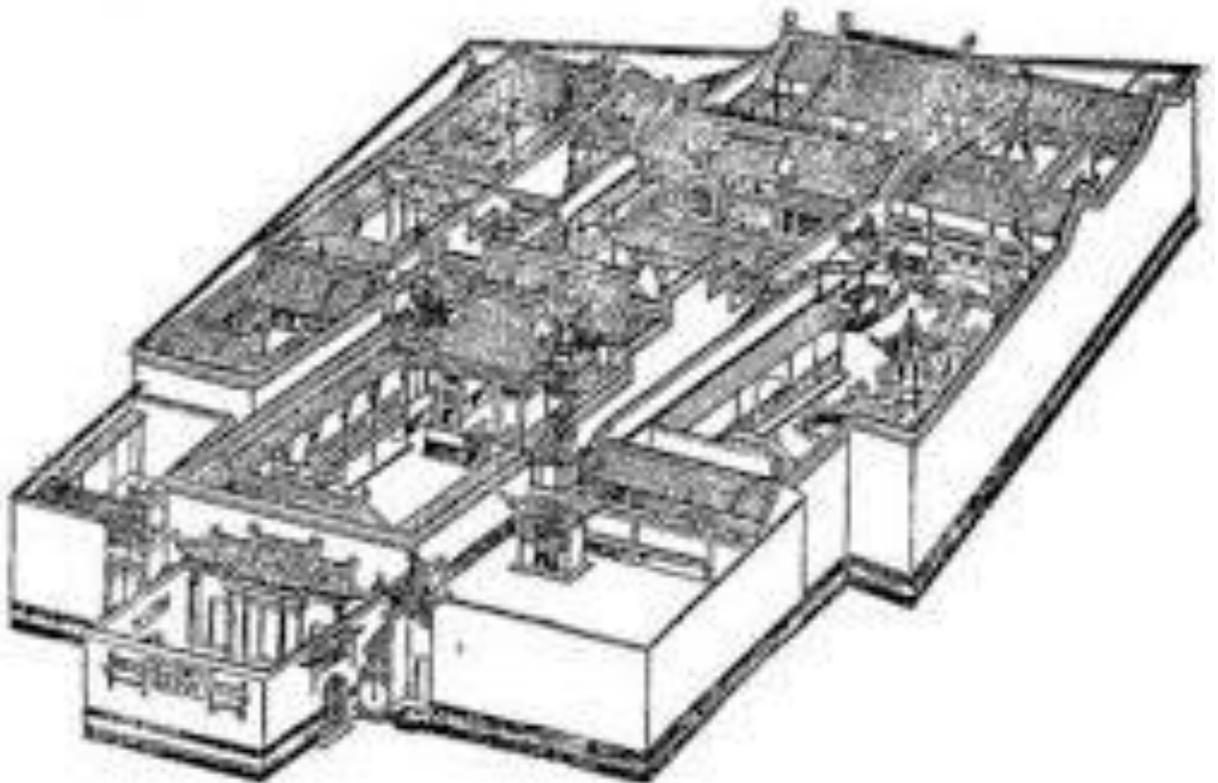


Figure 3.4: Spatial organization of Shan Shan West Hui Guan, Wuhan, China. (Source: http://www.hwjyw.com/zwhh/ctwh/zgds/xljz/200708/t20070830_5611.shtml, assessed May 4.)

⁷⁹ Yip (1995), 113.

important function the space serves. With neither permission nor room to expand at the rear, association buildings in American Chinatowns borrowed the idea of spatial hierarchy in traditional Chinese public buildings, but rather than horizontal, in in vertical sequences (see **Figure 3.5**).⁸⁰



Figure 3.5: Northeast elevation of historic Chinatown Young Man's Christian Association (YMCA) building, Philadelphia. (Source: Historic American Buildings Survey, 1974.)

⁸⁰ Ibid, 115.

Landmarks

The most renowned landmarks associated with Chinatowns are Chinese archways. With two or four pillars commonly painted in red and a roof covered with colored tiles, these ornamental archways usually stand at the entrance of Chinatowns, marking the boundary between the local Chinese-American community and the host society. Transplanted from China, this majestic structure has long been regarded as the symbol of Chinatown.

Archway, or *paifang* (牌坊) in Mandarin Chinese, is a very important architectural type in ancient China. *Pai* (牌) literally means “placard,” while *fang* (坊) can be understood as a “city subdivision” or “square.” Most likely derived from an Indian-style torana temple gate, the earliest Chinese *paifang* had a very simple design, basically composed of two columns with a crossbar on the top and two split wooden doors.⁸¹ During the Han Dynasty, Chinese cities gradually developed into a mature urban form with the emergence of administrative divisions and subdivisions. The top level of division within a city was *fang*, which is very close to the concept of precinct nowadays. Each *fang* was a residential area enclosed by four bounding walls, and the gate on each wall was shut and guarded at night. At that time, the residents would put up notices on the wooden gate to cite good people and good deeds inside the *fang* they lived in. Since then, the *fang* gate derived its new function. In order to make the honor notices sustain for a long time, people utilized more solid materials to build the gate and engraved reasons of praise, examples include *Jiexiao Fang* to honor filial affection and *Zhuangyuan Fang* to cite the Number One in imperial examination, which are the prototypes of general Chinese *paifang* later.

As the urban pattern of Chinese cities tended to develop into a more open form in the Song Dynasty, the *fang* system was abolished, and the walls between *fangs* were demolished. Thus, a *fang* gate ceased to serve as a gateway and became merely a decorative structure later

⁸¹ Ronald G. Knapp, *China's old dwellings*, (Manoa, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 85.

known as paifang. From the style of two pillars with an unpretentious crossbar to six exquisite pillars with a placard, paifangs became more and more elaborate and reached their peak in intricate design during the Ming and Qing Dynasty. These are the archetypes of many Chinese archways in the United States (see **Figure 3.6**).

Numerous American cities proudly exhibit the traditional archways of ancient China in their downtowns. Most of those archways were constructed under proposals by the local Chinese community, Chinatown association, governments or the tourism authorities to make the neighborhoods look more “oriental.” The archways serve to reinforce the Chinese character in the neighborhood, celebrate American multiculturalism, demonstrate good relationship between the American and sister cities in China, and mark an auspicious date or the official designation of an area as a Chinatown. The archway in San Francisco's Chinatown is among the earliest in the United States and is considered by many the only authentic Chinese archway in North America. Unlike similar structures which usually stand on wooden pillars, this iconic symbol conforms to Chinese gateway standards using stone from base to top and green-tiled roofs in addition to wood as basic building materials (see **Figure 3.7**). The Gateway was designed by Clayton Lee, Melvin H. Lee, and Joe Yee in 1970.⁸²

From analysis made above, two points should be kept in mind with regard to Chinatowns: firstly, the structures in American Chinatowns were different from what they were in China, but the result of a hybridized culture, marking their adaption to the host society; Secondly, culture played a very important role in shaping Chinatowns' built environments and contributed to its distinctiveness.

⁸² Tom Le Bas, *Insight Guides China* (Washington, D.C.: APA Publications, 2007), 104.



Figure 3.6: Lakefront Archway at Summer Palace, Beijing, China. (Source: <http://www.photophoto.cn/photo/show/055/003/0550030061.htm>, assessed May 4.)



Figure 3.7: Dragon Gate on Grant Avenue at Bush Street marking the entry to Chinatown, San Francisco. (Source: <http://ghirardellisquare.com/local-attractions/chinatown/>, assessed May 4.)

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES

A City within A City: Manhattan's Chinatown

New York City is usually perceived as a “melting pot” because of its colorful social mosaic. For more than a century, the city has been a hub for immigrants from all over the world, and cultural diversity has formed a great part of its fascinating urban landscape. Wandering along the east side of Lower Manhattan, one can hardly miss a historic neighborhood -- Chinatown. Strolling on its distinctive streets, visitors find themselves in an exotic country: store signage is marked with Chinese characters; roasted chicken and ducks are displayed in restaurant windows; the air is filled by the smell of dim sum and other cuisines; and all manner of cries are scattered through the crowds. It is a normal day in Manhattan's Chinatown. Serving as both home for the Chinese New Yorkers and a tourist attraction for sightseers, the Chinatown provided its residents and visitors with a variety of restaurants, grocery markets, and knickknack shops on its narrow streets (see **Figure 4.1**). Most Chinese immigrants living in this neighborhood still cling to their traditional ways and old values to maintain bit by bit a culture which is not meant to display.⁸³ It seems that the language barriers keep this ethnic neighborhood as a mysterious district for the large society. From a small ethnic enclave to the nation's largest immigrant neighborhood, the intricate history of Manhattan's Chinatown was inundated with challenges and opportunities under global and local changes.

⁸³ Zhou, 1.



Figure 4.1: Mott Street between Canal and Bayard Streets, New York City, 2014. The scene includes several restaurants, clothing shops, and a spectacles store. (Photograph by the author.)



Figure 4.2: Mott Street in the historic core of Chinatown, New York City, 1900. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

From “Chinese Quarter” to Chinatown

Ah Ken was the first documented Chinese to settle in New York City. Arriving in Lower Manhattan, Ah Ken developed his own cigar business on Park Row in the 1840s. By inviting other local cigar makers to ply their trade in the area, Ah Ken eventually achieved a monopoly on the cigar trade in the city. The successes of cigar businesses made him wealthy. He opened the Park Row smoke shop in lower Mott Street where the historic core of Chinatown formed.⁸⁴

During the 1870s, Chinese immigrants arrived in New York City in large numbers. Most of them came to the city to pursue new working opportunities after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and escaped the hostile environment along the West Coast.⁸⁵ The Chinese newcomers began to populate Mott Street south of Canal Street, the area of which was once the settlement of Africans, Irish, Polish, and Russian Jews.⁸⁶ At the time, boarding houses in the 6th Ward were the most concentrated living place for immigrants. As Chinese-owned businesses and mutual aid societies were established, Baxter and Mott Streets eventually developed as the hub of the Chinese community in New York City (see **Figure 4.2**). By the end of the decade, the portion of the 6th Ward bounded by Broadway, Bowery, Walker Street, and Chatham Square was known as the “Chinese Quarter.”⁸⁷

By 1880, only 73 Chinese-born immigrants settled in the Chinese Quarter, a small number compared to the 675 immigrant Chinese who lived outside.⁸⁸ Rather than a residential neighborhood, the Chinese Quarter was more like a Chinese-based commercial area of

⁸⁴ Tchen, 82-83.

⁸⁵ Chow, 190.

⁸⁶ Tchen, 77.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 232-233, 239.

⁸⁸ National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (NR Form), *Chinatown and Little Italy Historic District*, (2009), Section 8 Page 11.

restaurants, garment shops, hand laundries, cigar manufactories, and grocery stores. The first documented purchases of real estate in the Chinese Quarter were on lower Mott Street. In 1883, grocer Wo Kee bought 8 Mott Street for \$8,500, Wong Ah Ling purchased 16 Mott for \$15,000, Chinese merchant Kwong Hing Lung purchased 10 Mott Street, while Man Lee bought number 12.⁸⁹ Ownership enabled Chinese businessmen to take control of commercial development in the neighborhood. As more and more Chinese businesses opened, this area became the center of Chinese immigrants' daily life. From the city directory, the Chinese Quarter had over ten grocery stores, six herb shops or pharmacies, numerous restaurants, and garment factories back then.⁹⁰

The joss house served as a fixture in the Chinese Quarter since the beginning of its establishment. The term of "joss house" was invented by the American press to describe the incense-filled shrines where the statue of a deity was venerated. A great number of Chinese immigrants were Taoist, and the worship of ancestors and various deities was an important part of their tradition. Many so-called "joss houses" were built in the neighborhood, some of which were open to the public, while others were tucked away in tong⁹¹ headquarters. Also, there were Chinese movie theaters in Chinatown which provided the Chinese population with entertainment. The first Chinese-based theater in the city was located at 5 to 7 Doyers Street from 1893 to 1911. The theater was later converted into a rescue mission for homeless from the Bowery. The Chinese Opera House, opened by actor Chu Fong in the early 1890s, was usually packed with the Chinese "Bachelors." Traditional Chinese opera was performed there until the year 1905, when

⁸⁹ Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 406; Hall, *Tea that Burns: A Family Memoir of Chinatown* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 64.

⁹⁰ Tchen, 281.

⁹¹ Tong is a type of organization found among Chinese living in American Chinatowns. These organizations are firstly formed as secret societies or brotherhoods and are often tied to commercial activity. Today their major aim is to protect their members and their respective communities.

tong violence took place on Doyers Street.⁹² Located at East Broadway, Sun Sing Theater was opened in 1911 and featured performances of motion pictures and Yiddish vaudeville.⁹³ A variety of commercial and social activities established to facilitate the life of Chinese immigrants, especially newcomers into New York City. In 1898, Manhattan's original Chinatown was delineated as a small triangular area bounded by Pell, Bowery, and Mott Streets, and it was estimated that about 4,000 Chinese immigrants lived there (see **Figure 4.3**).⁹⁴

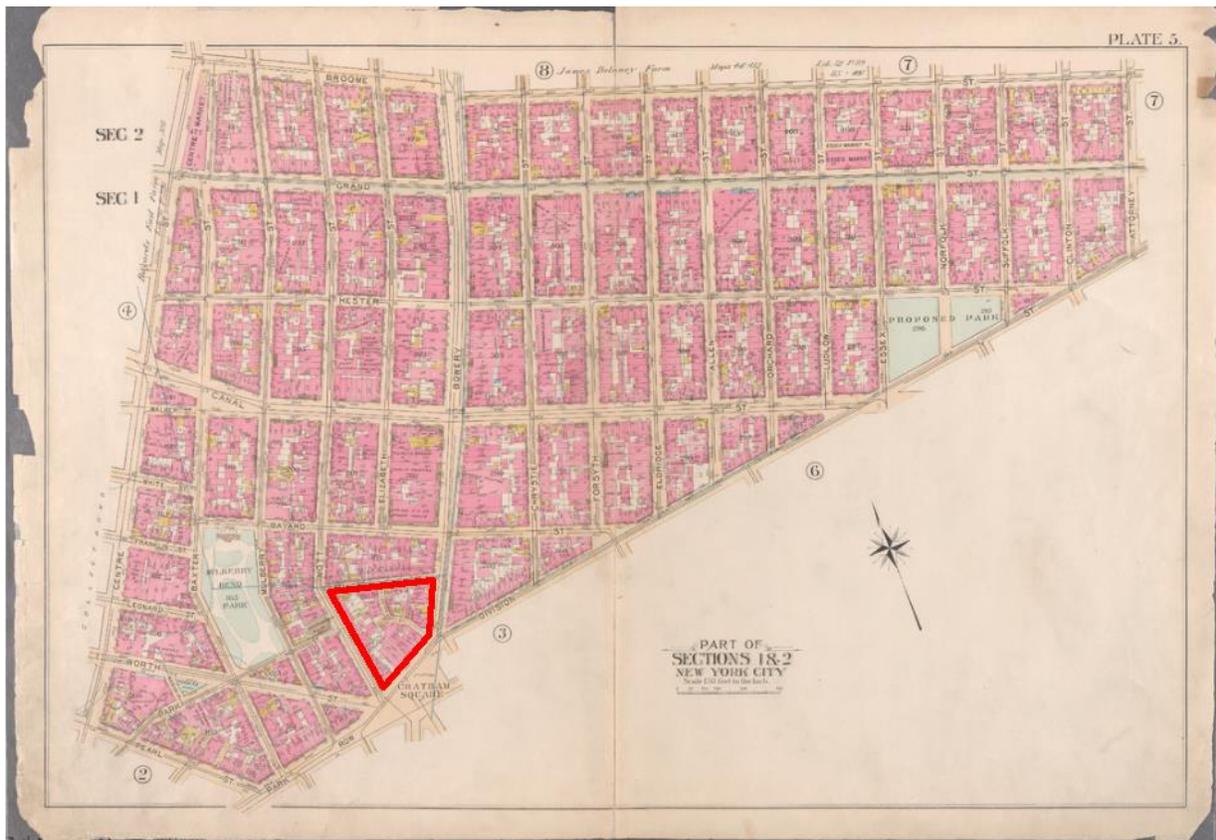


Figure 4.3: Historic Core of Chinatown, New York City, 1898. (Base map: Bromley, G.W., Atlas of the city of New York, Plate 5, circa 1911.)

⁹² Hall, 141.

⁹³ Sun Sing Theater was closed down in 1993.

⁹⁴ L. J. Beck, *New York's Chinatown: an historical presentation of its people and places* (New York: Bohemia Pub. Co., 1898), 11-12.

Traditional Chinese-American Associations

The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 greatly influenced the immigrant Chinese experience in the United States, not only excluding Chinese from certain professions and occupations but also denying their rights of naturalization to American society. In the face of the anti-Chinese movement, Chinese immigrants could rely on no one but themselves. A number of Chinese-American associations were developed in Chinatowns to meet the needs of Chinese immigrants, especially newcomers, for mutual aid and support. There were four types of traditional associations in Manhattan's Chinatown: the family, district, guild, and merchant associations. Although differing in size of membership, complexity of internal differentiation, and status in the community, all of these Chinese-American associations shared the same goal -- to maintain the existing social order of the Chinatown community and thus protect their members' long-term economic benefits.⁹⁵

By 1977, there were 24 documented family associations in Manhattan's Chinatown, 4 of which were large family-surname associations. The Lee family association had the most matured structure among all the family associations. It held a large federal credit union composed of the contribution of its members. Each member had the obligation to put in certain amount of money, and in turn enjoy the benefits of borrowing money at a very low rate. Most members had jobs in restaurants or hand laundries, while only five percent were college students. The Lee family associates acquired huge benefits from the federal credit union system and later became one of the most prosperous family associations nationwide. The example of the Lee family association was typical in structure and operation of a family association.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Kuo, 10.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 23-24.

District associations, or Hui Guan in Chinese, were based on localities of origin and dialects. Many members speak the same dialect but come from different places can join in the same district association. As one of the district associations, when first moving to New York City the Hakka district association was restricted in activities and movements by the Toishan-speaking people. Thus, the members of the association dispersed into areas outside the Chinatown neighborhood in its early years. As they became wealthy enough to own commercial properties in Manhattan and New Jersey, the Hakka district association came back to Chinatown and bought a large five-story building. By the 1970s, the association boasted 3,000 members around the metropolitan area. It was dedicated to providing members with mutual aid and social activities, as well as facilitating business transactions.⁹⁷

Merchant associations have become especially influential in American Chinatowns since the late nineteenth century. In the period following the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, they protected Chinese immigrants from the violence of the host society. As two major merchant associations in the New York metropolitan area, the On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong controlled the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), which can be considered as the City Hall of Chinatown. As its name implies, the CCBA was a consolidated structure that integrated and mediated all the traditional associations and functioned as the government.⁹⁸ The power of the CCBA determined that the On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong were at the very top of the social order in Manhattan's Chinatown. Led by a group of prominent Chinatown merchants, the On Leong Tong was originally operated at 18 Mott Street as the Long We Tong Eng Wi (the Chinese Freemasons) during the 1880s. Eight years later, the organization

⁹⁷ Ibid, 25-26.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 1.

moved to 10 Pell Street and later to 41 Mott Street. It changed its name to On Leong Tong in 1890. Different from the On Leong Tong, Hip Sing Tong was founded as advocates for the working class in Chinatown. Hip Sing Tong firstly established its headquarter at 13 Pell Street and later moved to 16 Pell Street (see **Figure 4.4**).⁹⁹ Tongs had the obligation to protect their members, and tong wars can hardly be avoided. From the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, a violent war regarding territorial competition between the On Leong and Hip Sing tongs attracted the notice of local press. The stories such as street gunshots and murders were reported in details, which caused the public's negative impressions of Chinese and Chinatown.¹⁰⁰

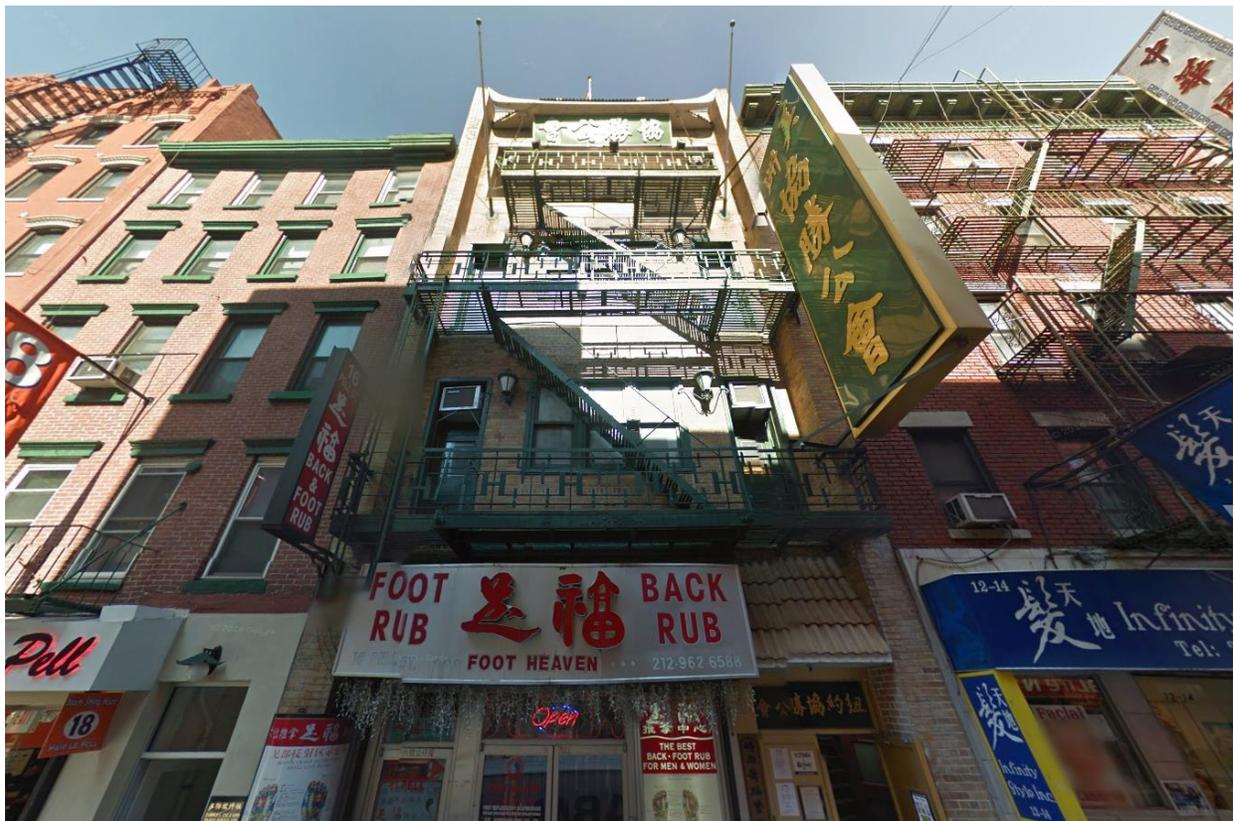


Figure 4.4: Hip Sing Tong headquarter at 16 Pell Street, New York City, 2015.
(Photograph by the author.)

⁹⁹ Tung P. Chin, *Paper Song* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), 17-18.

¹⁰⁰ NR Form, Section 8 Page 13-14.

Guild associations were a comparatively new type of Chinese-American associations and have a similar structure and function to those of family, district, and merchant associations. The formation of such association was due to other traditional associations failing to meet the needs of certain groups in the Chinatown community. Three guild and civic associations developed in Manhattan's Chinatown: the Chinese Laundry Association, the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, and the Chinese-American Citizens Alliance. The Chinese Laundry Association was established in 1932 to offer its members mutual aid and protect them against discrimination. Registered under New York State law, the organization would protest if the government adopted any discriminatory law or policy against the group of Chinese laundrymen. With discontentment on been exploited by the CCBA, some members of the Chinese Laundry Association established another guild association, the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance. With the support of local Chinese newspapers, this organization split with the Chinese Laundry Association and escaped the control of the CCBA. The Chinese-American Citizens Alliance was founded by second-generation Chinese-Americans who felt that the first-generation leadership could not meet its needs. This organization published a daily Chinese newspaper named *the Chinese Times* since the 1920s, which became the most influential Chinese-American newspaper in San Francisco, where its headquarter was located. Later it developed chapters in large cities, including Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Pittsburg, San Antonio, and New York. Its New York chapter was established in 1970. The Alliance aimed at putting pressure onto government to repeal legislation unfavorable to Chinese-Americans.¹⁰¹

These four types of traditional Chinese-American associations developed in response to

¹⁰¹ Kuo, 32-33.

the discriminatory policies of the government. Family, district, merchant and guild associations shared the same goals and used a similar organizational structure, but acted in different ways. An internal governing body comprised of the CCBA and several tongs managed the commercial activities, funeral arrangements, and mediated disputes among other responsibilities. The CCBA, an umbrella organization which drafted its own constitution, controlled Chinatown throughout the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century (see **Figure 4.5**). When threats endangered the Chinatown community along with the inaction of the local government, all of the traditional associations were consolidated to undertake the responsibilities of the government.¹⁰² The power of traditional Chinese-American associations in the Chinatown community could not be challenged. However, constrained and isolated by American society for more than a century, their power was very limited in dealing with the external political structures.

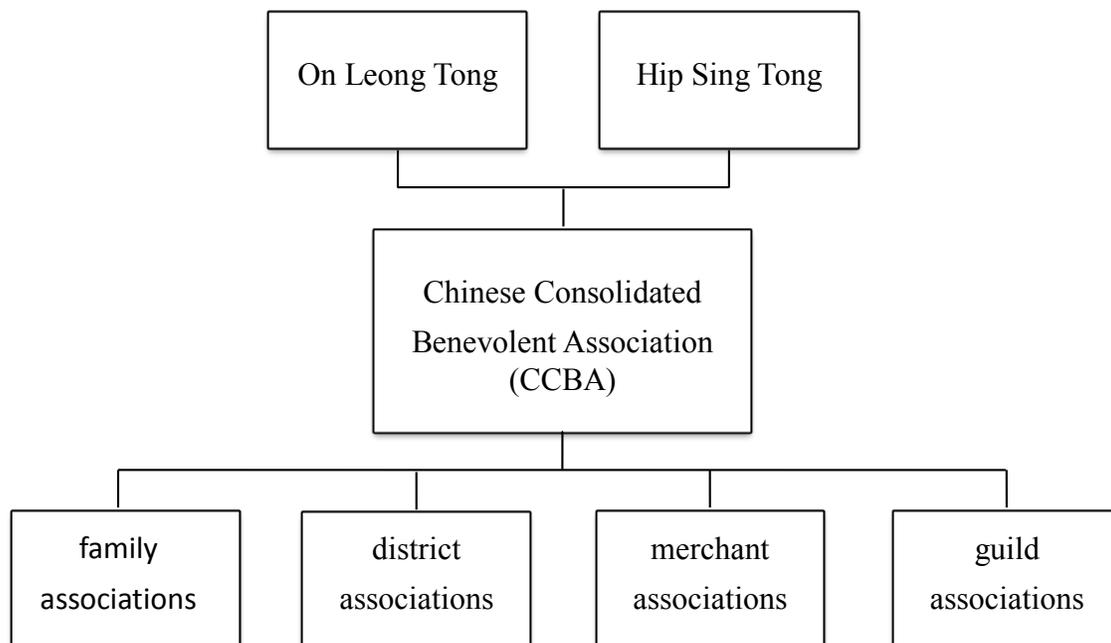


Figure 4.5: Structure of Chinese-American associations in Chinatown, New York City. (Illustration by the author.)

¹⁰² Ibid, 34.

Threats and Growth

Manhattan's Chinatown was not constructed by the Chinese as a Chinatown from scratch, but pre-existing buildings were modified and renovated to adjust to Chinese use and taste. A visitor to the Chinatown neighborhood in 1904 noticed some "exotic" elements on standard tenement buildings. From his observation, "conventional houses are here transformed, sometimes by an odd-shaped balcony, sometimes by an awning of unique design ..."¹⁰³ The transformation of old tenements with Chinese-style architectural elements and motifs prevailed in the district, creating a distinctive streetscape.

During the mid-1930s, New York City undertook ambitious slum clearance programs to erase blighted buildings in Low Manhattan. By the early 1940s, the Works Progress Administration have employed workers to demolish more than twenty buildings in the Chinatown district, including factories, Federal-style houses, and nineteenth-century tenements. There were no new tenements built in that period.¹⁰⁴ In 1941, a regional plan approved by city government brought threats to the Chinatown neighborhood. The plan proposed the Lower Manhattan Expressway (LOMEX), which would link the Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges with the Holland Tunnel by means of elevated highways going through the heart of Chinatown (see **Figure 4.6**).¹⁰⁵ The proposed LOMEX received fierce resistance by members of affected communities led by urban activist Jane Jacobs. Also, the proposal's negative impact on real estate values was a disincentive for landowners to invest or upgrade their properties. These efforts left the historic buildings in Chinatown untouched.

¹⁰³ William H. Tolman, *The Better New York* (Charlotte, NC: Baker and Taylor, 1904), 29.

¹⁰⁴ New York City Department of Buildings, *Block and Lot Folders, including Building Permit Applications*, Department of Records and Information Services, 1866-1975.

¹⁰⁵ New York City Planning Commission, *Master Plan: Express Highways, Parkways and Major Streets*, 1941.



Figure 4.6: Proposed plan for the Lower Manhattan Expressway.
 (Base plan: <https://katiebnyc.wordpress.com/2011/06/19/>, assessed May 4.)

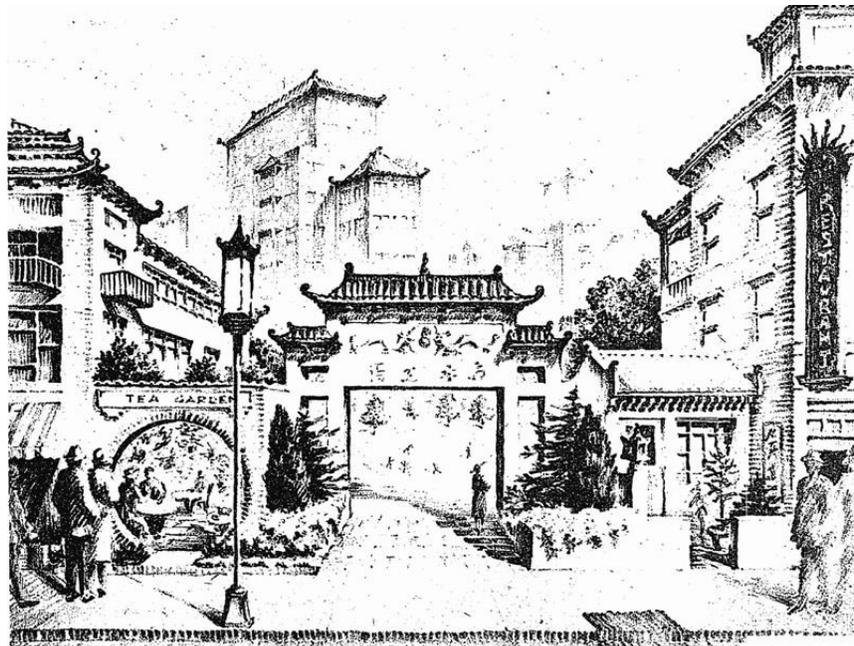


Figure 4.7: Drawing by Harold Thompson that shows an oriental look of the China Village.
 (Courtesy of *the New York Times*, June 25, 1950.)

The 1940s through the early 1970s saw a big growth and transformation of spatial environment in Manhattan's Chinatown. When the Exclusion Act in the United States was lifted in 1943, China was given a small immigration quota, and the community continued to grow slowly throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The garment industry, the hand-laundry business, and restaurants became the foundation of Chinatown neighborhood. These enterprises provided employment to thousands of Chinatown residents. In response to the 1949 Housing Act, Chinatown merchant and family association leaders approached Herman Stichman, the commissioner of the New York State Housing Division, with a redevelopment proposal incorporating some Chinese architectural characteristics into the Chinatown landscape. Stichman approved of the proposal with the ambition to mould Chinatown into "one of the greatest tourist attractions in the East." The following year, Stichman came up with a comprehensive development plan called "China Village." His plan called for the large amount of \$15,000,000 in state funds for replacing a 15-square-acre core of Chinatown with modern housing and buildings.¹⁰⁶ According to the released architectural drawings of China Village, the historic core of Chinatown would be replaced by eight housing towers surrounded by a perimeter of commercial buildings featuring pagoda roofs and other Chinese-style motifs on their facades. A Chinese-design gate would make the entrance of the Village outstanding. Even the lamp posts would have pagoda-style details (see **Figure 4.7**). Responding to queries on this project, Stichman stressed that oriental architectural features would strengthen the cultural authenticity of visitors' experiences.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Greg Umbach and Dan Wishnoff, "Strategic Self-Orientalism: Urban Planning Policies and the Shaping of New York City's Chinatown, 1950-2005," *Journal of Planning History* 7, no. 3 (2008): 220.

¹⁰⁷ "New Chinatown Gains Momentum," *New York Times*, June 10, 1950.

China Village with its plans to advertise the stereotypes of Chinese culture as a marketing tool emerged as the cooperation between city housing officials and Chinatown elites, who regarded the “self-orientalism” as an opportunity to make their community survive in the tide of urban renewal.¹⁰⁸ This proposal would result in the relocation of numerous Chinatown residents and businesses. As an influential broker who took charge of slum clearance and public housing in the city, Robert Moses strongly opposed the China Village project, arguing that Stichman obstructed his efforts to modernize the city for upper-class whites.¹⁰⁹ The conflicts between Stichman and Moses over the Chinatown Village proposal became increasingly acute and played in *the New York Times*. In a letter quoted in the press, Moses disparaged the China Village project as Stichman’s own attempt to cater to minorities in the city by attenuating “[t]his project...largely a figment of your busy imagination.” Moses ridiculed the Chinatown residents as “being taken for a lovely rickshaw ride” and pointed out the plan was too expensive for the city or state. To fight back, Stichman labeled Moses “City Construction Obstructer” and criticized the broker’s failures in completing a few urban renewal Title I redevelopment projects which he had already started. He also condemned Moses’ racial discrimination, “what is wrong with some of architectural reminders of one of the oldest civilizations in an area where many of that nationality live?”¹¹⁰

Stichman’s appeals were passed to the Federal Housing and Home Financing Agency, but the head of the agency insisted that the China Village plan was a local matter which could not get public funds at the time. However, since the commissioner and Chinatown elites agreed

¹⁰⁸ Umbach, 221.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 222.

¹¹⁰ “Stichman Retorts to Gibes by Moses,” *the New York Times*, June 7, 1950.

to cooperate in the project, small-scale architectural orientalizations plans were encouraged to be completed first, and hopefully later those could be incorporated into large-scale redevelopment sponsored by public funds.¹¹¹ As a result, some small plans to achieve the same goals were completed in Chinatown. The On Leong Tong or On Leong Merchants Association building was an example featuring oriental design. Designed by Andrew J. Thomas, the new association building completed at the southwest corner of Mott and Canal Streets in 1948. With its hallmarked pagoda roof and delicate balcony, the On Leong Merchants Association building presents a character-defining landmark in the district (see **Figure 4.8**). Other examples include the Lee Family Association, Lin Sing Association, and the CCBA buildings. These association buildings are among the only purpose-constructed buildings rather than modified structures.¹¹²

The year 1954 marked a turning point of the China Village redevelopment. Stichman and Moses arrived at a consensus that New York State would abandon the original plan and instead come up with a scaled-down China Village. The changes in legislation introduced by 1954 Housing Act led to a truce between pro-and anti-groups of the project. Specifically, before 1954 Title I urban renewal projects clearly defined that the condemnation of slum districts should reach a considerable number of square blocks, while the new urban policies enabled more flexibility in the location, condition and scale of redevelopment projects.¹¹³ Introduced at the end of the year, Stichman's revised China Village plan down sized to a quarter of the original, including two low-income housing towers with pagoda-style roofs with low-rise structures to arrange for a recreation center and a museum.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ "U.S. Agency Agrees to Consider Chinatown Plan if City Asks Aid," *the New York Times*, August 8, 1950.

¹¹² NR Form, Section 7 Page 11.

¹¹³ Richard M. Flanagan, "The Housing Act of 1954: The Sea Change in National Urban Policy," *Urban Affairs Review* 2 (November, 1997): 275.

¹¹⁴ "Chinatown Plan Moves Forward," *the New York Times*, December 30, 1954



Figure 4.8: On Leong Merchants Association building, 2015. (Photograph by the author.)

However, this new China Village plan was rejected by the CCBA, the governing body of Chinatown and cultural broker between the community and city government. The reason it actively collaborated with Stichman on the original plan was the CCBA's intention to gain prestige over progressive Chinese-American organizations through the Chinatown Village plan.

The CCBA greatly benefited in a series of power shifts in Chinatown after 1951, which directly led to its dampened enthusiasm for China Village. Against the revised Village plan, the CCBA refused to sell properties for the proposed redevelopment.¹¹⁵ As Stichman ended his term as State Housing Commissioner, the China Village plan was a washout. In 1960, the city government confirmed the construction of a high-rent cooperative “Chatham Tower” on the site once assigned for the Village.¹¹⁶ These facts proved Moses right in the prediction of the project’s failure because the State could hardly provide funds for low-income housing on such high-valued property.

Despite not advocating large urban renewal development, advocates of self-orientalization turned to comparatively manageable-scale projects to enhance the exotic appearance of Chinatown in the early 1960s. As a voluntary group committed to strengthening the neighborhood’s Chinese characteristics, the Committee for the Improvement of Chinatown supported the embellishment of Chinatown streetscapes, including pagoda-roofed phone booths, traditional red lanterns, and other oriental-style fixtures. Another small project was the “Pagoda Theatre” by a group of restaurant owners who were eager to promote the idea of “cultural tourism’ in the neighborhood. The Chinese theatre boasted a three-leveled pagoda with an oversized tile roof. Most of the self-orientalization was to serve Chinatown merchants especially community elites’ economic interests.¹¹⁷

The United States enacted the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, which reopened the gate to Chinese immigrants into the country. During the following years, the population of

¹¹⁵ Umbach, 226.

¹¹⁶ “Mr. Stichman and Housing,” *the New York Times*, January 4, 1955; “Slum to be Razed Near Chatham Sq.,” *the New York Times*, October 15, 1956.

¹¹⁷ “Chinatown to See Movies in Pagoda,” *the New York Times*, May 29, 1964.

Chinatown increased rapidly. It was reported that the number of Chinatown residents almost doubled from 1965 to 1970. In the early stage of its development, Manhattan's Chinatown was dominated by Taishanese-speaking Chinese immigrants. As the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 enabled an influx of immigrants from Guangdong province and Hong Kong, Cantonese became the primary speaking tongue.¹¹⁸ When the quota was considerably raised in 1968, the Chinese flooded into the United States from the mainland. As a result, Manhattan's Chinatown expanded from its historic core of 10-block bounded by Canal, Baxter, Worth, Park, and Bowery streets to the boundary of Little Italy (see **Figure 4.9**).¹¹⁹



Figure 4.9: Chinatown boundary in Lower East Manhattan, New York City.
(Courtesy of Department of City Planning, New York City.)

¹¹⁸ Ming K. Chan and Gerard A. Postiglione, *The Hong Kong Reader: Passage to Chinese Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 174.

¹¹⁹ Zhou, 6-7.

Revitalizing Chinatown

The 1970s witnessed a dramatic decline in New York's tourism industry. A rising crime rate and overcrowding issues made the city less attractive when compared with other large cities in the western hemisphere. Such circumstances spurred municipal officials to put more and more efforts into tourism promotion. Many of the efforts similar to those of the Chinatown Village plan more than two decades earlier, creating the "culture" brand of local tourism through the cooperation between ethnic community elites and city agencies in the urban planning process.¹²⁰ The Chinatown Street Revitalization Plan was a typical example.

The New York Department of City Planning targeted Chinatown as part of its attempts to increase tourism by revitalizing historic neighborhoods in 1975. In an effort to distinguish Manhattan's Chinatown as a commercial center and tourist destination, the Planning Department proposed to redevelop the Chinatown district with oriental elements on tenements, leisure kiosks, shop signs, and banners. The plan acquired full support from the Chinatown Improvement Committee, a group of merchant elites and cultural leaders bolstered by the CCBA. Various design details of the street revitalization plan of the Chinatown core echoed those demonstrated in China Village: bilingual overhead banners to accentuate the entrance and welcome sightseers; shop facades with quaint awnings; lights resembling Chinese lanterns, and other cultural features. To boost the idea of an "outdoor cultural park", an information center would be housed in a street kiosk shaped as two-roofed pagoda.¹²¹ Different from the China Village, this time the street revitalization plan mainly focused on the improvements of streetscapes while avoiding

¹²⁰ Umbach, 229.

¹²¹ New York Department of City Planning, *Chinatown Street Revitalization* (New York: Department of City Planning, 1975), 2-7, 34-40.

public housing. But with the same fate, the Chinatown Street Revitalization Plan of 1975 never actualized. A number of the properties selected for revitalization were owned by different private developers or community associations. Although as the umbrella organization with the highest authorization, the CCBA was unable to mediate all the groups reaching a common plan.¹²²

Although a series of streetscape revitalization plans were not conducted, a documentation endeavor brought about a celebration of history and folklife within Manhattan's Chinatown since the 1970s. The efforts started from "cultural rescue mission" and developed into a "true national center." Co-founded by Charles Lai and John Kou Wei Chen, the organization started its life as the New York Chinatown History Project, which was designed to reconstruct the 120-year legacy of what is now the nation's largest Chinese-American community. Scholars, community workers, photographers, and artists collaborated with the Chinatown community in fighting stereotypes and reclaiming a largely neglected past. Later, it became the Basement Workshop, and produced a range of bilingual programs and productions, ranging from traveling exhibitions and slide shows to walking tours and roundtable discussions. The organization moved to 70 Mulberry Street in 1984, then changed its name to "Chinatown History Museum," and their current official name "Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA)" by the year 2007.¹²³ Two years later, MOCA moved to a new site at 215 Centre Street in 2009 and increased in size by six times (see **Figure 4.10**).¹²⁴ Central to its mission is to make Chinese American history accessible to the general public, ranging from scholars to young children, from community members to international tourists. Through its thought-provoking work, the Museum not only encourages the

¹²² Glenn Fowler, "Planning Department Proposes a 'Revitalization' of Chinatown," *the New York Times*, August 18, 1976

¹²³ Lena Sze, "Chinatown Then and Neoliberal Now: Gentrification Consciousness and the Ethnic-Specific Museum" *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 17 (2010), 514; John Kuo Wei Tchen, "New York Chinatown History Project," *History Workshop*, no. 24 (1987):158.

¹²⁴ Edward Rothstein, "Reopened Museum Tells Chinese-American Stories," *the New York Times*, September 21, 2009.



Figure 4.10: Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) main entrance on Centre Street, New York City, 2015. (Photograph by the author.)

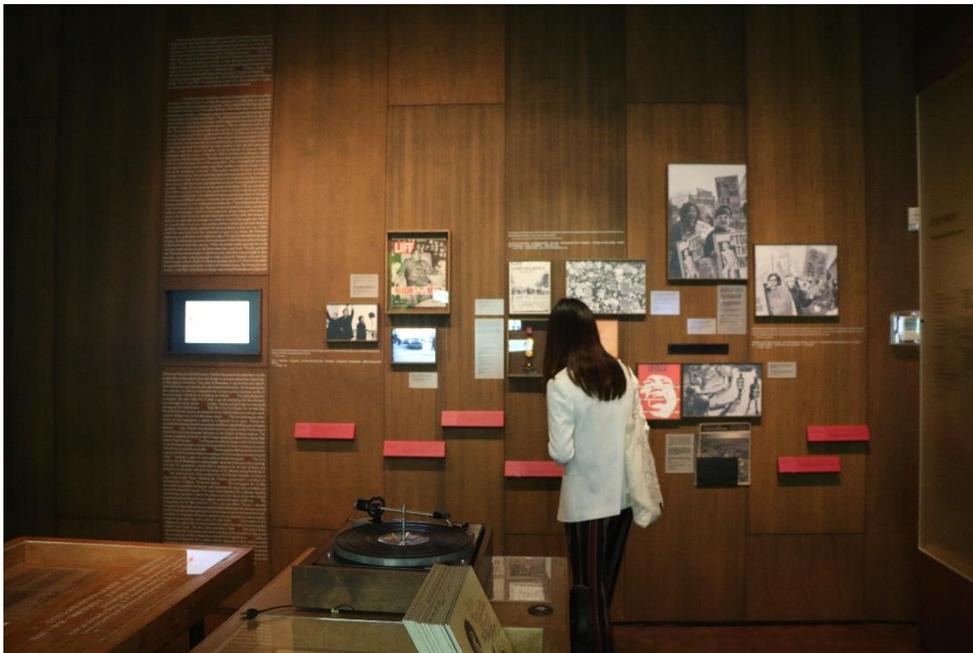


Figure 4.11: A corner of MOCA's core exhibit *With a Single Step: Stories in the Making of America*, 2015. (Photograph by the author.)

understanding and appreciation of Chinese American arts, culture and history, but also informs, educates and engages visitors about Chinese American history that is in the making (see **Figure 4.11**).¹²⁵ Specific ethnic museums as the MOCA benefit both the Chinese living in the area and those who have interests in Chinese culture.

Post-9/11 Development

The events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath caused a dramatic decline in business and tourism industries in Chinatown. Located so physically close to Ground Zero, Chinatown south of Canal Street was a zone frozen for eight days after the attacks. For nearly two months, Chinatown saw a very slow return of tourism and business. Part of the reason was the closure of Park Row by New York's Department of City Planning, one of two major roads linking the Financial Center with Chinatown. The economic destruction devastated by 9/11 called for solutions from Chinese-American associations. For instance, the Asian American Federation of New York advocated a multi-prong proposal that would "strengthen the economic base of Chinatown through targeted workforce development strategies."¹²⁶

At the same time, the CCBA perceived the transformation of Chinatown as the ideal timing to materialize their long-standing plan, a Chinese gate in the neighborhood. In 2003, the CCBA proposed to build the Unity Arch, a \$1,800,000 project 85 feet long and 43 feet high which would span over the five-lane Bowery street. Referring to the Chinese gate construction, the CCBA wrote to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, "San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Montreal, Vancouver, Melbourne, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston ... all have beautiful Gateway Arches

¹²⁵ "About," Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA), accessed April 24, 2015, <http://www.mocanyc.org/about/>.

¹²⁶ Asian American Federation of New York, "Chinatown One Year After September 11th: An Economic Impact Study," 34-35.

that reflect Chinese culture ... and serve as centerpieces for local tourism,” but “New York City has none!” The Unity Arch proposal was favored by city officials who optimistically predicted that once the proposed new archway was completed, it would become a visual symbol of Manhattan’s Chinatown and attract more sightseers to visit the district intentionally. However, Chinatown residents firmly opposed the Unity Arch with the concern that the project “emphasized tourists over residents.” Critiqued by many, the motivation of the plan was to cater to outsiders’ expectation of “Chinese-ness” instead of improving community life. With no support from the community residents, the Unity Arch plan was cancelled. As Gary Tai of the CCBA talked about the controversy over the gateway in a 2006 interview, “[b]asically, all the business people want to build an arch in Chinatown because businesses and restaurants need more tourists to come to Chinatown ... however, nobody wants to build an arch in front of their house ...”¹²⁷

Luxury condominiums began to spread from SoHo into Chinatown since the year of 2007. Chinatown in Lower Manhattan was renowned for its predominantly Chinese residents and cultural diversity. However, under the pressure of some luxury housing projects, Chinatown's economic and cultural core has been transformed. Further stimulated by a rezoning plan approved by the New York City Council in November 2008, the prices of Manhattan real estate increased rapidly. Particularly in the Lower East Side, a large number of apartments once as affordable housing for Chinese immigrants have been renovated and then leased at much higher prices. Many low-income Chinese residents and newcomers could not afford the high rents within the area and turned to other Chinatowns in New York City for a living, the Brooklyn

¹²⁷ Ibid, 232-233.

Chinatown, Elmhurst Chinatown and Flushing in Queens are included.¹²⁸

In December 2009, along with its neighboring district Little Italy, the historic core of Manhattan’s Chinatown received the National Register nomination as a place significant in the nation’s history (see **Figure 4.12**). Following the Chinatown Historic Districts in Honolulu, the Seattle Chinatown Historic District, the Portland New Chinatown-Japantown Historic District, and the Chinatown Historic District in Riverside, Manhattan’s Chinatown became the fifth Chinatown listed on the National Register of Historic Places.¹²⁹

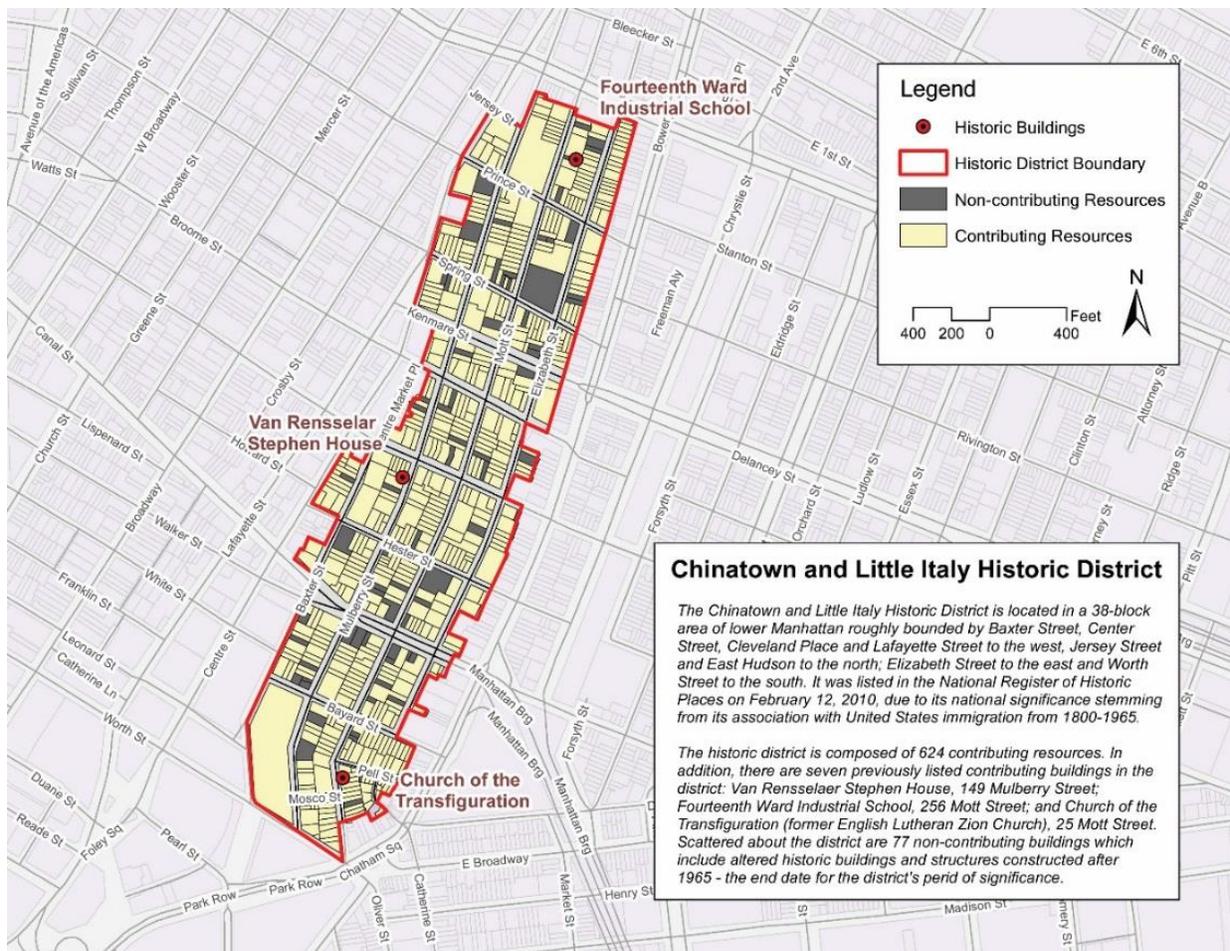


Figure 4.12: Chinatown and Little Italy Historic District map. (Illustration by the author.)

¹²⁸ Kirk Semple, "In Chinatown, Sound of the Future Is Mandarin," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2009.

¹²⁹ NR Form, Section 7 Page 8.

A Neighborhood in Transition: Philadelphia's Chinatown

When walking in Philadelphia's Chinatown, people can feel a sense of being in a different side of the world. Thousands of Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesians and immigrants from other Asian countries now reside here. Boasting its concentrated Asian-owned businesses and oriental streetscapes, today Chinatown still retains its distinctiveness among Philadelphia neighborhoods (see **Figure 4.13**). How this small but resilient community overcame outside threats and served as a cultural center for Asian Philadelphians over time is a story about the conflicts and cooperation of development versus preservation, the meaning of a community, and the celebration of cultural diversity that greatly enriches the city's history.



Figure 4.13: Chinatown streetscape at 10th Street between Vine and Arch Streets, Philadelphia, 2014. (Photograph by the author.)

Evolution of Early Chinatown

Early Chinese immigrants to Philadelphia started businesses in an area close to the city's commercial wharves, which led to the birth of Philadelphia's Chinatown.¹³⁰ The first documented Chinese business was Lee Fong's laundry opened in 1871 at 913 Race Street.¹³¹ Later a Cantonese restaurant occupied the upper floor of the laundry. The laundry and restaurant were the only Chinese-based commercial enterprises at that time. As more Chinese businesses clustered around the block, this area soon became the acknowledged center of immigrant Chinese in Center City Philadelphia. According to an observer's description, the historic Chinatown core was especially animated on certain days of the week: "On Sundays and Mondays it would be packed with Chinamen, and the strains of the Chinese fiddle could be heard over the never-ending click of the dominoes, from midday to midnight."¹³²

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were primarily row houses on Spring, Winter, 9th and 10th Streets. A majority of them were boarding houses which provided havens for immigrants with different nationalities: Mexican, Italian, German, Irish and so forth. The 900 block of Race Street was available due to its adjacency to the city's warehouse and central business district and chosen by Chinese businessmen as the home for generations of the Chinese in Philadelphia. In the early stage of its establishment, Chinatown was predominantly occupied by several family organizations: 925 Race by the Lees family, 915 by Fongs, 931 by Mocks, 929 Race by Jungs, and 906 by Youngs.¹³³ The operational arrangement of Chinatown buildings was

¹³⁰ David J. Wallace, "Near Philadelphia's Chinatown, 51 New Homes," *the New York Times*, March 8, 1998.

¹³¹ "History of Chinatown," Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC), accessed March 8, 2015, <http://chinatown-pcdc.org/our-community/>.

¹³² Stewart Culin, "Social Organization of the Chinese in America," in *The American Anthropologist: Volume IV* (Washington, D. C.: Judd & Detweiler, Printers, 1891), 348.

¹³³ Kathryn E. Wilson, "From Bachelor Enclave to Urban Village: The Evolution of Early Chinatown," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 12, number 1 (May 2012): 12-14.

first-floor commercial spaces with upper-story dwelling units or social rooms. For example, the original building at 915 Race Street was operated as an oriental merchandise store on its first floor selling imported goods such as tea, drugs, and oriental decorations. The second floor was used for storing stock, while the third floor and attic served as living units and sleeping quarters for Chinese immigrants. By 1900s, the physical environment of the neighborhood spread from 8th to 10th and Race to Winter Streets and this became the original Chinatown boundary established in the public mind (see **Figure 4.14**).¹³⁴

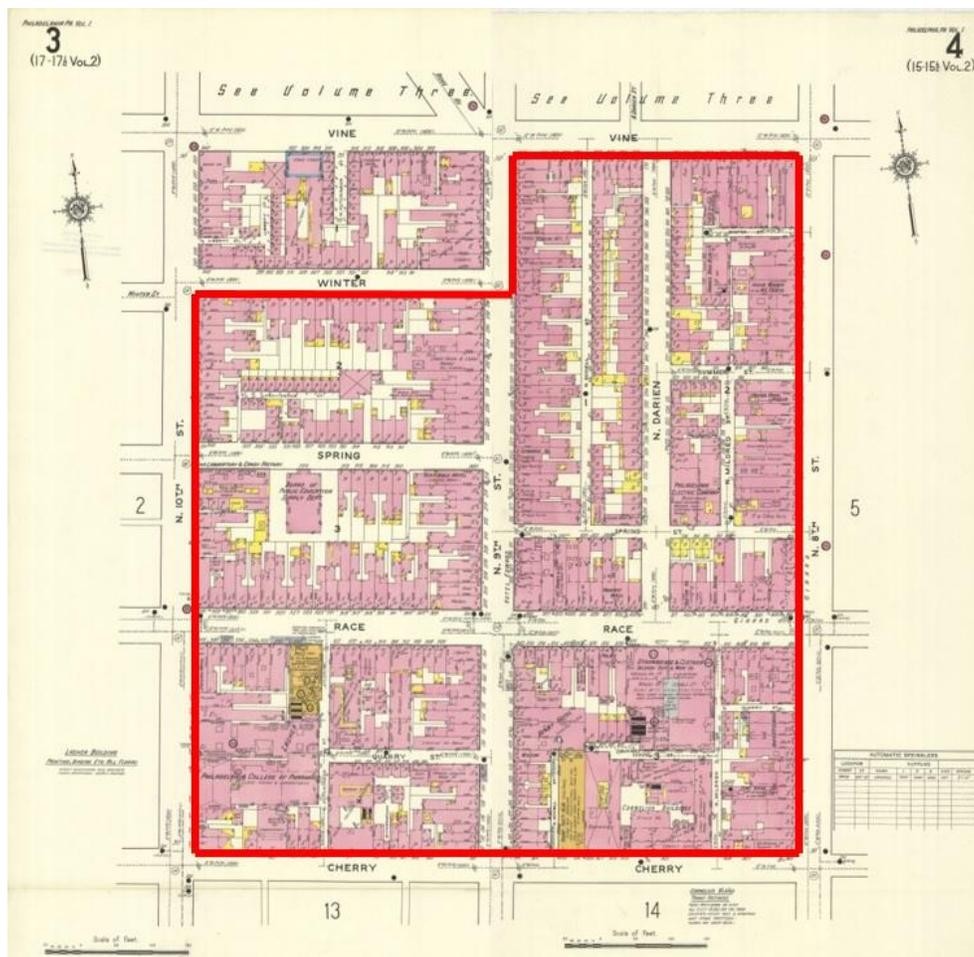


Figure 4.14: Chinatown boundary, Philadelphia, circa 1900. (Base map: Insurance maps of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Vol.1, Sheets 3 and 4, 1916.)

¹³⁴ Ibid, 14.

Chinatown developed from a merely immigrants' neighborhood to a cultural tourist destination in the early twentieth century. Influenced by the idea that oriental culture was mysterious, Chinatown attracted many thrill seekers and local police attention from the larger society. Chinese restaurants became especially popular in Philadelphia at the time. Unlike early Chinese-based businesses such as hand laundries, grocery stores, and imported goods shops, which mainly targeted Chinatown residents, the then thriving restaurant enterprises adjusted the traditional cuisine to cater to non-Chinese customers. For example, the Far East at 907 - 909 Race Street was one of the most famous Chinatown restaurants of the period, serving Americanized Chinese food (see **Figure 4.15**). Throughout the 1910s and 20s the tales of white slavery and the "tong wars" in the Philadelphia official press caused negative publicity. To boost the public image of Chinatown, community leaders and Chinese businessmen developed the streetscapes of the neighborhood by creating an exotic themed place which would characterize much of the community's identity in the following years.¹³⁵

The total population of Chinatown declined during the Great Depression. The decreased economic opportunities drove many Chinese immigrants back to China to make a living. However, world events in the 1930s exposed Chinatown to greater public visibility. To support mainland China's defense of the Japanese invasion, the leaders of Philadelphia's Chinatown cancelled the 1938 Chinese New Year parade to save expenses for the Chinese Defense Fund. As the United States entered World War II in 1941, the contribution made by the China army joining the U.S. as an ally and the support from the American Chinatown communities

¹³⁵ Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *The Pacific Historical Review* 43 (August 3, 1974) 367-394.

engendered a positive image of Chinese immigrants in American society.¹³⁶ After the World War II, comparatively liberalized immigration laws and policies on Chinese transformed Philadelphia's Chinatown into a growing and family-oriented community.¹³⁷

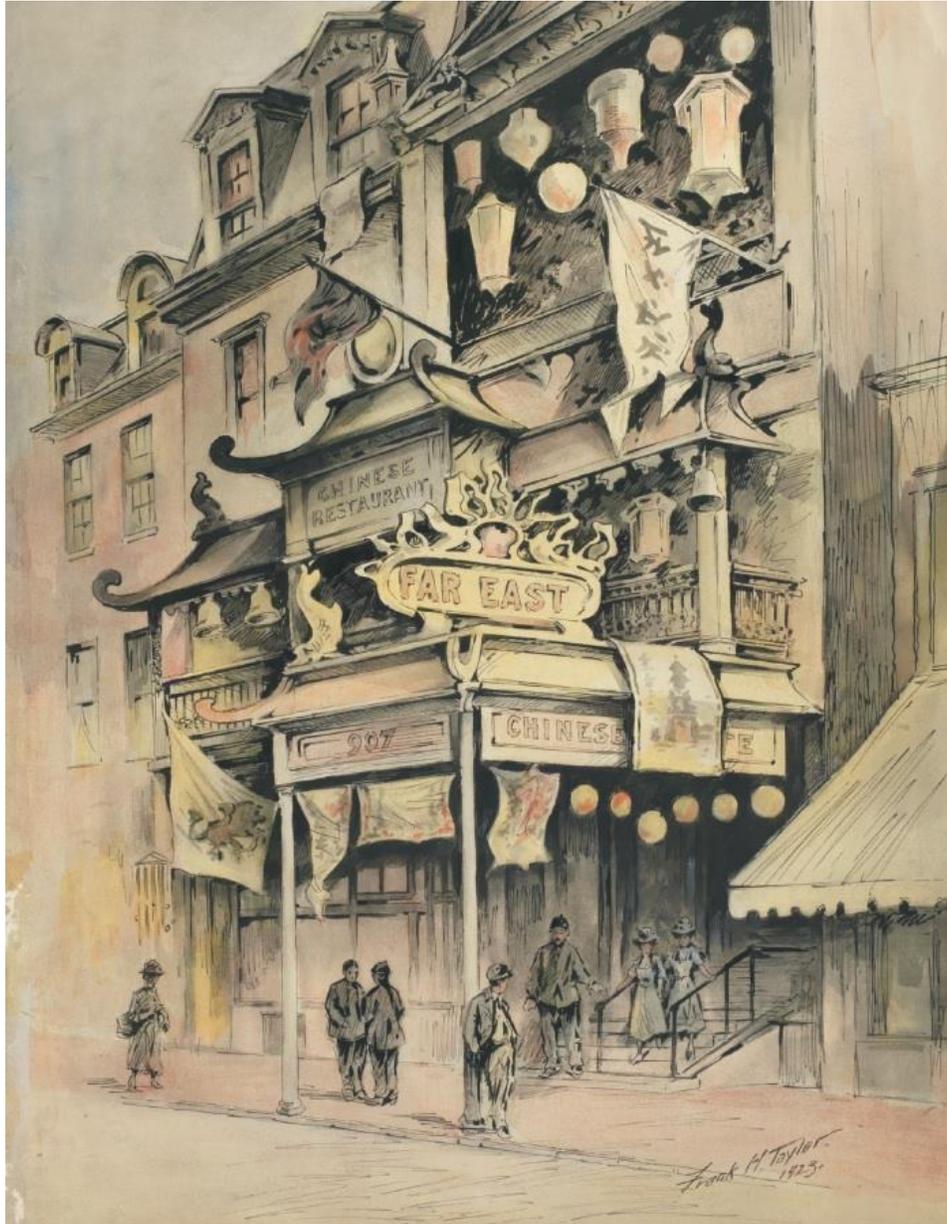


Figure 4.15: Painting by Frank Hamilton Taylor that shows Far East Restaurant at 907 Race Street, Philadelphia, 1923. (Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.)

¹³⁶ Wilson (2012), 15.

¹³⁷ "History of Chinatown", the PCDC, accessed March 8, 2015 <http://chinatown-pcdc.org/our-community/>.

Community Institutions

With a new wave of immigrant Chinese entering the United States, it became imperative to mediate the old and new dynamics in the Chinatown community. To serve the growing number of Chinese immigrants in Philadelphia, merchant, religious, social, and cultural organizations came into being throughout the 1940s to 1960s. Community institutions have played significant roles in shaping the contours of the Chinese Philadelphians' experiences and built environments in Chinatown. In fact, the history of Philadelphia's Chinatown is tightly intertwined with its Chinese-American institutions. Besides the historical family and district associations, merchant organizations are also very common in most Chinatown communities. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA, the original Six Company) is one example. As with other chapters of this influential organization, the Philadelphia branch of the CCBA devoted to protecting the interests of economically and politically vulnerable immigrant Chinese in the area and providing them with services such as translation, day-care, income taxes, and health insurance.¹³⁸

Churches also played a particularly important role in community life. A great number of churches were built in Philadelphia's Chinatown during and after the war, including the Chinese Christian Church and Center in 1941, Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church and School in 1941, and the Chinese Gospel Church in 1952.¹³⁹ Such religious institutions in Philadelphia have played a formative role in assisting immigrants to merge into mainstream society. As the former director of the Chinese Christian Church and Center, Mitzie Mackenzie once talked about the

¹³⁸ Lena Sze, "Opportunity, Conflict, and Communities in Transition: Historical Contemporary Chinese Immigration to Philadelphia" in *Global Philadelphia: Immigrant Communities Old and New*, ed. Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 103.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 101.

catalyst mechanisms of churches for immigrants, especially the youth, in naturalization: “My mission was to make them Americans. The first thing we did was have a girls club where they learned how to cook American dishes to introduce to their parents. Their parents were from China and they were American.”¹⁴⁰ Under the directorship of Mackenzie, the Center sponsored Girl and Boy Scout troops, recreation and education. The church later built a playground for Chinatown residents at 10th and Spring Streets. Founded in 1941, Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church, or “HR” as its nickname preferred by Chinese Philadelphians, served as the first Chinese Catholic church in the western hemisphere (see **Figure 4.16**). The Holy Redeemer



Figure 4.16: Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church in Philadelphia’s Chinatown, 2015.
(Photograph by the author.)

¹⁴⁰ Lena Sze, *Chinatown Live(s): Oral Histories from Philadelphia’s Chinatown* (Philadelphia: New City Community Press/Asian Arts Initiative, 2004), 48.

had the only Chinese school and gymnasium in the neighborhood. The church supported Yu Pin Club, which hosted a variety of sports activities for Chinese-American youth in the 1940s. Also the Club published its own newsletter, the *Chinese Lantern*, to report the successes of community athletic teams and propagate various club activities.¹⁴¹ These religious organizations were critical not only in helping members of local Chinese community merge into the American society, but also becoming important sites of memory and identity.

The Chinatown Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was one of the organizations devoted to improving community life, preserving Chinese cultural heritage, and providing services to new immigrants and native Chinese-American youth. The Chinatown YMCA's opening in 1955 was in response to the Chinatown residents' needs for social organizations that had long been neglected by the larger society. The founder of the Chinatown YMCA organization was Tien T. Chang, the later well-known "Mayor of Chinatown." After graduating from university, Chang's interests in theology led to his efforts in the creation of the Chinatown YMCA at 125 North 10th Street. The organization actively got involved in the development and preservation of Chinatown. To improve the environment of the neighborhood, it promoted the design of bilingual signage and oriental-styled streetscape. In addition, the organization helped the city define the Chinatown neighborhood boundary on Philadelphia map. The first open house held by the Chinatown YMCA encouraged visitors to experience a five-course Chinese dinner and a guided tour of Chinatown.¹⁴²

The Chinatown YMCA was renamed and developed as the Chinese Cultural and

¹⁴¹ Wilson (2012), 17.

¹⁴² Jean Barth Toll, and Gillam, Mildred S., eds., "Chinese Cultural and Community Center (Chinatown YMCA)," in *Invisible Philadelphia: Community Through Voluntary Organizations*, (Philadelphia: Atwater Kent Museum, 1995), 62.

Community Center (CCCC) in 1968. As the director of the Center, Chang felt it was a good opportunity to renovate the original organization building as the symbol of Chinese culture. So he hired C.C. Yang, one of Taiwan's most renowned architects, to take charge of the project. The final approved plans included the building's entire facade and part of its interior renovation to an authentic Mandarin Palace style.¹⁴³ The building's façade is a single bay flanked by broad stucco planes. The main entrance is a central recessed entryway set above sidewalk level by about five concrete steps (see **Figure 4.17**). A pair of Chinese-red painted doors occupies the majority of



Figure 4.17: Facade of the Chinatown YMCA building, 2015. (Photography by the author.)

¹⁴³ "New Community Center to Beautify Chinatown," *Center City Philadelphia*, May 1967.

the entryway wall. Both doors feature cast bronze lion-head doorknockers. The three walls of the entryway are white stucco matching the façade. The side wall features inscriptions: to the left of the entrance, along the north wall are the words “Chinatown YMCA – 1955.” The ceiling of the entryway is richly decorated with painted wood paneling featuring two rows of painted floral roundels (see **Figure 4.18**). The entryway is framed by highly ornamental bas-relief stone panels flanking each side of the stairs.¹⁴⁴After the completion of its renovations in 1971, the Chinese Cultural and Community Center became the “first example of authentic Chinese architecture in the tri-state area”¹⁴⁵ and the most recognizable landmark in Philadelphia's Chinatown.



Figure 4.18: Detail of porch ceiling, 2015. (Photography by the author.)
As the social and cultural center of the Chinese Philadelphians, the Chinese Cultural and

¹⁴⁴ Philadelphia Historical Commission, “Nomination of Historical Building, Structure, Site, or Object”, assessed April 14, 2015, 3-4, http://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Nomination_Chinatown.pdf.

¹⁴⁵ “The Chinese Cultural and Community Center (also known as the Chinatown YMCA),” Carnegie Mellon University, assessed April 14, 2015, <http://digitalcollections.library.cmu.edu/awweb/awarchive?type=file&item=480774>.

Community Center designed a number of programs and activities to not only assist Chinese immigrants but also promote Chinese cultural heritage to all the citizens. Examples of its representative programs include providing immigrant Chinese of the area with English classes, employment training, and legal assistance. In addition, the Center created several programs to care for the youth and other members of the local community, such as a Dragon Club for Chinese-American youth to build cultural pride, and a hot lunch program to encourage the social life of elderly Chinese.¹⁴⁶

The built environment of Chinatown was significantly reshaped by a Chinese-American organization founded by Yep in 1966, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (see **Figure 4.19**), which gave community and business leaders more power in matters of local



Figure 4.19: Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) office, 2015.
(Photography by the author.)

¹⁴⁶ Philadelphia Historical Commission, 21.

community development, the details of which will be explored in the next session. Other important Chinese-American institutions include the Greater Philadelphia Overseas Association, the Community Youth Organizing Campaign (CYOC) Collective, and pan-Asian organizations such as Asian-Americans United, the Asian Arts Initiative, the Asian American Women's Association.¹⁴⁷ Those organizations made great contribution to provide members of the local community with services and promote interracial and intercultural understanding in the region.

Chinatown at Turning Point

Due to a series of liberalized immigration acts in the 1960s, large numbers of Chinese immigrants came to the East Coast which significantly transformed both Manhattan's Chinatown and Philadelphia's although to a lesser but still significant extent.¹⁴⁸ The direct outcome was that the Philadelphia's Chinatown desperately needed more housing to help settle the growing number of newcomers. However, in the post-war period when the city intended to use "slum clearance" strategies to make vibrant downtown commercial environments, how the Chinatown neighborhood could survive between the cracks of ongoing urban renewal projects and economic redevelopment became a big question to community leaders, not to mention the neighborhood's own development needs.

In 1966, the Pennsylvania Redevelopment Authority (RDA) proposed an expressway along Vine Street to channel traffic into and through the city. The proposed project was just north of Chinatown boundary, and its outcome would result in demolition of the Holy Redeemer Church with its school and displacement of current Chinatown residents. As an important site for

¹⁴⁷ Sze (2010), 102.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 101.

community members in the area, Holy Redeemer along with its school and recreational facilities memories of Chinese Philadelphians, especially of the Chinese-Americans who had grown up in the neighborhood since the 1940s. Threats to the beloved-community church became a rallying cry for Chinese community elites who founded their own organizations to deal with the crisis.¹⁴⁹ The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) stepped on the historical stage. Celilia Moy Yep, as a founding member of the PCDC, organized a town meeting to gather diverse groups against the Vine Street Expressway proposal. Some elders expressed their concerns that the language barriers would situate Chinatown residents in unfavorable circumstances when fighting against city government. Young leaders of the community claimed that “[i]f you want to fight, you will have to do it on your own.”¹⁵⁰ The proclamation marked the beginning of the following two-decade “Save Chinatown” movement. The Chinatown community made a series of efforts to stop the Vine Street Expressway project, from protest to political lobbying. Even though the expressway plan was implemented in the end, not only was its construction delayed for over fifteen years, but the Chinatown activists successfully saved the Holy Redeemer Church and obtained certain concessions from the government, such as sound barriers.¹⁵¹ Triggered by the city government’s proposal to destroy Holy Redeemer, the “Save Chinatown” movement in Philadelphia extended to further projects that encroached on the residential and commercial space of the neighborhood.

How to preserve Chinatown’s unique built environment in the face of redevelopment became a following question for the community leaders. In the late 1970s, the PCDC considered

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 104.

¹⁵⁰ Sze (2004), 58.

¹⁵¹ Jian Guan, “Ethnic Consciousness Arises on Facing Spatial Threats to Philadelphia’s Chinatown,” in *Urban Ethnic Encounters: The Spatial Threats to Philadelphia’s Chinatown*, ed. Aygen Erdenug and Freek Colombijn (New York: Routledge, 2002), 132-135.

historic designation as a strategy for Chinatown neighborhood. After consulting with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation about means to preserve Chinatown as a historic district, the PCDC submitted an application to the National Endowment for the Arts' Livable Cities program to nominate the neighborhood as a historic and cultural district. The staff also realized that many other acute needs had precedence over preserving the past, among which more affordable housing had always been a priority for the community. In that period, Chinatown leaders made a lot of efforts to build new housing to replace structures that had been demolished as part of urban renewal programs in the 1960s and 1970s, but unfortunately historic-district designation would not contribute to that process. Moreover, as a common redevelopment strategy in old urban areas, historic-district designation sometimes can be problematic to immigration neighborhoods as Chinatowns.¹⁵² There is no denying fact that Chinatown majority is below the poverty level, as historic designation can probably accelerate gentrification and rise property values which would make it difficult to maintain the ethnic neighborhoods as gateways for newcomers. Gentrification mainly focuses on preservation of physical environment and aesthetic imperatives, but usually neglects "social preservation" of existing populations and neighborhood characters.¹⁵³ Hence, the PCDC rejected historic designation as a feasible option for Chinatown neighborhood.

Instead, a viable solution to reconcile the conflicts between redevelopment and preservation in Philadelphia's Chinatown was put into effect. The PCDC worked actively with the RDA and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) in Chinatown rezoning and

¹⁵² Kathryn E. Wilson, *Ethnic Renewal in Philadelphia's Chinatown: Space, Place and Struggle* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 158-159.

¹⁵³ Japonica Brown-Saracino, *A neighborhood That Never Changes: Gentrification, Social Preservation, and the Search for Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

redevelopment. The cooperation with city agencies authorized the PCDC's role as a developer of the neighborhood. In 1989, the PCDC initiated Bill No.429, which established a Chinatown Special Zoning District. The zoning code empowered the PCDC to control the uses and scale of existing and new structures in the neighborhood, thus could help them fight off demolition and high rise construction.¹⁵⁴ In the design review process, the PCDC made decisions predominantly based on whether the proposed structure and building could serve the community's and its members' benefit.¹⁵⁵ On concrete action, the PCDC spent years in purchasing back Chinatown properties from the RDA and trying to take the control of the redevelopment in the neighborhood as much as possible.

The late 1980s saw a big transformation of Chinatown's landscape. The PCDC launched a number of housing projects to meet community needs, such as senior housing, mixed-income housing, and mixed-use development. Examples include Mei Wah Yuen, a complex of twenty-five townhouses on Spring Street from 9th to 11th streets; Wing Wah Yuen, or Dynasty Court, fifty-six Section 8 rental apartments and six commercial units at Race Street between 10th & 11th; On Lok House, fifty-five Section 8 rental units for the elderly with two commercial units at 219 North 10th Street. To boost the public image of Chinatown, community leaders and Chinese businessmen utilized the idea of "strategic self-orientalism" by creating an exotic themed place on their own. To celebrate the Chinatown neighborhood and commemorate the relationship between Philadelphia and its sister city, Tianjin in China, an enormous 80-ton Friendship Gate was built at 10th and Arch Streets (see **Figure 4.20**). This ornate archway was decorated with

¹⁵⁴ Wilson (2015), 160.

¹⁵⁵ Wilson, "Rebuild Philadelphia's Gold Mountain: Themed Space and Living Community in Transition," *Pioneer America Society: Association for the Preservation of Artifacts and Landscapes* 34, (2011), assessed April 8, 2014, <http://www.pioneeramerica.org/past2012/past2012artwilson.html>.

Chinese phoenix and dragon symbols, the top of traditional hierarchy in architectural design. Upon its completion in 1984, the Friendship Gate became the official entrance of the Chinatown community and is marked as the “first authentic gate built in America by artisans from China.”¹⁵⁶ The two-decade “Save Chinatown” movement in the Philadelphia Chinese community accomplished much not just by saving its buildings and institutions, but through the strength and power of both individuals and groups in the community itself and in other Chinese-American communities in the United States.



Figure 4.20: Chinatown Friendship Gate, Philadelphia, 2014. (Photography by the author.)

¹⁵⁶ To know more about PCDC’s projects, see the accomplishment of this organization’s official website at <http://chintown-pcdc.org/zh/about/accomplishment/>.

Opportunities and Conflicts

Extensive gentrification took place in Philadelphia's Chinatown in the late twentieth century, started by “renewed,” “upgrades,” and reinvestment development proposals. A number of luxury hotels and apartments were constructed in and around the neighborhood. In the 1990s, Chinatown was hemmed by large public projects -- Independence Mall Urban Renewal Area to its east, Gallery Mall to the south, Pennsylvania Convention Center to the west, and the Vine Street Expressway to the north. Constraints on all sides hardly left space for future expansion of the neighborhood, and the north of Chinatown, an area of old garment factories, remained as the only viable prospect for the neighborhood to grow.¹⁵⁷

A key moment for the local Chinatown community was in 2000 when Mayor John Street approved the proposal to build a baseball stadium at 12th and Vine Streets, just north of the Vine Street Expressway. The proposal was raised by the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team who were hoping to construct a new ballpark in downtown Philadelphia to replace their aging Veterans Stadium. Afraid that the ballpark plans would threaten Chinatown's future, Chinese immigrants, Chinese-Americans, Chinatown and Asian-American community institutions worked together as a coalition known as “Stadium Out of Chinatown,” which staged a number of rallies and public protests to oppose the proposal. In the face of the coalition's robust opposition, the government made a concession and ballpark plans were cancelled.¹⁵⁸ This moment represented a precious success in cases when ethnic neighborhoods claim territory and fight for survival under the pressures of urban redevelopment in American downtowns.

However, the happiness of success did not last very long. One urgent problem for

¹⁵⁷ AALDEF, 10.

¹⁵⁸ Sze (2010), 104.

Chinatown leaders was to find affordable housing in and around the neighborhood for the growing number of newcomers. The PCDC, which developed a series of affordable housing projects in the 1970s and 1980s, found it pretty difficult to do so in the 1990s due to rapidly growing property values. Right across the Vine Street Expressway there was an area of light industry and warehouse businesses. That neighborhood was later known as “Chinatown North,” since the Chinatown residents perceived its potential to accommodate new affordable housing and they took action to protect the hope by defeating proposals of several public funded projects in the neighborhood, including a baseball stadium, a new prison, and expansion of a methadone clinic.¹⁵⁹ The PCDC worked with the City Planning Commission to rezone this area for potential Chinatown residential conversion. Despite the fact that expansion of Chinatown has occurred into the so-called Chinatown North neighborhood, the Chinese population continued to dwindle as real estate prices increased when the area turned into a site of luxury development. Affected by global events in the turning point of the century, Philadelphia’s Chinatown population was shuffled -- an influx of immigrants and refugees from Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia transformed the city’s Chinatown to an Asian-American community no longer a merely Chinese-American community.¹⁶⁰ Gentrification and population shifts explain how the city’s Chinese population has been disproportionately affected and why the neighborhood kept to a relatively small size. Philadelphia’s Chinatown seems constantly to stand at the center of urban development pressures. There were always some groups who thought Chinatown was not good enough and should make way for “modern” and “high standard” progress. However, the sad part was a number of these plans did not consider Chinatown residents.

¹⁵⁹ AALDEF, 11.

¹⁶⁰ Sze (2010), 105-110.

Preserve Chinese-American Heritage

The landscape of Chinatown today was as a result of the development struggles overtime and continued community activism. Chinese-American institutions and residents have made great efforts to preserve Chinese-American heritage and celebrate cultural diversity. In 1995, the Chinese community held an exhibit to commemorate the 125th anniversary of Philadelphia's Chinatown. As part of the commemoration, the residents attached a plaque to the wall of the H.K. Golden Phoenix Restaurant at 913 Race Street, where the Li Fong's laundry once stood and where Chinatown was established (see **Figure 4.21**). The plaque reads: "In commemoration of



Figure 4.21: 913 Race Street, Philadelphia, 2015. (Photography by the author.)

From 2002 to 2004, the Asian Arts Initiative conducted an oral history project, interviewing twenty-four Chinatown residents. The achievement was a book of twenty-two edited oral histories accompanied by high-quality black and white photographs. In addition, essays by editor Lena Sze, historian John Kuo Wei Tchen, and John William Chin, the executive director of the PCDC, gave a brief overview of Chinese-American immigration, Philadelphia's Chinatown, and the oral history project. Through those snapshots in both words and images, readers can get a glimpse of the varied experiences of the people living and working in Philadelphia's Chinatown in the early twenty-first century. As Tchen pointed out, "[t]he history of Philadelphia's first Asian settlement has yet to be written," and these collected stories and photographs "offer us glimmers of a yet to be written people's history of this community."¹⁶³

In 2012, a project named the "Eastern Tower" at the northwest corner of Vine and Tenth streets was approved by the city council. As the PCDC's most ambitious mixed-use development projects so far, the 20-story tower will include apartments, ground-floor retail, a green roof, community space, bilingual social and health services, youth and senior recreation facilities, and the East Tower Community Center on its first floor (see **Figure 4.23**). The Eastern Tower is set for completion in 2015.¹⁶⁴ John Chin, the current director of the PCDC, expressed his concerns on the lack of identifiable Chinese elements in the building's facade, "I always believe that it comes down to, well we are the ones who should be telling the story. If we tell the story then we should feel safe that anybody that comes and visits should walk away with the right feel and history and the attitude and sense of this community."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Rachel Moloshok, review of *Chinatown Live(s): Oral Histories from Philadelphia's Chinatown, Pennsylvania legacies*, (May 2012), 38.

¹⁶⁴ Alexis Stephens, "New Philly High-Rise Links Past and Future of Chinese Immigration," assessed February 12, 2015, <http://nextcity.org/daily/entry/philadelphia-chinatown-apartments-high-rise-eb5-funding>.

¹⁶⁵ John Chin, Interview by Kathryn E. Wilson, Philadelphia, PA, July 2009.



Figure 4.23: Design of the “Eastern Tower.” (Above: courtesy of the PCDC.)
Site for the project at the northwest corner of Vine and Tenth streets, 2015.
(Bottom: photography by the author.)

A new Comprehensive Plan, “Philadelphia 2035,” was adopted by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) in 2011, a collective work of the PCPC, other city agencies, local community groups, and non-profit organizations over the last decade. It contained consensus-based strategies for reinvestment in the study areas (see **Figure 4.24**). Bounded by the Vine Street Expressway, Spring Garden, 11th, and 9th Streets, the Chinatown North sub-area currently contains a mix of commercial, residential, and industrial uses north of the Chinatown neighborhood, the hope of Chinatown community for future expansion. The strategic plan indicated the trends that Chinatown’s multi-cultural, mixed-use, mixed income community will continue to extend north of the Vine Street Expressway. Definite steps include encouraging distribution and food-related manufacturing uses along 10th Street north of Ridge Avenue to support the food service economy of Chinatown, enhancing pedestrian and bike access between Chinatown and Chinatown North by a series of sidewalks, and landscaping improvements, creating community parks and greenways to beautify urban space in the neighborhood.¹⁶⁶ The promises bring new hopes for the future of the tight-knit Chinatown community in Philadelphia.



Figure 4.24: Callowhill-Chinatown North Subareas.
(Courtesy of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.)

¹⁶⁶ Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Callowhill Chinatown North Strategic Plan,” assessed January 7, 2015, http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans/PDF/Callowhill_Chinatown_North_Plan.pdf.

A Community under the Friendship Archway: Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown

At the intersection of H and Seventh Streets in downtown Washington, D.C., stands the largest and most ornate Chinese archway in the United States. Decorated by 270 ceramic dragons in gold coating and with peaked roofs which are covered by 7,000 glazed tiles, this grand structure glitters in the sun. A placard in the middle of the archway inscribes the modern Chinese name of this special place -- 中国城 (Chinatown). Echoing the Chinese script on the placard, every building in this particular district has Chinese characters on its signage, such as CVS Pharmacy, McDonald's, Starbucks, Loft, and other stores. Close to Gallery Place-Chinatown Metro station, the streets are packed with Washingtonians and tourists. That is a snapshot of Chinatown today (see **Figure 4.25**).

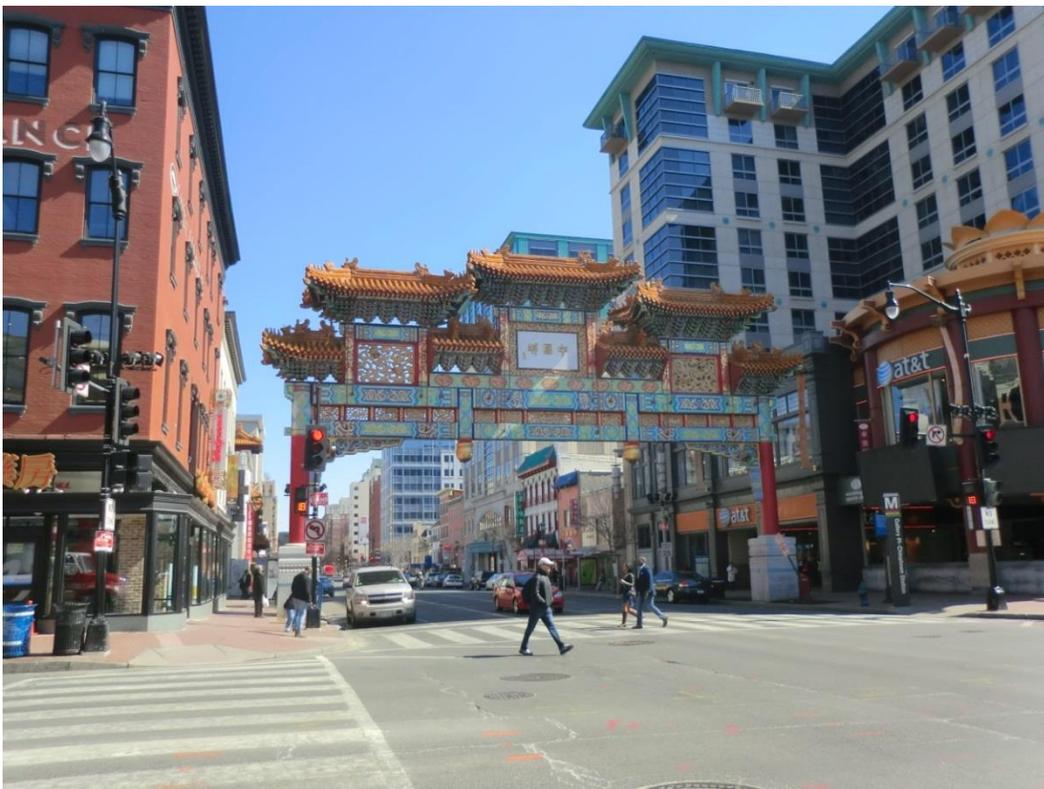


Figure 4.25: Chinatown Friendship Arch, Washington, D.C., 2014. (Photography by the author.)

Establishment of Current Chinatown

The first documented Chinese resident in the District of Columbia settled on Pennsylvania Avenue in 1851. Washington, D.C. experienced a growth of Chinese population in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when a rising tide of extreme anti-Chinese violence took place on the west coast of the United States. Thousands of Chinese immigrants moved to other regions of the country to seek less hostile living environments and better working opportunities. Washington, D.C., as the U.S. capital, became one of the new destinations for Chinese migrants. Washington, D.C.'s first Chinatown developed in the 1880s on Pennsylvania Avenue near Four and One-Half Street, NW.¹⁶⁷ As more and more Chinese immigrants clustered, this area became bustling with its self-dependent businesses such as Chinese laundries, grocery stores, drugstores, restaurants, and other small businesses (see **Figure 4.26**). A March 1903 *Washington Times* article described Chinatown as an “orderly and well-regulated community, with stores neatly kept and stocked with canned goods, preserved fruits, gifts, and Chinese foodstuffs.”¹⁶⁸ During the early 1900s, the community expanded on both sides between Third



Figure 4.26: Photograph by L. C. Handy that shows commercial buildings along the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue, including the Nam Kee and Hop Sing laundries, Washington, D.C., 1890. (Courtesy of Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.)

¹⁶⁷ Chow, 191.

¹⁶⁸ “Chinatown Slumming Parties Are Now the Fad,” *the Washington Times*, March 29, 1903.

and Sixth Streets on lower Pennsylvania Avenue. By 1914 the city directory listed several businesses within the Chinese commercial cluster: Sun Sing Laundry; Wah Chong and Lee Yick grocery; Tong Hing Low and Yuen Hong Low Restaurant; Lee Ying's cigar manufacturing; import companies of Tuck Cheong, Puen Chong, Yuen Chong, Hop Duey, Wah Yick, High Yuen, and Kim Lai Yueng.¹⁶⁹

Within the microcosm of clustered Chinatown, merchant associations and family associations came into existence to meet the needs of the Chinese immigrants. Those two types of associations have served protective, economic, social and government functions in the community. In American Chinatowns, merchant associations were governing bodies that settle trade activities among the Chinese immigrants living in the neighborhood. Established in 1912, the Washington branch of the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association was an early example of such associations, and the majority of its members had a commercial or industrial background. Different from the structure of tongs, family associations were set up for those immigrants who share the same surnames or from relative clans. The functions of family associations include serving residents' daily needs, allocating limited resources in the neighborhood, and consolidating conflicts among members, thus binding the Chinatown community together. The first of such associations in Washington, D.C.'s original Chinatown was the Lee Association, which was founded in 1905.¹⁷⁰

Relying on self-sufficient economic mechanisms and self-governing local associations, the Chinese immigrants led their own way of life and limited their social circle within this neighborhood. The absolute isolation of Chinatown reinforced its image as a mysterious place

¹⁶⁹ Chow, 191-192.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 195-196.

and of its residents as unassimilable ethnics. In the public press, Chinatown was usually associated with gambling, crime, tong wars, opium dens, and other negative images. Hence, Chinatown's reputation eventually declined to the point that it was regarded as an unsafe, unclean, and dilapidated grotto.¹⁷¹ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Federal Beautification plans for Washington, D.C. brought disaster to this Chinese community, the culture and architecture of which was seen as a blight along the lower Pennsylvania Avenue. The federal government forced the evacuation of the original Chinatown to make room for office construction as part of the Federal Triangle project in 1929.¹⁷² Without social or political clout to stop the community's fate towards demolition, the 398 Chinese residents in the neighborhood had no choice but to move.¹⁷³

In the process of finding a new home for the Chinese residents who were living in the relocated neighborhood, the On Leong Merchants Association actively got involved in the negotiation with local real estate agents about renting or purchasing properties. With the assistance of its New York headquarters, the Washington branch of this influential association confirmed the vicinity between Fifth and Seventh Streets of H street to be the ideal location of the proposed Chinatown. This area was formerly populated by German and Irish immigrants, and the site where the Goethe-Institute was located. Afraid the influx of Chinese would rapidly lower the property value of the district thus driving away potential commercial investments, white property owners petitioned the government to prevent the Chinese from moving in. After the petition failed, the vicinity on H Street became the present site of Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 194

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 194-195.

¹⁷³ "Where Will Chinatown Locate?" *the Washington Times*, August 6, 1929.

(see **Figure 4.27**).¹⁷⁴ According to V. Ray Sawyer's report of Chinese in the capital, the then Chinatown was the home of almost eight hundred Chinese, and boasted twelve shops, eight associations and men's lodges.¹⁷⁵

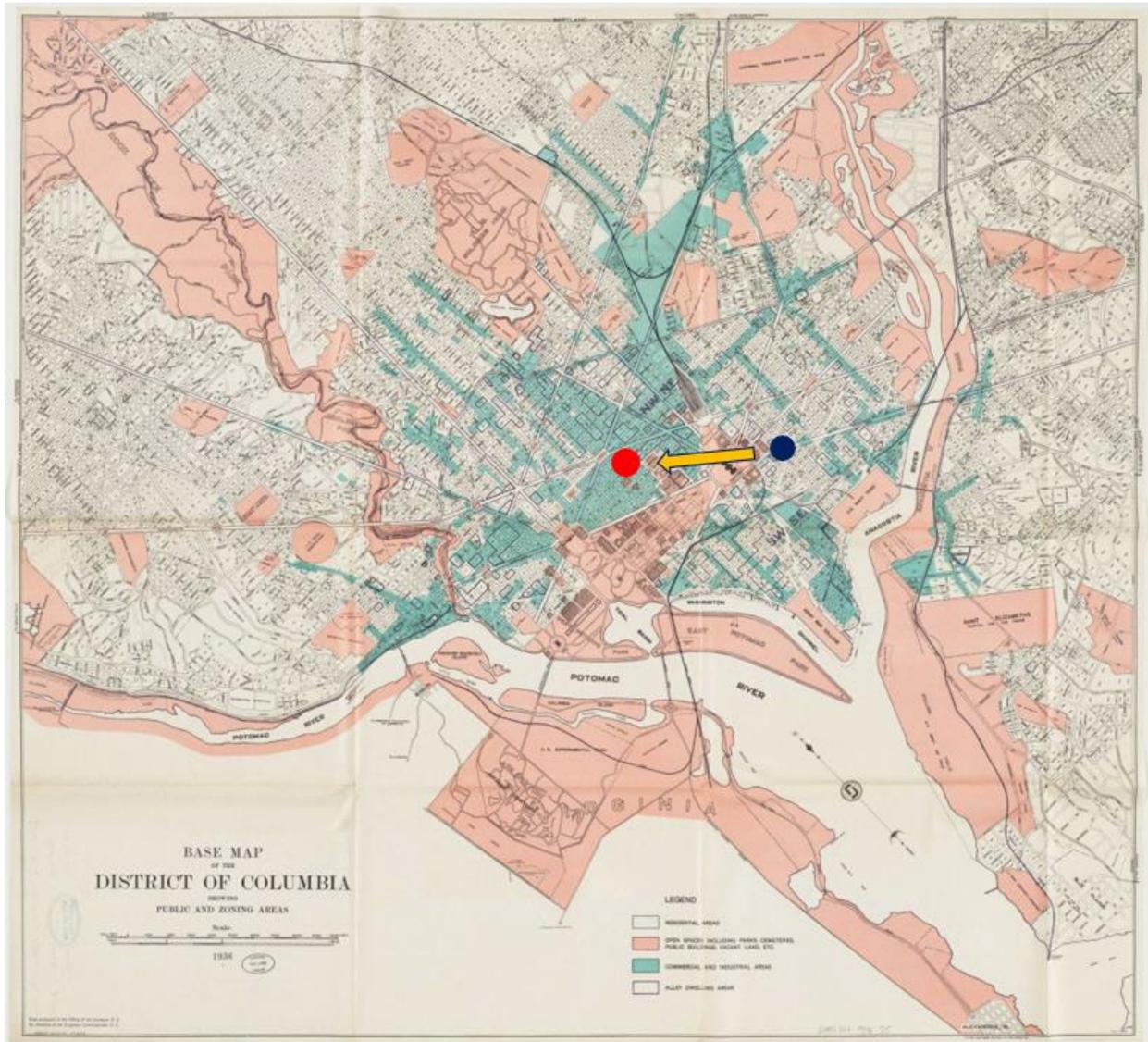


Figure 4.27: Relocation of Chinatown in the 1930s, Washington, D.C.
(Base map of the District of Columbia showing public and zoning areas, 1936.)

¹⁷⁴ Chow, 195.

¹⁷⁵ V. Ray Sawyer, "The Chinese in Washington, D.C., *Washingtoniana Collection*, (D.C. Public Library, Washington, D.C. photocopy), 196.

Reinforcement of Chinese Culture

The relocation of Chinatown from Pennsylvania Avenue to H Street aroused the community's awareness of preserving Chinese culture. It was marked by the establishment of Washington, D.C.'s first Chinese language school in the year of 1931. Children from Chinese immigrant families could attend the school at night or on weekends to learn about Chinese traditional culture and way of life. Chinese history, mathematic, geography, calligraphy, music were all included in the curriculum.¹⁷⁶

In 1935, the city's first Chinese Christian church was established by C. C. Hung, a China-born reverend who migrated from Detroit to Washington, D.C. The parishioners have donated their savings, followed by fund-raising, finally collecting enough money to build their own building near Eleventh and L Streets, NW. The church provided generations of Chinese immigrants both spiritual and physical support. In addition, the congregation opened its own Chinese school and later offered referrals, outreach, and social services through the newly founded Chinatown Service Center. Constrained by limited access to leisure facilities and few opportunities to mingle with people outside of the community, the Chinese in the neighborhood relied on their own sources for entertainment. The Ching Sing Club, an art and music group, was organized to meet the residents' needs for cultural life. The club gave its debut for the church's Chinese school in 1936. A religious building, the Pythian Temple on Ninth Street, NW, served as a popular recreation center for the Chinese immigrants for decades, although it is now demolished. The Chinese lottery was another leisure outlet for residents in the Chinese community.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Chow, 196.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 195.

Race relations in American society changed along with shifting political and economic conditions, which greatly affected Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown. As a result of improved international relationship with mainland China during World War II, Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and reopened the gate for Chinese immigrants. The political turmoil in China drove many Chinese abroad in the early 1950s. As the United States government expanded the quota of Chinese immigrants, the Washington community experienced a gradual population growth in the mid-1960s. Under the relatively loose immigration policy, spouses and children could join Chinese in the United States for family reunions. All of above circumstances brought about a new immigration wave, which differed from those before. In general, the new immigrants came from broader regions in China, had better education, tended to be more skilled, and had a higher female ratio.¹⁷⁸ With the influx of newcomers, Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown developed into a large community and expanded from G Street north to Massachusetts Avenue and from 9th Street east to 5th Street. At its peak, the community even gained influence beyond its boundary and helped newcomers adapt to the city. It was estimated that there were 3,000 residents with Chinese origins living in Washington, D.C. Although more Chinese live outside than inside the Chinatown community, it still remained as a harbor for recent Chinese immigrants.¹⁷⁹

As the new immigrants moved into the Chinatown community, the established families who followed the trend of decentralization began to move out. Chinese grocery stores, service centers, and restaurants came into being in uptown and suburban areas which brought convenience to the Chinese-Americans living nearby. However, Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 199.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 199-200; Sawyer, 204.

still remained the center of many Chinese immigrants' social life. On weekends, Chinese families usually went to Chinatown to have meals, get daily goods, go to church, and attend social events. Marked by a growing consciousness of civic rights nationwide, the 1960s saw a series of changes in Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown. Chinese-Americans became aware of their ethnic heritage's importance and launched several projects to preserve their identity continuity, including the Chinatown History Project and the Chinese Mural Project. Many newly-formed groups actively got involved in those projects. In addition, some other groups appealed, devoted to improving the basic welfare and rights of Chinese-Americans, especially focusing on the general population of women. Among these groups were the Organization of Chinese-American Women, the Organization of pan Asian Women, and the Organization of Chinese-Americans. During that decade, racial pride, cultural development and social activism of the Chinese-Americans in the city was at its high point.¹⁸⁰

Save Chinatown Movement

In the early 1970s, along with a blooming tourism industry, there was a rapidly growing need for luxury hotels and a convention center in downtown Washington, D.C. The redevelopment plans and urban renewal projects of the city became a threat to Chinatown's physical environment and cultural identity. There were construction projects on four sides of the Chinese-American community: expansion of government office buildings to the east; a luxury hotel and department complex to the south and north; a convention center to the west; and a metro station close to Chinatown's center. Such situation placed Chinatown in jeopardy. Without

¹⁸⁰ "History of Washington DC -Chinatown", Chinatown Community Cultural Center, assessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.ccccdc.org/templates/page.asp?articleid=476&zoneid=18>.

any doubt this ambitious blueprint would bring tremendous changes to the Chinatown community. The convention center itself, which was originally planned near the heart of Chinatown, would directly lead to the demolition of several buildings and relocation of a considerable number of residents.¹⁸¹ If the Washington, D.C. convention center proposal was fulfilled, it would potentially cause a sharp increase of property value in this area. The more recently arrived immigrant families and the elderly were among those who would suffer a hard time from the proposed convention center construction. With strong emotional attachments to the cultural milieu, these two major Chinese immigrant groups preferred to stay within Chinatown, where they could speak their own language, eat their own food, and socialize with others from the same cultural background. If the convention center was built, the housing in this area would become less affordable which could eventually drive more and more Chinese immigrants out of the community.¹⁸²

Seeing Chinatown's fate in the urban renewal wave, just as the disappeared African-American communities in Georgetown and the southwest, community leaders, Chinese merchants, and activists formed a coalition making serious efforts to save Chinatown (see **Figure 4.28**). However, as the redevelopment plan greatly lifted the property value in the neighborhood, many buyers provided a price that those Chinese property owners felt very hard to refuse. As the ownership of most buildings was transferred to whites, Chinese-Americans lost control of their community redevelopment. As a result, the original residential quarters were replaced by profit-motive properties. The proposal of the metro station was supposed to open new business opportunities to Chinatown. However, the long and unpredictable delays of the construction

¹⁸¹ Chow, 202.

¹⁸² "Chinatown Fights to Survive Amid Building Boom," *The Washington Post*, January 3, 1988.



Figure 4.28: Photograph by Robert Lee and Harry Chow that shows “Save Chinatown” banner near Seventh Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 1975. (Courtesy of Eastern Wind, Inc.)

work brought inconvenience to residents and lowered the commercial values along Seventh Street, NW.¹⁸³

In the process of hanging on to residents in the community, several Chinese-American associations worked together to build an apartment complex at Sixth and H Streets, NW. The funding was accumulated from the United States Department of Housing and Urban

¹⁸³ Chow, 205.

Development. The design of this apartment complex fell on Alfred H. Liu, a Chinese-American architect and chair of the Chinatown Development Corporation. Introducing modern Chinese design motifs like the red-paneled balconies, this 152-apartment complex was completed in 1982, and was given the official name Wah Luck House (see **Figure 4.29**).¹⁸⁴ With the vision of happiness by both the builders and residents, the building aimed at providing subsidized housing mainly for newcomers, the elderly and low-income immigrant families.¹⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the opening of the downtown Washington D.C. Convention Center in 1983 resulted in the displacement of one hundred Chinese-American families along with the



Figure 4.29: Wah Luck House features its Chinese name “華樂大廈” and unique design in balcony details, 2015. (Photograph by the author.)

¹⁸⁴ The name Wah Luck House in English is “the House of Chinese Happiness.”

¹⁸⁵ David Nakamura, "Wah Luck House maintains culture in dying D.C. Chinatown," *The Washington Post*, July 10, 2011.

demolition of twelve percent of the community. Accordingly, the save Chinatown movement can only be considered a modest success.¹⁸⁶ Truly, the community is honored to become the only surviving ethnic community in downtown Washington, D.C. However, as a *Washington Post* article questioned, “how much Chinatown will look like Chinatown when it’s all done, but how much of Chinatown will be left when it’s all done?”¹⁸⁷

Design an Imagery of “Chinese-ness”

In the 1960s and 1970s, many actors actively got involved in the process of reshaping and reinforcing of Chinatown neighborhood, including the Downtown Business Improvement District, D.C. Planning Office, Mainstreet Development Programs, etc. Chinatown leaders seemed to share the same interests with city officials. The close collaboration between these parties led to a series of legal tools securing the only ethnic neighborhood in downtown as cultural area, and District of Columbia Municipal Regulations was one of the examples (see **Figure 4.30**). The Chinatown Steering Committee was encouraged by city planners to develop guidelines to reinforce the distinctiveness of the community. The city government’s Chinatown Program in 1976 called for Chinatown guidelines design; the Mayor’s Downtown Committee was established in 1982; the comprehensive plan in 1984 mentioned that objective again. All of these efforts resulted in *Chinatown Design Guidelines Study*, a document created by a local consulting firm, the Architects Engineers (see **Figure 4.31**). Published in December 1988, this book represented early local efforts to design an imagery of “Chinese-ness” in Chinatown.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Chow, 205.

¹⁸⁷ James Wu, “Chinatown Divided,” *The Washington Post*, January 10, 1988.

¹⁸⁸ Ching Lin Pang and Jan Rath, “The Land of the Free: The Persistence of Chinatown, Washington DC as a Symbolic Ethnic Enclave,” *The Sociology of Entrepreneurship Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 25, (2007): 210-212.

1705 CHINATOWN (DD)

1705.1 The principal policies and objectives from the Comprehensive Plan for the Chinatown area are to:

- (a) Protect and enhance Chinatown as Downtown's only ethnic cultural area;
- (b) Maintain and expand the existing concentration of retail uses emphasizing Chinese and Asian merchandise and related wholesale operations serving residents, visitors, tourists, and business travelers;
- (c) Reinforce the area's economic viability by encouraging mixed use development, including substantial housing, cultural and community facilities, offices, retail and wholesale businesses, and hotels; and
- (d) Protect existing housing and the most important historic buildings with suitable preservation controls, residential and commercial zones, and economic incentives.

Figure 4.30: District of Columbia Municipal Regulations.
(Courtesy of District of Columbia Zoning Office.)

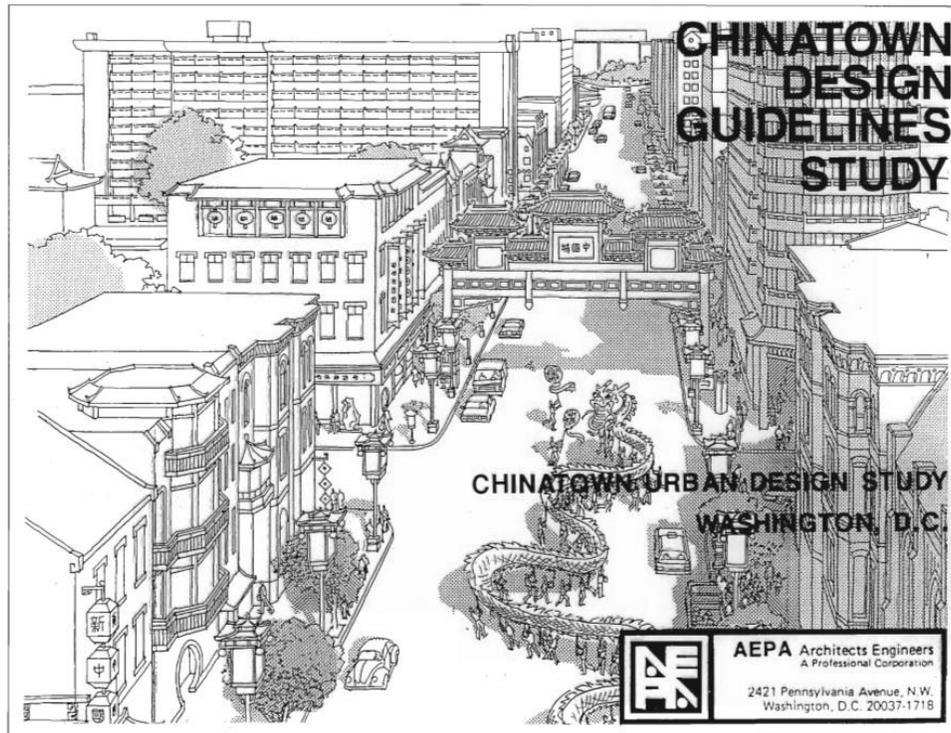


Figure 4.31: The cover page of *Chinatown Design Guidelines Study*.
(Courtesy of District of Columbia Planning Office.)

In an effort to reinforce the community's Chinese character, the city government of Washington, D.C. dedicated the Friendship Archway, a traditional Chinese archway to celebrate friendship with its sister city Beijing. The design of the public artwork included seven Chinese-style peaked roofs, seven thousand tiles, two hundred and seventy-two painted dragons, all of which was modeled of the highest standard the Ming and Qing Dynasties. This ornate archway cost approximately one million dollars, and the city government of Washington, D.C. and Beijing agreed to share the total expense. Completed in 1986, the giant structure spans 63 feet and reaches 47 feet at its highest point, thus became the largest single-span Chinese archway in the world. The District also worked with the Chinatown Steering Committee to create Chinatown design guidelines and establish the Chinatown Design Review Program, to preserve and promote oriental inspired architecture in Chinatown.¹⁸⁹

In the same year, the metro station close to the community changed its name into "Gallery-Place and Chinatown." When the station began to serve the neighborhood in 1976, only Gallery Place was mentioned in the name of the station, and Chinatown was completely ignored. Like many other Washington neighborhoods, Chinatown suffered a heavy toll after the 1968 riots. Further spurred by downtown's rising taxes, crime, and blighted business environment, a large number of Chinese-American residents moved to the suburbs. The historic core of the Chinatown neighborhood was destroyed to make way for the construction of the MCI Center in the 1990s. Marketed by the change of the MCI center to the current Verizon Center in 1997 (see **Figure 4.32**), rapidly increasing real estate values and other effects of gentrification have driven Chinese business out of the community. As signs appeared of Chinatown fading, the city

¹⁸⁹ John DeFerrari, "Chinatown's Friendship Archway," Greater Greater Washington, assessed February 9, 2011, <http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/9183/chinatowns-friendship-archway>.



Figure 4.32: The Verizon Center at 601 F St NW, Washington, D.C., 2015.
(Photograph by the author.)



Figure 4.33: FuDDRUCKERS with its Chinese name on the sign, 2015. (Photograph by the author.)

government began to realize the loss of ethnic identity in the neighborhood. It made a series of efforts to increase the visibility of Chinatown in public view, the neighborhood has already become more name than reality.¹⁹⁰

To preserve Chinatown's ethnic identity, local laws and ordinances clearly indicated that every new business inside or near this area was required to have Chinese characters in its signage. Ironically, currently there are not many authentic Chinese family businesses left in the neighborhood, and what were erected there were mostly national chain stores and restaurants. The direct result was that Starbucks, Hooters, Legal Sea Foods, and Fuddruckers among others, hang their names in Chinese outside their stores (see **Figure 4.33**).

In 2004, Chinatown underwent a \$200 million renovation. Historic buildings mainly along the west side of Seventh Street were tenanted and renovated. Mix-use development in retail-residential-office mode commenced construction on the corner of Seventh and H Streets. High-end restaurants, a deluxe movie theater, exclusive department stores, and a bowling alley, together with the renamed Verizon Center, were included in the developments, transforming the area into a bustling scene for nightlife, shopping and entertainment. In the competition with national brand stores and restaurants in the real estate market, Chinese-based businesses can hardly find their place in the neighborhood.

"Ethnic Block?"

Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown has been shrinking dramatically during the past three decades. Nowadays, the community could reluctantly claim a territory of two blocks at most, and

¹⁹⁰ "Development Gives Chinatown a New Flavor; As Decline Is Reversed, Older Businesses Are Forced Out," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 200.

thus was derided by many as “Ethnic Block” or “China Corner.” In public memory, just as *Asian Week* commented in 2000, this Chinese-American neighborhood “barely” remains.¹⁹¹

In September 2011, the District of Columbia Office of Planning created the Chinatown Public Realm Plan to provide both government agencies and private property owners with guidance on capital infrastructure investments and ideas of designing and managing public spaces in this Chinese-American neighborhood (see **Figure 4.34**). The draft pointed out several current issues concerning streetscape and the use of public spaces in the heart of Chinatown: potential hazard of pedestrians; insufficient outdoor commercial activity; lack of vegetation planting; weak Chinese cultural characters and so on. The report mainly focuses on two questions: firstly, how to add life to the public space; secondly, how to improve pedestrians’ overall experience.

As for the first concern, the Public Realm Plan proposed to create a dynamic center at the corner of Seventh and H Streets, where the Friendship Archway stands. The idea is to motivate cultural activities at this node of city streets. The recommendation on promoting active outdoor commercial culture is borrowed from successful business activities in other Chinatowns. This recommendation would need to work together with regulation reform. For example, the revision of vending regulations is necessary to make it possible. To discuss the second question, it is important to understand that people experience space in many ways: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile sensation. The report draft stressed the significance of improving the safety and comfort of pedestrians, followed by the creation of place-identity. In the discussion of diverse transportation options, the highlight is to make Chinatown friendlier to bicyclists. In

¹⁹¹ AsianWeek Staff, “Philadelphia Chinatown Wins Stadium Fight,” *AsianWeek*, (November 24, 2000), assessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.asianweek.com/2000/11/24/philadelphia-chinatown-wins-stadium-fight/>.

addition, a guideline in the draft details the design of vegetation, lighting, paving and curbs, and street furniture, aimed at creating a consistent streetscape.¹⁹²

In sum, Chinatown Public Realm Plan of 2015 put forward many positive potential changes in Washington, DC.'s Chinatown, most of which focus on the improvement of streetscape and public spaces. The current needs of Chinatown residents and mode of operation are rarely discussed in the draft.

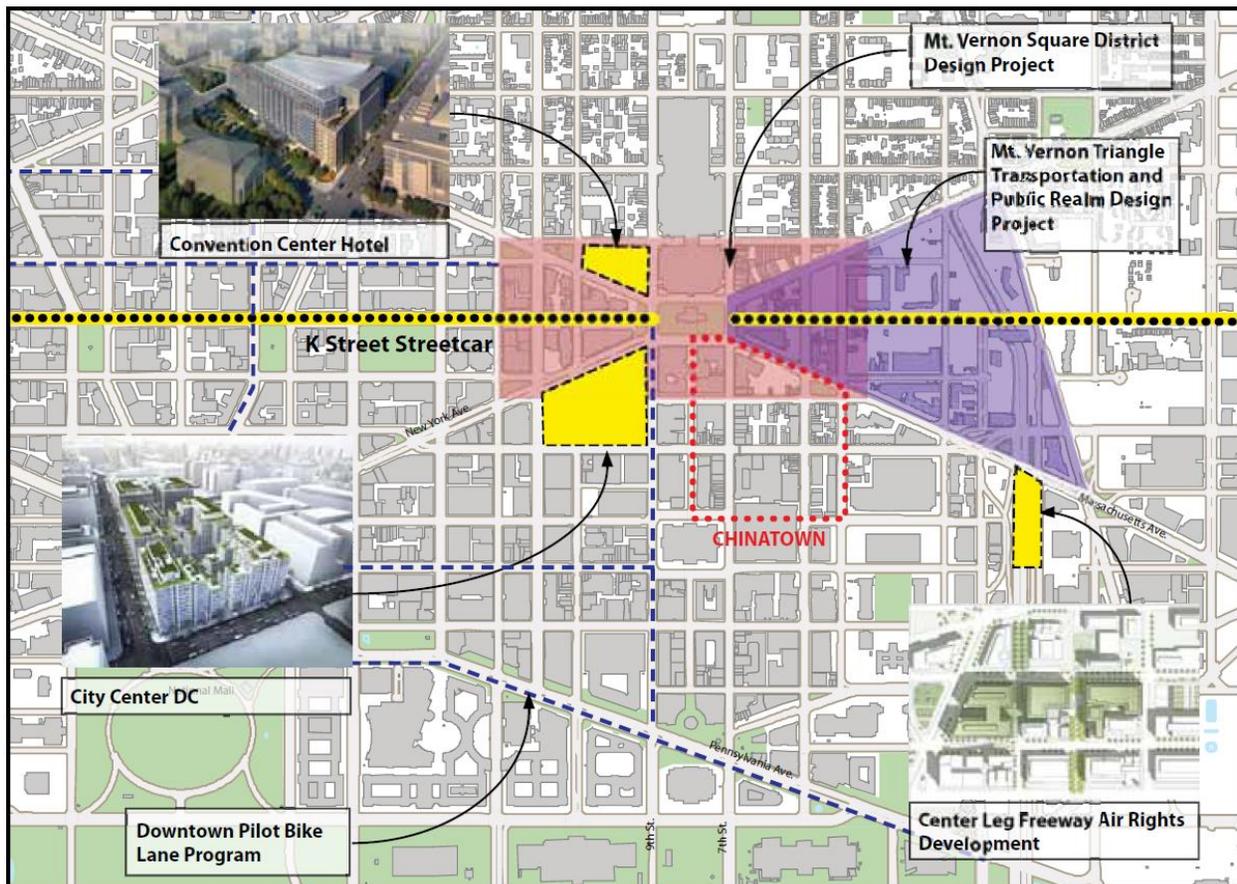


Figure 4.34: Planning and redevelopment projects around Chinatown area, Washington, D.C. (Courtesy of District of Columbia Planning Office.)

¹⁹² District of Columbia Planning Office, "Chinatown Public Realm Plan," 2011, accessed February 12, 2015, http://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/publication/attachments/Draft_Chinatown%20Public%20Realm_web%2011.10.11.pdf.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF AMERICAN CHINATOWNS

Preservation of Chinatown's spatial environment and celebration of its cultural distinctness in the current era present an obvious contrast to the slum clearance and removal of ethnic minority communities in earlier historical periods. It took a long time for Chinatown leaders and residents from being merely the witnesses of urban environmental transformation to becoming activists involved in the planning process and challenging local political establishments. Chinatown communities in the United States have gained considerable political power through a series of civil rights movements, and thus could control the development that occurred in the neighborhood to some extent. As tourism became a seemingly promising industry for Chinatown economics, community elites and city agencies both worked on "orientalizing" Chinatown's physical environment to draw local capital, which raised new issues in maintaining its place-identity as a Chinese-American immigrants' community.

This chapter draws much inspiration from the work of Jane Jacobs, the tenacious urban activist who spearheaded the bulldozers of New York City's urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s. In her milestone book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs attacked modernist urban planning based neither on construction methods nor architectural aesthetics, but "on the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding."¹⁹³ Safety, vitality, and stabilization are the three big goals for urban planning.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

Similarly, my critique of current Chinatown preservation does not point to any particular efforts in maintaining place-identity, but rather, to the scheme and intention that directs local preservation practices.

Issues in Chinatowns Preservation

Before analyzing current preservation issues, it is especially important to understand the changing roles of Chinatowns over time and the reasons behind the scenes in global and local contexts. The three case studies shared some common patterns in historical episodes of their transformation. In the 1870s, discriminatory policies and shrinking opportunities on the West Coast forced many Chinese immigrants to large cities on the East Coast to make a living: New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. are included. As more and more Chinese came in, the first few Chinese businesses opened by pioneer immigrants became the residential and social centers for the Chinese in the three cities, such as Ah Ken's cigar store, Lee Fong's laundry, and small businesses on Pennsylvania Avenue. As the federal government adopted the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, hostile sentiments from the outside society consolidated Chinatowns as havens for immigration Chinese. A series of slum clearance projects targeted Chinatowns from the 1930s to the 1960s, which led to far-reaching influences on Chinese-American communities, such as demolition of tenements in Manhattan's Chinatown, the construction of the Vine Street Expressway in Philadelphia, and the relocation of Washington, D.C.'s original Chinatown to make way for the Federal Triangle project. After Immigration and Nationality Act was enacted in 1965, all three Chinatowns experienced different degrees of growth in both population and spatial environment, especially the population of Manhattan's Chinatown which almost doubled in the following five years, which made it surpass the one in

San Francisco to become the largest American Chinatown in 1970. Chinatowns gradually turned into attractive tourist destinations of sightseers, which encouraged some intended “orientalization.” Examples include renovation of association buildings in Manhattan’s Chinatown, the Friendship Gate in Philadelphia’s Chinatown, and the Friendship Arch in Washington, D.C.’s Chinatown. Threats from large public projects never stopped. The 1990s were marked by local efforts to “upgrade” Chinatowns, construction of condominiums, office buildings, and luxury hotels. Nowadays, serving their mission as immigrant communities, Chinatowns are also promoted by cultural branding to attract visitors throughout the country.

The brief review of the historical episodes made above can help with examining the reasons for the fading of Chinatowns. On one hand, the threats usually come from city agencies who want to change Chinatown neighborhoods either to make way for proposed public projects or to maximize the economic profits. Most traditional Chinatowns formed near the central business districts. As American downtowns grew, the location of Chinatowns usually became the “ideal” place for downtown expansion. As a result, the Chinatown neighborhood was encroached by slum clearance projects. “Slum” itself is a subjective word, which indicated that ethnic places such as Chinatowns are “blighted,” which should be erased from the beautiful cityscapes. In recent decades, the ethnicity of Chinatown and exotic scenes of oriental culture turns out to be appealing to sightseers. The cities participated in the process of making Chinatowns more oriental-looking and aimed at using Chinatown branding as a market tool to boost the concept of “cultural tourism.” On the other hand, Chinatowns as ethnic minority communities usually lack the political clout to say “no” in the face of urban renewal or economic development, especially in early years. Isolated from the larger society for too long, Chinatown residents felt it very hard to make their voice heard in the American mainstream culture.

Further, relying on some marginalized businesses in early years or single-form business in the new century made Chinatown economies fragile and subject to outer market shifts. Back to the establishment of Chinatowns, Chinese immigrants were unable to compete with the white working class in job markets. As a result, they turned to marginalized businesses for a living, including hand laundries, garment factories, and other small businesses. However, such industries find it very difficult to survive under the pressure of modern trends: hand laundries were replaced by machining using an electrically powered agitator; most garment factories have been closed because they have no advantage when competing with imports from China; very few Chinese theaters survived as DVDs became extremely accessible. These industries once served as the pillars of Chinatown economies, and more importantly, they provided thousands of jobs to the Chinese living in the areas. As opportunities in the communities shrank, former residents would move to other parts of the city in search for available opportunities. As tourism rose as a quick return industry in Chinatowns, Chinese merchant elites were enticed by the potential benefits of this new opportunity and embraced the idea of “orientalization.” They were willing to work together with city agencies for the goal of “authentic” Chinatowns-making. The thriving tourism industry not only changed the physical environment of Chinatowns with loads of Chinese architectural motifs and oriental symbols, but also turned small local businesses to a uniformed business mode which merely serves the tourism industry. Examples include Americanized Chinese restaurants, souvenir stores, and hotels. Single-type business made Chinatowns’ economy difficult to recover if the only industry dramatically declined due to some external changes. In sum, just as the formation of Chinatowns was both an involuntary and voluntary process, their fading has both exterior and interior reasons.

It seems this story of Chinatown has a happy ending as city agencies and community

leaders finally reached an agreement to save Chinatown's urban environment and build the "oriental dream" together. However, the cooperation has turned out sometimes to accelerate the fading of Chinatowns. More and more residents complain that the nowadays Chinatowns were not the Chinese-American communities they grew up with. A clearer sign was that the ratio of Chinese in the Chinatown neighborhoods dramatically declined during the past three decades.

It is not difficult to notice some ironic scenes in case studies. Manhattan's Chinatown has what is regarded by many as an organic built environment when compared with other American Chinatowns. In fact, most of the local attempts to make it more "authentic" failed due to reasons such as lack of funding or community support. The China Village plan, Chinatown Street Revitalization plan, and Unity Arch were three examples among those. If the development were actualized, Manhattan's Chinatown would boast to have its oriental streetscapes and an arch. However, would as many people think that Chinatown is authentic? Or can we say that the comparatively authentic environment of Manhattan's Chinatown today was actually the result because most of the local efforts to make it "authentic" failed? Another case worth discussing is Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown. Nowadays, Washingtonians joke whether it should get a new name "Ethnic block" or "China corner," which gives you a direct impression about how small it is. However, this smallest American Chinatown is marked with the largest single-span Chinese archway not only in the United States, but in the world. Many tourists come to see this wonderful structure and stop by to take pictures in front of it. However, few of them would know that there was a once thriving Chinese-American community years before the flamboyant arch was completed. In the district, Chinese characters on the signage of every store seem to persuade the passing-by visitors that this is a distinctive neighborhood called Chinatown, while most of the stores are national chain stores that you can find elsewhere in the city, which particularly

weakened these statements. The most ornate Chinese gate, which is seen by many Americans as the symbol of Chinese culture, apparently did not bring promised prosperity to the community.

Then what can?

To answer the two interesting questions raised in these cases, it is important to go back and review the role culture played in shaping Chinatowns' built environment. Just as Jacobs observed cities, "[t]he look of things and the way they work are inextricably bound together."¹⁹⁵ Architectural appearance and cultural influence intertwined in Chinatown built environments as well. Early Chinese immigrants altered existing row houses to meet their own needs to live on foreign land. As some wealthy Chinese were eligible to purchase land, they constructed some buildings by themselves based on their memories of hometowns in China and the sources available in the United States. Hence, the buildings in Chinatown were carriers of a hybrid culture. These buildings are distinctive not merely because their design has some oriental elements, but more important, because the hybrid culture serves as the origins for their formation. In short, the built environments in Chinatowns were an expression of Chinese-American culture. Exotic streetscapes in Chinatowns attracted visitors to appreciate their distinctiveness. However, that is the exterior image but not the interior agent that shaped it. Similarly, tourism can become the attachment of Chinatown preservation but should not be the primary goal. If tourism is overemphasized above the needs of Chinatown residents, the power of culture which makes the community thrive would gradually be gone, and the blight of Chinatowns follows.

Back to the discussion on Chinatown preservation, although there are several historic

¹⁹⁵ Jacobs, 20.

preservation incentive programs in all three case studies,¹⁹⁶ most current local efforts are dedicated to making Chinatowns tourist destinations and implanting many oriental symbols in their built environments. The problem of such oriental-image creation is that symbol-embedding merely aims at catering to sightseers' novelty-hunting expectations and thus cannot turn into cultural accretion for the community. To make clear my point, I am not criticizing the use of tourism as a means to benefit a community, but rather, boosting tourism as the only goal in saving ethnic places including Chinatowns. This kind of motivated preservation, or more accurately, "tourism gentrification," would exploit Chinatowns' meaning of existence in the future. If Chinese-American residents make up only a tiny fraction of the total population in the neighborhood, if traditional Chinese businesses are replaced by mainstream national chain stores in the district, if the Chinese characters on the signage convey no useful information to the Chinese living in the area, even a neighborhood with all of the fancy oriental details you can imagine, can only deceive us and we cannot still call such place a Chinatown. A Chinese gate does not make a Chinatown; people do.

Closing Thoughts

Based on the analysis made above, the key question in Chinatown preservation should be addressed as how to maintain Chinatown's unique characteristics while making it a thriving community. The answer to the question lies in how an immigrant community can hang on to its original residents and small businesses. Appealing life is what kept the community vibrant. once community residents leave, it is difficult to draw them back. Although each city's Chinatown has

¹⁹⁶ See Appendix A for details of historic preservation incentives at the local level.

its distinctive history, different current concerns, and future development plans, there are some general strategies available to better preserve the identity of Chinese-American communities.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is no doubt the major concern of Chinatown leaders and residents. Without going into great detail, there are basically four types of affordable housing. The first type is newly built housing developments, in which the entire development is specifically planned to be affordable, ranging from individual houses to apartments to single-room-occupancy facilities. The second is newly built affordable housing units, constructed as part of a mixed-income development; again these units can also take the form of individual houses or apartments. The third is existing housing units, renovated or converted from their previous use to become affordable. The last but not the least is existing and already-affordable housing units, neither renovated nor converted, but which are intentionally maintained and conserved so that they will remain affordable.¹⁹⁷

There are no resources to conduct a census of affordable housing in the case studies of American Chinatowns, and it is urgent that research be done either by city planning departments or community development corporations because the valid data can greatly assist the assessment of the status quo of affordable housing in the neighborhood and which affordable units ceased to be affordable because of the expiration of their affordability requirements. What percent of existing affordable housing are eligible to be kept permanently? What is the median rent of subsidized units in the neighborhood? The answers to these questions are especially important in

¹⁹⁷ "Section 3. Providing Affordable Housing for All," Community Tool Box, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/physical-social-environment/affordable-housing/main>.

the decision-making process of community leaders and city agencies. Without accurate data, we could only guess about how many more affordable housing units are needed in the Chinatown community in general, or simply assume that the neighborhood is close to saturation of affordable housing. If current data indicates that a Chinatown is short of affordable housing, there are basically two strategies to meet the community's needs: reinforcement existing low-income and public-subsidized housing, and development of mixed income and senior housing.

To create more available affordable housing for the community, it is necessary to make inclusionary zoning policies work for Chinatowns. In recent years, efforts by local governments depend on the profit-maximum system and amassing properties of inclusionary zoning strategies. Inclusionary zoning is a technique used to develop diverse mixed-income housing. To make it feasible, a set percentage of units in each new or renovated building are required to be used for affordable housing. In return, developers would receive a "bonus density," which enables them to construct more units than would normally be allowed. Inclusionary zoning seeks to promote mixed income communities and equitable growth for all residents.¹⁹⁸ However, the profit-driving policies used by local governments have usually weakened existing housing and networks rather than strengthening current resources and infrastructure. On one hand, community leaders and residents need the regulatory tools to avoid inclusionary zoning policies when the ultimate outcome turns to bring in more and more luxury developments and encroached affordability over all. On the other hand, city governments should not promote inclusionary zoning as a rubber stamp but need to develop creative strategies to achieve preservation or construction of

¹⁹⁸ "Inclusionary Zoning Affordable Housing Program," District of Columbia Department of Housing and Community Development, assessed April 14, 2015, <http://dhcd.dc.gov/service/inclusionary-zoning-affordable-housing-program>.

affordable housing.¹⁹⁹

Along with the “pull” of downtown living, there are opportunities to bring families back to the neighborhood. Advocacy and funding should target towards creating more mixed-income, senior and single room occupancy units. Currently, the public funds for housing are limited and often used to subsidize real estate developers of luxury developments rather than create low-income and moderate-income housing tied into gentrification projects. How to turn the governments’ interests in affordable housing is a question that merits more study.

Business Mode

The vitality of Chinatowns strongly depends on the business mode of small community-owned business ventures. There are very strong ties between small businesses and Chinatown residents: small businesses rely on the support of immigrant residents, while the residents rely on the affordable goods and job opportunities provided by community-based businesses. One current issue in Chinatown small businesses is the increasing real estate values in the community which makes commercial unites less affordable for small business owners or renters. As a result, many “formula” businesses with strong financial base move into the community. Formula businesses or the so-called national chains are stores and restaurants that have standardized services, décor, methods of operation, and other features that make them virtually identical to businesses elsewhere. Too many formula stores in a downtown neighborhood lead to long-term economic consequences as the district loses its distinctive appeal and no longer offers opportunities for independent entrepreneurs.²⁰⁰ Even worse, low-margin businesses that meet the

¹⁹⁹ AALDEF, 41-42.

²⁰⁰ “Chain Stores (Formula Retail Use),” City & County of San Francisco Planning Department, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=2839>.

basic needs of the Chinatown community, such as pharmacies and grocery stores may be pushed out. Hence, government should include small business owners in the decision-making process to identify the best practices in reinforcement and creation of businesses that serve surrounding residents and produce job opportunities.

Many cities enact regulations to prevent formula businesses' permeation into downtown commercial environment. San Francisco is one of the most successful cases dealing with formula businesses. San Francisco's first restrictions on chain stores were enacted in 2004 with an outright ban for Hayes Valley. North Beach followed suit. In 2006, voters approved a ballot measure requiring any chain store to obtain a special permit to open in neighborhood commercial corridors through the Planning Commission. The courts concluded that this is a legitimate purpose, noting that "the objective of promoting a diversity of retail activity to prevent the city's business district from being taken over exclusively by generic chain stores is not a discriminatory purpose under the commerce clause."²⁰¹ Another approach is to designate formula businesses as a conditional use subject to case-by-case review by either the planning board or the city council. A formula business that wishes to open in any of San Francisco's neighborhood business districts, for example, must obtain approval from the planning commission. The law states that, in making its decision, the commission must consider: the existing concentration of formula businesses within the neighborhood; whether similar goods or services are already available; compatibility with the character of the neighborhood, retail vacancy rates, and the balance of neighborhood-serving versus citywide or regional-serving businesses.²⁰²

²⁰¹ "How San Francisco is Dealing With Chains," Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), accessed April 20, 2015, <http://ilsr.org/san-francisco-dealing-chains/>.

²⁰² "Protecting Locally Owned Retail: Planning Tools for curbing chains and nurturing homegrown businesses," Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), accessed April 20, 2015, <http://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/0204msn.pdf>.

That does not mean that formula businesses are all bad and should be forced out of downtown. National chain stores have their advantages and could facilitate more capitals into the neighborhoods. To question what would be the best strategies, it seems that the answer lies somewhere in the middle: a healthy mix of local small businesses and national chains seems to strike an ecological balance that both retains stable customer flow and attracts new customers. For Chinatown neighborhoods undergoing a rapid rise in rents, there are two sets of strategies that could assist local small businesses to stay in the community. One set of strategies is to assist local small businesses in property occupation. The first means for a local retailer to maintain a stable location at a steady price would be obtain the property's ownership. City government could encourage this through incentives such as income or property tax incentives and by providing low-interest loans for this purpose. The second strategy is to establish a community land trust, which is a nonprofit corporation that purchases property from a city and holds it in perpetuity for the community's benefit. The mode has proved an effective method to reinforce affordable housing. Houses on the property list can only be sold to low-income families at affordable prices. When the family decides to sell the home, the community land trust²⁰³ buy it back for a price set by a formula that allows for a fair return on the family's investment but maintains affordability for the next owner. The third way is that a city could buy a commercial building and contract for its management with the stipulation that space in the building can only be leased to local businesses at subsidized, below-market rates. The idea is that the city owns and maintains the building with no profit. Another set of strategies is to implement some restrictions

²⁰³ A community land trust (CLT) serves as a nonprofit, community-based corporation that develops and stewards affordable home ownership opportunities. Usually, a CLT acquires land and removes it from the for-profit real estate market. CLTs balance the needs of individuals to possess land and the security of tenure with a community's benefits to stabilize affordability, boost economic diversity, and facilitate public access to essential services.

on formula businesses thus reducing their potential threats to the downtown commercial environment. The first idea is to enact a small-scale zoning regulation. Many national chain stores cannot open at a lot smaller than a certain size or that have certain street frontage setback. Maintaining the small-scale character of a retail district through zoning rules that stipulate maximum store sizes can reduce interest from national retailers and stave off gentrification. The second strategy is to create a downtown commerce steering committee to manipulate the trends of investment and development. A number of cities have adopted land-use policies that steer new retail development to areas in or adjacent to the downtown or other established business districts. Last but not least, the city with the community can request an economic impact review to evaluate the potential costs and benefits of prospective businesses based on the needs of surrounding neighborhoods.²⁰⁴

Tourism and Authenticity

The growing interest in ethnic cultural and heritage tourism in the United States parallels the increasing global importance attached to indigenous cultural heritage sites. The awakened ethnic concerns in American cities are also relevant to the emergence of folk and vernacular revivals which can be perceived in a series of popular folk music events and folklife festivals. In folklife festivals, the outsiders of a vernacular cultural group benefit from their real experiences of face-to-face interaction with the insiders. A famous example of that is the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, which became an annual event on the mall of Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁴ "Formula Business Restrictions," Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), accessed April 20, 2015, <http://ilsr.org/rule/formula-business-restrictions/>; "Protecting Locally Owned Retail: Planning Tools for curbing chains and nurturing homegrown businesses," Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), accessed April 20, 2015, <http://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/0204msn.pdf>.

since 1967.²⁰⁵ The Smithsonian held its 2014 Folklife Festival on the theme of “China: Tradition and Art in Living.” More than one hundred artists and culture bearers in the China program presented tourists ubiquitous mass-produced goods to highlight creativity, heritage, and masterful skill. This event provided visitors with great opportunities to taste Chinese cuisines and participate in a number of traditional activities, such as Tai Chi and kirigami workshop (see **Figure 5.1**).²⁰⁶ Outdoor exhibition in that form comes close to a living museum, serving both education and entertainment goals.



Figure 5.1: Tai Chi workshop at 2014 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. (Courtesy of Jian Chen.)

²⁰⁵ Lin, 259-260.

²⁰⁶ “Smithsonian Folklife Festival: China,” Smithsonian Institute, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.festival.si.edu/2014/china/>.

Within the context of Chinatown, city officials intensified efforts to revitalize and advertise Chinatown as a tourist destination which often neglected the real treasure of that place, culture and people. In order to keep its location in urban environments, city planners turned to a seemingly fast way to restore a sense of place, specifically, using different forms, colors, symbols to create built-environments of cultural distinctiveness, and moreover, a tourism selling-point. Their desire to blend east and west, as well as old and new in a harmonious way aimed at serving the increasing demands of tourism industry rather than the needs of local community. Rapidly increasing values of residential and commercial properties were making it impossible for a former immigrant group to live and work in the neighborhood. Traditional businesses were replaced by high-end restaurants, mainstream national chain stores, souvenir shops and luxury hotels. That would come to a point that the Chinatown ceased to be a Chinatown. If its original character and distinctiveness disappears, the neighborhood will turn into a drab and unattractive place, especially as a tourist destination. Sightseers expect to experience something authentic about the place, rather than a package of experiences sculptured by tourism developers.²⁰⁷

That also raised the question about how to assess the authenticity of tourist experience. According to Wang, there is a three-fold typology can be used to evaluate authenticity: firstly, objective authenticity refers to the substance of originals; secondly, constructive authenticity is what is projected to objects or sites by tourism interpretation or by visitors themselves; thirdly, existential authenticity is something that is aroused from site tourist participation and interaction.²⁰⁸ To interpret this typology, visitors who seek authentic objects, sites and

²⁰⁷ J. Henderson, "Attracting tourists to Singapore's Chinatown: a case study in conservation and promotion," *Tourism Management* 21, (2000): 531.

²⁰⁸ N. Wang, "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience," *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, 2 (1999) 349-370.

experiences unavoidably accept the “authenticity” deconstructed or distorted by interpreters or literates; the authenticity they search for is symbolic rather than real.²⁰⁹ On this count, the absolute authenticity in tourist industry will never exist, and Chinatowns as tourist destinations are merely westerners’ “dreams of oriental romance.”²¹⁰ While admitting that it is not possible to reconstruct a place’s past in all aspects, those involved in the tourism industry do have responsibilities to deliver sightseers an accurate history and contemporary meaning of a place. If presentation descends to a selective process which reflects the profit-seeking interests of those making the selection rather than visitors themselves or community residents, authenticity in the tourist experiences is completely manipulated. Integrity and honesty in site interpretation that restores the comparatively realities of a historic neighborhood can benefit both of visitors and residents.²¹¹

In the case of Chinatowns, part of its past that the tourism industry authorities want to see recovered and wish to present to tourists is the community’s internal operation and a vivid street life, but the original “feel” of that place is impossible to draw back. In the past, dense Chinese population and overcrowded living conditions boosted the improvisational conversations and trade activities take place on the streets, which contributed to a vibrant community atmosphere. However, those bustling scenes are gone as a city government started urban renewal projects and new housing established a unified cityscape which displaced the diversified community activities. In recent decades, some city officials and urban planners do endeavor to turn Chinatown into an attractive tourist destination and support “upgrade” of stores and hotels

²⁰⁹ Henderson, 532.

²¹⁰ Josi Ward, “‘Dreams of Oriental Romance’: Reinventing Chinatown in 1930s Los Angeles,” *Building and Landscapes* 20, no.1, (Spring 2013): 19.

²¹¹ Henderson, 532.

without considering the potential threats to longtime residents and community-based businesses. Current efforts to revitalize Chinatown into a more oriental appearance requires changing the exterior decor and even services they can provide, and such investment is not what most property owners can afford. Many of them simply sell their properties and make a fortune elsewhere. A corresponding rise in rent would drive low-income families out of the neighborhood, and the character of the community will change. If the tourism revitalization plans are fully conducted, it is not difficult to foresee Chinatown's future as an ethnic theme park without its original population. In short, the physical environment will still be there, but the essence will be gone.

The physical environment of a place can be restored to achieve authenticity of some degree, while original lifestyle and street atmosphere cannot be easily restored and actually the chaos and harsh conditions of Chinatown's past is not somewhere both visitors and residents want to return to.²¹² Comparing to a strict reconstruction of the past, historic preservation is more like a dynamic process and has a very important responsibility to assist the old to show out its vitality in the modern world. As for the preservation of Chinatowns in the United States, the key is how to acknowledge, respect and preserve their cultural distinctiveness and identity and the people who created the places. It is a more promising future that to build a sustainable community than serving as an ethnic-themed "Disney World."

²¹² Ibid, 532.

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APPENDIX A

HISTORIC PRESERVATION INCENTIVES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Historic Preservation Incentive Program Types Offered in Three Cities

<i>City</i>	<i>Grant</i>	<i>Loan</i>	<i>Tax Credit</i>	<i>Other</i>
New York	✓	✓		
Philadelphia	✓	✓		✓
District of Columbia	✓			✓

Historic Preservation Incentive Programs in New York

<i>Program</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Additional Details</i>
Historic Properties Fund	Loan	\$300,000	\$20,000 to \$300,000; Exterior work, structural repairs
Sacred Sites Program	Grant	N/A	
City Ventures Program	Grant	\$30,000	\$5,000 to \$30,000
Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund			Preserve building around Lower Manhattan post-9/11
Upper Manhattan Preservation Fund			Assist historic properties in Harlem, Inwood, and Washington Heights
NYS Barn Income Tax Credit	Tax Credit	N/A	25% of rehab. costs
Historic Preservation Grant Program	Grant	N/A	State matches 50% of approved project cost

Historic Preservation Incentive Programs in Philadelphia

<i>Program</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Additional Details</i>
City of Philadelphia Home Improvement Loan Program	Loan		
City of Philadelphia Property Tax Abatement	Tax Relief		
City Council Ordinance 961	Tax Relief		Exemption of real estate taxes of 100% of improvement to a residential property
City Council Ordinance 1130	Tax Relief		Exemption of real estate taxes on 100% of improvements to an industrial, commercial or other business property with no owner occupants.
City Council Ordinance 970274	Tax Relief		Exemption of real estate taxes on 100% of improvements to a deteriorated industrial or business property which has been converted to a commercial residential use
Certified Local Government Grant Program	Grant	\$15,000+	Funding for all projects available through PHMC program grant categories; Covers staffing and training, pooling and third-party admin.
Keystone Historic Preservation Grant Program	Grant	\$100,000	Funding for Preservation, Restoration, and Rehabilitation
Technical Assistance Grants	Grant	\$1,500	N/A
<i>Pennsylvania History & Museum Grant Program</i>	Grant		<i>(see below for individual grant details)</i>
Archives and Records Management Grants	Grant	\$15,000	Access and Preservation Programs, and County Records Improvement Programs
Collection Management Program Grants	Grant	\$15,000	Make public aware of needs of museum collections
Education, Public & Local History	Grant	\$15,000	Research, development, and execution of public programs that support original research regarding Pennsylvania life
General Operating Grants	Grant	\$150,000	General Operating
General Operating Grants for Official County Historical Societies	Grant	\$10,000	
Historic Properties Repair Program	Grant	\$20,000	Grants for exterior repairs and restoration work to residential properties; For low-to-moderate income households
Preservation Alliance Easement Program	Donation		Allow donations to fund the maintenance of historic buildings; Tax easement as a result of donation
Preservation Fund of PA	Grant/ Loan	\$50,000	Either "2/3 Loan, 1/3 Grant" or "100% Loan"- Restoration or rehabilitation of specific historic properties
Technical Assistance Grants (TAG)	Grant	\$1,500	Assist small PA organizations with issues concerning preservation planning

Historic Preservation Incentive Programs in Washington, D.C.

<i>Program</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Additional Details</i>
Historic Homeowners Grant Program	Grant	\$25,000	Exterior repairs, rehabilitation, and structural work on historic properties in the following districts: Anacostia, Blagden Alley/Naylor Court, Capitol Hill, Fourteenth Street, LeDroit Park, Mount Pleasant, Mount Vernon Square, Mount Vernon Triangle, Shaw, Strivers' Section, U Street, and Takoma Park
Preservation Easements	Easement		
Community Grants Program	Grant	N/A	Limited matching grant for supporting DC Preservation Plan

Source: Econcult Corporation. "The Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Philadelphia." March 29, 2010. Assessed April 14, 2015. http://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Econ_Report_Final.pdf.