

CHINATOWN AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT:
A SPATIAL NARRATIVE OF RACE, IDENTITY, AND URBAN POLITICS
1950 – 2000

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The dissertation explores the intricate relations between landscape, race/ethnicity, and urban economy and politics in American Chinatowns. It focuses on the landscape changes and spatial struggles in the Chinatowns under the forces of urban redevelopment after WWII. As the world has entered into a global era in the second half of the twentieth century, the conditions of Chinatown have significantly changed due to the explosion of information and the blurring of racial and cultural boundaries. One major change has been the new agenda of urban land planning which increasingly prioritizes the rationality of capital accumulation. The different stages of urban redevelopment have in common the deliberate efforts to manipulate the land uses and spatial representations of Chinatown as part of the socio-cultural strategies of urban development. A central thread linking the dissertation's chapters is the attempt to examine the contingent and often contradictory production and reproduction of socio-spatial forms in Chinatowns when the world is increasingly structured around the dynamics of economic and technological changes with the new forms of global and local activities. Late capitalism has dramatically altered city forms such that a new understanding of the role of ethnicity and race in the making of urban space is required.

Using a methodology that combines field observation, personal interviews, and archive research, the research uses the case studies of three Chinatowns located in the metropolitan cities San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. The regional differences of the three Chinatowns reveal that there is no single Chinatown model but rather multiple Chinese American communities with difference experiences of urban redevelopment and spatial evolution. The comparison of these Chinatowns contributes both theoretically and empirically to our understanding of regionally-specific variations to the widespread processes of urban redevelopment and spatial apparatus

based on ethnic/racial differentiations. It also reveals varying modes of landscape in staging and performing racial/ethnic identity and social activism.

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When I was a master student at the department of Landscape Architecture in the University of Wisconsin – Madison, I made a decision to study the Chinatowns in the United States. Coming from China, I thought this research topic is closely related to my own cultural experiences and social backgrounds. However, when I started to conduct the research in Chicago’s Chinatown, I realized the Chinatown is a foreign land to me. The exotic architecture, the odd social institutions, the languages people speak, and even the goods sold in the stores appeared to be unfamiliar and strange. But at the same time I share a strong ethnic tie to the people who live and work in the Chinatown, as the bitter life experiences they have suffered in the past century were concurrently occurred with the wars, poverty, colonization, and the Communist movements such as the Cultural Revolution in our homeland China. Thus, in this research, the positioning of myself both as an outsider and insider provides me complicated feelings and unique perspectives towards the project. Working in the three Chinatowns located in the west coast, the midwest, and the east coast also turned out to be challenging and rewarding experiences. One of the challenges is the time and money to do fieldwork at these very far apart Chinatowns and another one would be how to understand the nuances of the differences in terms of demographic, economic, and political constituencies of the three Chinatowns.

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Introduction

Chinatowns, as ports-of-entry for immigrant Chinese in the United States, have played a significant role in Chinese immigration history in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chinatowns have endured a century of hostile immigration laws and racism. In response, the communities that lived there relied on their internal institutions and informal ethnic economy to actively organize and provide job opportunities and housing to the Chinese immigrants, protecting them from racial exclusionism and job discrimination. This protective role developed from a specific set of social conditions. But as the world enters into a global era in the twenty-first century, those conditions have changed: with the explosion of information, fast communication networks, and the blurring of racial and cultural boundaries, will the classic Chinatown turn into an anachronism that is destined to wither away like so many other ethnic enclaves in the last century? How will Chinatown evolve to situate itself in a world that is now increasingly structured around the dynamics of economic and technological changes with the new forms of global and local activity?

Many important studies have contributed to the contemporary conceptualization of Chinatown as a metaphor of the racialization processes or the unequal economic and labor relations in Western countries.¹ This dissertation contributes to that body of scholarship by exploring empirically the spatial evolution of Chinatown from a constellation of social relations both outside and inside the community, and a conscious linkage to the wider world that integrates the global and the local.² More specifically, using the case studies of three Chinatowns located in metropolitan cities – San Francisco, Chicago, and New York – the study examines the various ways that city and land formation in Chinatown has responded to the forces of urban redevelopment, ideological changes, and highly differentiated local economic and political dynamics in the second half of the twentieth century.³

As sites of explicit difference, Chinatowns rupture the urban fabric of global cities. The ruptures are made visible through the exotica of the built landscape and the noticeably distinct social and cultural practices of the community (figure 1). Perhaps because Chinatown has reterritorialized the city with

special identities, cultures, and practices that disrupt the established histories and norms of social life, the



Figure 1: A view of Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown. The exotic built environment, bilingual signboards, and colorful decorations rupture the urban fabric of the city (Photo by author, 2007).

ethnic enclave has been perceived as “foreign” and disjunctive to the national category of space.⁴ In the modern era, the dramatically altered socio-economic order creates a situation in which the discourse of race and ethnicity is increasingly organized to fix identity and address the contested interests of the local and the global. Thus a central thread linking the chapters of the dissertation is the examination of the contingent and often contradictory regeneration of social and spatial forms in Chinatown in a period when cities have increasingly become effective machines for capital accumulation. The monotony of late capitalism has created dramatically altered city forms that require a new understanding of the role of ethnicity and race in the making of urban space and norms. I formulate the conceptual framework of the dissertation within the context of urban transformation, globalization, and economic restructuring.

Specifically I focus on the following questions: 1) How do the rhetoric of urban renewal and the various forces of urban redevelopment shape the landscape changes in Chinatown? 2) What are the similarities and differences among the spatial formations of various Chinatowns in different urban contexts and local conditions? 3) How are liberal notions of multiculturalism productively unsettled through an engagement with the politics of difference? 4) How do Orientalized and ahistorical forms of landscape affect the political and cultural representation of Chinese Americans? 5) How does the management of heritage and ethnicity mediate between the official claims of urban redevelopment and the local forms of social reproduction? 6) Finally, how does thinking about Chinatown's landscape changes in terms of social relations facilitate a better understanding of the interconnection between place-bound identity, landscape, race, and a broader process of socioeconomic transformation?

These questions are pursued by investigating two themes pertinent to spatial transformations in Chinatown: *land-use changes* and *reinventing neighborhood*. The theme of land-use changes looks consciously beyond the micro-level schemes of community transformation and connects the analysis to macro-level political-economic and social changes at regional and global scales. It examines the various forces of exclusion and growth that changed land use in Chinatown amidst a shift in governance from classical liberalism to neoliberalism. The second theme of neighborhood reinvention focuses on the cultural identity and discourses about Chinatown. It explores the new fields of power that emerge as a result of various political, cultural, and economic interests that were in turn generated by the attempt to reinvent a landscape imagery of "Chineseness" in Chinatown. Both themes are linked to particular changes of landscape imageries and forms in response to city strategies of urban redevelopment. The ways that neighborhood landscapes changed from 1950 to 2000 will be shown in the dissertation. These reveal the struggles over land use caused by exclusionary urban planning and the refusal to acknowledge cultural, social, and political differences on the one hand, contrasted with the symbolic inclusion of ethnic culture to represent the city as multicultural, democratic, and diverse, on the other. The different strategies of urban redevelopment have in common the deliberate efforts of the city government and local institutions to manipulate the representations of Chinatown as part of their plans for urban redevelopment.

The two themes are not strictly arranged in chronological order, and neither are they clearly divided. Instead, they represent two different processes of urban redevelopment that are interactive, intermingled, and interdependent.

The Idea of Chinatown

Early studies of Chinatown emphasize a “natural” bond between the Chinese settlements and ethnicity. The emergence of Chinatown in North America was associated with the kinship migration network and internal ethnocentricity of the Chinese immigrants.⁵ According to this line of scholarship, Chinese immigrants found it very difficult to merge into the mainstream American society due to their inassimilable difference and the lack of verbal and written communication skills. As a result, the ethnic enclave was a natural choice for them because they found security living among people of their own culture, speaking their own language (figure 2). Once the ethnic enclave was established as a located



Figure 2: Open air display of Chinese goods at Stockton Street of San Francisco’s Chinatown indicates the particular life-style of the Chinese immigrants (Photo by author, 2007).

place, a distinct ethnic identity was then inscribed into the place.⁶ In David Lai’s description, “Chinatown 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 the urban fabric. It is basically an idiosyncratic oriental community amidst an occidental urban environment.”⁷ Lai’s assertion is typical of the kind of scholarship that perceives Chinatown as “a colony of the East in the West.”⁸

However, since the late 1980s, numerous studies in human geography, cultural anthropology, history, and urban sociology point to the weakness of these previous studies. Instead of seeing Chinatown as a neutral place of ethnicity, their later studies interpreted it as a racial, social, and cultural category resting on the distinct immigration experiences of the Chinese. These studies highlight the salient role of the Western institutions in shaping the space and place of Chinatown. They denaturalize the relationship between the ethnic ghetto and ethnicity, and emphasize the external forces such as anti-Chinese legal regulations, governmental actions, racial politics, and capitalism in producing Chinatown as a space of “Otherness.”⁹ John Kuo Wei Tchen and Kay Anderson, for instance, draw from Edward Said’s conception of Orientalism and write that the existence and development of Chinatown was not so much about the actual lived experience of the Chinese immigrants, but the systematic definition and construction of the racial category of “Chinese” by the White institutions in the U.S. society.¹⁰ Examining the history of public health in San Francisco, Nayan Shah similarly demonstrates how strategies of regulation, surveillance, and knowledge control informed the racialization of San Francisco Chinese and the production of Chinatown’s space as deviant and foreign. Shah complicates the argument by exploring how the constructed categories of the respectable domesticity of White society served to justify the racial hierarchy and discriminatory practices toward the Chinese immigrants.¹¹ The racialization process by which the Chinese were categorized as “inferior” others, according to Nicholas De Genova, is analogous to the logic of racializing American Indians and Latinos which has historically been central to consolidate the U.S. nation-building and nation-state formation.¹² While racialized blackness was considered subordinate to the Whiteness within the border of the United States, the Native Indians were identified as “outsiders” whose “savagery,” “cultural inferiority,” and “hostility” were believed to be inassimilable into the White American society. And so they were condemned to extinction, displacement, and colonization.¹³ Demonstrating the analogies between the racialization of Latinos and Asians in the U.S.

and that of Native Americans, the author points out that the practice of racializing non-Whiteness was constitutive to and entangled with the hegemonic formulation of White supremacy and the national identity of “American”-ness.¹⁴ The construction of a morality of “them” vs. “us,” and self vs. “other,” inspired a collective sense of cultural identity within the White population and secured a “White” cultural and institutional hegemony of the nation-state. The identification of ethnic minority was thus useful because it reified the social category of “outsider”: “otherness” was at once conceptually and spatially located.

In addition to the scholarship on discourse that produces Chinatown as a racial and social category, another stream of study examines Chinatown in the larger space of capitalism. Lisa Lowe, for instance, argues that the liberalization of immigration policy in 1965 occurred for economic reasons. . With the development of global capitalism, immigrants were admitted into the U.S. to renew the domestic labor supplies.¹⁵ In this perspective, the development of Chinatown resulted from the U.S. society’s desire to promote economic production and to reshape the domestic relations of production.¹⁶ Chinatown became a nodal space interconnected with the unevenly distributed spaces of production, ranging “from worldwide networks of markets of capital, labor, and commodities to national, regional, and local markets.”¹⁷ By examining the social struggles in New York’s Chinatown, Peter Kwong also argues that Chinatown is a *locus* where the labor and capital relations have been structured and restructured to enhance production, testifying to the unequal power relations within the national markets.¹⁸ While Kwong’s work primarily focuses on intra-ethnic conflicts in terms of class and labor relations, Jan Lin incorporates a global perspective to examine the impact of globalization on the structural changes in New York’s Chinatown. He highlights the impact of overseas Asian investment, especially from Taiwan and Hong Kong, on the bank industry and real estate development in Chinatown. The transnational and global connections make Chinatown a nexus of capital and labor.¹⁹

Despite these important studies that examine Chinatown within the context of local and global processes, there is a lack of scholarly attention to the actual space and built environment of the Chinatown – that is, the cultural landscape – as a kind of text encoded with ideological representation through which

contested power relations are signified, naturalized, and reconstructed.²⁰ This dissertation thus draws on the critical theories in cultural landscape studies to examine the formative processes and patterns of ethnic landscape in American Chinatowns and their underlying meanings and power relations. The following sections describe the theoretical literature pertinent to this work.

Conceptualizing Cultural Landscape

In North America, the academic study of cultural landscapes is associated with the geographer Carl Sauer. His classic essay, “The Morphology of Landscape,” offered the following definition: “The cultural landscape is fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result.”²¹ Sauer’s conceptualization of landscape came from the German idea of *landschaft*, which situates landscape within a particular kind of social formation, bounded in space and time. In contrast with the earlier scholarship that viewed landscape primarily from a spatial perspective, Sauer viewed landscape as a temporal expression and a dynamic, changing, interrelated entity that was shaped by human activities in a particular way.²² He associated landscapes with coherent and stable cultures, sustained community life, ideas of the folk, and the careful stewardship of nature.²³ After Sauer, J. B. Jackson, the writer, editor, and landscape philosopher also played a seminal role in developing the concept of cultural landscape. While sharing Sauer’s vision of landscape as the material transformation of nature by particular cultural groups, Jackson provided new insights into “un-aesthetic” and everyday landscapes such as strip highway developments and trailer parks, observing that landscape serves “as infrastructure or background for our collective existence.”²⁴ He noted that despite the absence of a formal organization of space, vernacular landscape shows a degree of mobility and flexibility that reflects their creators’ adjustments to the societal changes.²⁵ Jackson’s argument was in part a rebuke to what he considers the prejudices and deficiency of modernist architecture and planning for neglecting the importance and meaning of popular American settings.²⁶

Cultural landscape scholars from a range of fields such as cultural and human geography, architectural history, and etc., have continued to develop new ideas about the method, theory, and

philosophy of landscape studies. In the 1960s and 1970s, their philosophical debates revolved around the relationship between agency and structure, in which individual experience and action is located at the center of analysis and emphasizes “‘sense of place’ as a way of putting individual experience back into the agency side of the agency-and-structure debate.”²⁷ D.W. Meinig also explored how people view the landscape subjectively and create their own meanings from what they see. He suggested that we can view landscape from the standpoint of nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place, and aesthetic.²⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan has emphasized that human perception, as well as socio-cultural affiliation, influences how we perceive in the world. He has illuminated how we view landscapes subjectively based on our aesthetic sensibilities and cultural influences.²⁹ This vision of landscape can also be found in John Stilgoe’s *Common Landscape of America*, which documents the transformation of rural landscape during the mid-nineteenth century from a form linked to sustained community life, husbandry, and nature to a practice based on commodification, production, and alienation of labor from the land.³⁰ By emphasizing ethnicity as a medium of shaping the landscape, Dell Upton contributes to this discourse by examining the vast array of built environments and landscapes associated with ethnic groups in North America.³¹

A theme that unites all these scholars is the perception of landscape as a material entity that demands to be studied through direct observation and first-hand empirical experience.³² The emphasis on materiality has led to research that examines the “verbal, narrative, or historical” elements of landscape and the embedded “transcendental consciousness.”³³ The approach of investigating what to “read” in a landscape led to a greater emphasis on the discursive and symbolic roles of landscape that was incurred by thinking of landscape as both an object to be seen and a particular “way of seeing.”³⁴ Taking its cues from the statements revealing the subjective nature of vision, the discussion of landscape as “a way of seeing” is associated with a cultural Marxist interpretive tradition and the emerging post-structuralism that examine “the complicity of artistic and literary genres with evolving capitalist systems of production and property ownership.”³⁵ As Denis Cosgrove noted in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, landscape is closely associated with human perspective, and is therefore a metaphor of specific social,

political, or cultural tensions and struggles within any society at any given time and place.³⁶ In this vein, W. J. T. Mitchell highlights the European colonization of landscape way of seeing, placing great emphasis on the imperial power relationships implicated in the colonized landscape. Understood not as a purely *cultural image* that reveals ideological values embedded within it, landscape is also a *cultural practice* that belongs to a larger socio-political process of naturalizing, reproducing, and transforming social and cultural relations in human society.³⁷ This concept of *cultural practice* has enriched the theoretical perspective of my own work as it sees Chinatown not simply as a culturally produced emblem, but as a living entity that undergoes constant changes.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Marxist and post-Marxist analysis has provided new theories in landscape studies. Accordingly, the production of landscape has been understood in terms of the axioms of classical Marxism, focusing on capitalist production and reproduction, the need for surplus value or profit, and contestations between labor and capital.³⁸ Extending the definition of landscape as visual ideology, Don Mitchell examines landscape within the material processes of labor, capitalism, and production. He perceives landscape as both a “work” produced by human practice and thought and the contested relations among social actors, and as something that “does work,” that actively engages in the production and reproduction of capitalist social and economic relations.³⁹ Landscape analysts who study landscape under a Marxist/materialist approach emphasize landscape as a dynamic process that should be studied in the context of social difference and conflict, unequal power relations, and social change. They open the discipline to broader debates of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, colonization, and globalization, all of which are shared by many other humanistic disciplines.⁴⁰

Adopting the theoretical position that perceives landscape as a discourse – that is, an ideological expression that actively engages in the production and reproduction of social relations – this dissertation draws heavily on the scholarship focusing on the relationships between space and the social construction of race. Idea about race and space figures prominently among the formation of identity and social relations within the contemporary society. The critical studies of Whiteness reveal the privileged status of the White against which racialized identities are considered as “Others,” and the invisibility of this

epistemology as it has been naturalized as a system of meanings and values rooted in the hegemonic culture of the White.⁴¹ Human geographers have contributed to this scholarship by examining the role of race in politicizing and manipulating the representation and (re)production of space. They consider the discourse of race as a significant category for spatial analysis, and vice versa, space as central apparatus to inform and articulate the process of racial and social constructions.⁴² Race studies have also been introduced into the discipline of landscape architecture, albeit more slowly. In 2007, *Landscape Journal* dedicated a theme issue to examining the built form not only as mirror, but also as active agent that reinforce and create racial identity and racially-based practices of exclusion, minoritization, subordination, and privilege.⁴³ Going beyond the binary of Black and White, the issue includes studies of Latino/a and Asian American space. Lynne Horiuchi, for instance, provides a good account of how the racial covenants, real estate market, and urban planning policy jointly enforced a segregated living pattern of Asian Americans in San Francisco in the first half of the twentieth century. Her study demonstrates the centrality of racial ideology in the formation of Asian American settlement and space.⁴⁴

This dissertation advances existing scholarship by focusing on the ethnic landscape of three important American Chinatowns. The intention of the study is not to “generate another good theory,” in the words of Stuart Hall, but to “reproduce the concrete in thought.”⁴⁵ More specifically, it tries to provide a better theorized account of the landscape history of Chinatown to understand the embedded tensions among power, racial ideology, and the formation of space. The theoretical framework of this work extends beyond those studies of Chinatown that tend to view the formation of landscape space as a passive response to outside forces. Instead, my approach is to regard landscape as an instrument that can disguise or reinforce the socioeconomic relations of Chinatown with the larger society. Thus this study juxtaposes the empirical work of Chinatown with the philosophical debates of landscape, to ask how space is insinuated in the constitution, communication and reproduction of social life in general, and contested power relations in particular.

Urban Segregation and the Politics of Difference

In the 1950s and 1960s, the first wave of urban renewal was initiated in American cities. It was characterized by the state-sponsored bulldozer that remade the downtown, encouraging scattered private-market gentrification. Federal and city governments played a crucial role in the process of urban regeneration.⁴⁶ During that time, the Keynesian model of public housing reached an apex in the U.S, while the machine of city growth aggressively pushed to revitalize the downtown to create a landscape of consumption, leisure, and luxury housing. Federal funds were largely allocated to downtown commercial development, construction of transportation networks, and cityscape beautification, while few grants were used for community development and neighborhood rehabilitation. In the context of American-style Keynesian administration, the rhetoric of “blight” was employed as a convenient excuse for the state and the local government to execute demolition for the public goal of “healthy” cities. But the effect was disastrous.⁴⁷ In that heyday of social liberalism and Keynesianism, a redistributive nation-state aggressively intervened to provide basic economic conditions that were needed for political equality and the individual pursuit of pleasure. The nation-state’s role was perceived to be the protection of freedom as well as welfare rights.⁴⁸ Though difference was promoted as necessary and positive for national unity and coherence, many critics of liberalism point out the inherent and fundamental system of exclusion that is embedded in the rhetoric of liberalism. Katharyne Mitchell, for instance, argues “the central ‘civil rights’ tenets of liberalism – individualism, individual choice, dignity, freedom and rationality – are premised on a form of reason and rational behavior which is culturally inscribed and can never be completely accessible to the outsider.”⁴⁹ Holston and Appadurai similarly argue that the right to difference as an integral part of the foundation of liberal citizenship is factually premised on an ideology of a particular referent group that is a “white, European, propertied, male,” while the excluded partake of a passive form of citizenship which “is managed... by an unelected bureaucracy.”⁵⁰ Scholars such as Lisa Lowe and John Friedmann also emphasize the unrealistic premise of dissolving material particularities of citizen into equal political representations as promised by national citizenship.⁵¹ Thus, the failure of liberalism to fully engage with the unfamiliar is at the heart of the early urban renewal movement that used the

category of “slum” and “degraded site” to limit claims of equal political representations of the racial minority and accord priority to the logic of capital accumulation.

In many Western cities, Chinatown – historically perceived as one of the notorious slums – housed a community that saw clearly how urban renewal might become an aggressive force to evict and dislocate them. But this community was no match for the powerful coalition of city officials, real estate developers, and other interest groups of urban growth, and thus Chinatown residents were constantly threatened with the loss of their homes. Meanwhile, large numbers of Chinese flowed into the U.S. following the Communist takeover of Mainland China in 1949 and the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 signed by President John Kennedy. Especially after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that abolished discriminatory national-origin quotas and allowed Asian immigrants to unite with their families, Chinatown experienced a major boom of population. The burgeoning population worsened the long-existing problems of housing shortage and lack of necessary community infrastructures. The politics of difference and immigrants’ struggle over city-imposed norms of what constituted a good and proper life in the public sphere points to a crucial theme of Part I – *land-use changes* – which considers how the rhetoric of urban renewal impacted the physical and social space of Chinatown, and how the Chinatown community actively engaged in the contested processes of urban transformation.

Saskia Sassen has argued that there are two forms of urban development in the global cities. One is a homogenization of the urban forms of advanced economic sectors that represent “technological advance and cosmopolitan culture,” while the other urban form is represented by the immigrant communities or the informal economies that are “economic and cultural backwaters” in the cities.⁵² The two seemingly divergent forms of urban development are mutually dependent, but also mutually exclusive. Their relationship is historical and can be traced through various stages of urban development in modern urban history. The duality of urban forms is also discussed in Holston’s essay “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship,” in which he criticizes the modernist planning as utopian because of its pervasive ideal of transforming “an unwanted present” into “an imagined future.”⁵³ The model of the modernist planning is to forge a subjective appropriation of the new social order through the means of architectural and urban

design. The utopic paradigm that was intended to create an egalitarian and cosmopolitan urban culture, however, tends to generate a dystopic version of urban life that encourages a privatization of public space, which invariably exaggerates social stratification and hierarchy.⁵⁴ This spatial logic of modernism has been employed by developers and other proponents of urban growth who use the vocabulary of urban renewal to create new lines of segregation between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the disenfranchised. The increasingly fragmented and divided urban form has been analyzed by many scholars. According to Mike Davis, the debates concerning the city of Los Angeles are polarized so that it either has “ultimate world-historical significance” or it is “the nightmare at the terminus of American history.”⁵⁵ He argues that the urban forms in the city are fragmented and dispersed according to a division between “fortified cells” and “place of terror.”⁵⁶ Urban planning, architectural design and policing apparatus have unprecedentedly allied with each other in a common effort of exclusion, while urban public space has been destroyed through socio-spatial strategies such as privatization of the architectural public realm, redevelopment through the framework of gentrification or re-colonization, and making public facilities “unliveable” for the homeless and poor.⁵⁷ The narrative of the spatial strategies of segregation and walled enclaves reveals the systematic operation of socio-spatial control imposed on the marginal populations to intensify social disparity and realize capitalist interests.

The pattern of urban segregation based on the rhetoric of urban renewal represents a new spatial strategy to get access to and command over the resources belonging to the unprivileged groups. David Harvey perceives the appropriation of assets as a form of capital accumulation that rests upon dispossession of the surpluses of others, “to absorb them into the circulation of capital but to have the power to devalue them and even destroy them.”⁵⁸ Such a way of conceptualizing the uneven geographical development is inherently linked to the politics of urban renewal and the undergirded relations of inequality between race, class, and gender. On the one hand, in most Chinatowns, revitalization projects continued to marginalize the ethnic enclave by constraining it with physical barriers or encroaching upon it with the uncontrolled expansion of downtown commercial and financial sectors. On the other hand, a productive economy caused rents to rise, which led to the eventual dislocation of low-income populations.

The influx of overseas Chinese capital into Chinatown, partly facilitated by the political uncertainty of the East and South-East Asian countries, was encouraged by the neoliberal urban policies of the American cities that were determined to “upgrade” and “beautify” Chinatown through market forces. However, unlike the actual Chinatown residents, the overseas Chinese developers had hardly any commitment to maintaining the community and its cultural identity. In response, the former engaged in various forms of resistance to contest the process of gentrification.

Exclusion by race and by class was integral to urban redevelopment, in which profit was made from dispossession of the unprivileged through imposing the category of rationality, order, and normality in the discourse of urban planning.⁵⁹ But the disadvantaged social groups with distinct identities demanded difference-specific citizenship that would respect their interests and their rights to equal opportunity. By demanding “substantive citizenship” to pursue their ideology of equality, the marginalized groups challenged – and continue to challenge – the basic premise of liberal citizenship and debunk the limited definitions on the kinds of good individuals can pursue.⁶⁰

Reinventing Neighborhood and Marketing “Chineseness”

A second wave of urban renewal occurred in the 1970s and 1980s when the political support for gentrification waned. The state intervened less directly in the process of urban renewal, and instead “federally inspired, locally implemented laissez-faire governance” became prevalent through re-regulating public policies for providing incentives for urban redevelopment.⁶¹ The fiscal crisis of 1973 prompted a major shift in urban policy as cities faced the difficulties of trying to revive declining neighborhoods, improve devalued land, and control violence. The strategy for dealing with these problems was economic restructuring and the search for new sources of wealth.⁶² In the process, the Keynesian model of welfare proved unable to contain the inherent conflicts of capitalism. Neoliberalism that promotes “market-resolution” and less governmental intervention within the marketplace replaced Keynesianism and became the dominant form of governance in the U.S. In this new mode the market was perceived as the essential way to revive the urban economy.⁶³ The political and economic restructuring

caused urban form and city landscape to change significantly. Starting in the 1970s, the inner core of the cities experienced fast growth, and increasing reinvestment in the downtown led to rising real estate values. City governments encouraged growth in service economies and developed consumption-based infrastructure to attract investments. The urban landscape was reshaped to accommodate the capital shift to a secondary circuit, of which real estate, finance, insurance, tourism, and other “soft” industries constitute an important part.⁶⁴

The new agenda for urban land planning prioritizes the global circulation of capital and other resources in urban space, all for the sake of capital accumulation. In a sense, urban land is treated as a pure commodity that is “spaceless” and “timeless” without local particularities of social reproduction and urban consumption.⁶⁵ This is especially true in the so-called “global cities” or “world cities,” which, according to Sassen, play a strategic role in the management of the global economy by providing the states a major competitive advantage on a world scale through increasing the “global control capability” in the global system of production.⁶⁶ The discourses in which “places are not so much presented as foci of attachment and concern, but as bundles of social and economic opportunity *competing* against one another in the open *market* for a share of the capital investment cake” reveal how places are commodified as a central way to facilitate urban growth.⁶⁷ With the market-based notion of pursuing competitive advantages, the cities are eager to embrace the place-selling ethnos, while the regeneration policies emphasize marketing the image of the city to build positive perceptions amongst tourists, entrepreneurs, and investors.⁶⁸

By internalizing the idea of place commodification and consumption to foster free market competition, the city institutions manage to mobilize their local cultural, social and capital resources in building attractive and distinct place images. One particular important means of doing this has been through “a conscious and deliberate manipulation of *culture* in an effort to enhance the appeal and interest of places.”⁶⁹ Sharon Zukin asserts that there are many different cultural strategies of urban economic development, among which “the symbolic economy of cultural meanings and representations implies real economic power.”⁷⁰ In such a context, cultural industries that include music, publishing, tourism and the

arts play an essential role in urban transformations, while the development or refurbishment of cultural attractions such as art museums, restaurants, theatres, and sports stadiums is particularly important to realize the re-invention of the cities.⁷¹ In the trend toward visual consumption, urban strategies such as gentrification, historic preservation, and theme parks have also been employed to improve the visual appeal of cities.⁷² Thus, culture becomes a powerful tool for urban redevelopment in many post-industrial cities.⁷³ The manipulation of culture that depends on promoting locally-rooted traditions and customs capitalizes the city as a source of images and memories.⁷⁴ It also greatly influences the ways that we create place and see landscape. Such processes of producing space through cultural strategies are commonly incorporated in the global market competition by converting cultural capital into visual images and circulating them in the global scale.⁷⁵ Especially given modernity's tendency to homogenize urban environments, it appears that local distinctiveness is a strategy that, because it resists homogenization, becomes a key tool in the global selling of places.

Since the attempts to attain cultural uniformity and homogeneity within the urban environment of modernity ultimately failed, the shift towards a postmodern culture offers a greater tolerance of diversity and cultural presence of others.⁷⁶ Different communities have always produced powerful visual imageries that contribute to the construction of a coherent vision of the city.⁷⁷ As well, with the increase of immigrant and racially diverse population in the global cities, the narrative of multiculturalism becomes central to the assertion of American urban culture as a democratic terrain to which racial and ethnic minorities have equal access.⁷⁸ As the United States will soon become a "minority-majority" society in which the minority groups will constitute more than half of the population, the immigrant effects on urban landscape are profoundly important. Major cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco have benefited from the positive economic effects brought by its new immigrants. The places that these people inhabited – ethnically defined neighborhoods – not only figure significantly in the cultural imagination of the cosmopolitan cities, but also form a key component of a city's marketing campaign.⁷⁹ The market-driven efforts of translating diverse cultural products into marketable difference has appropriated and transformed symbols and images of the once inferior and deviant ethnic culture into global commodities.

Multiculturalism, according to Morgan and Pritchard, “holds many implications for tourism marketing.”⁸⁰ In global cities, a packaged construction of cultural symbols is conducted to articulate multiple and manufactured place identities. In the process, the symbolic cultures that address ethnic identity and history are linked together in a narrative that encourages the consumption of ethnic products and mediates the impressions of the ethnic places for the Western public.

For these reasons, ethnic neighborhoods have been managed as part of the cultural strategies of urban redevelopment. A confluence between commercial culture and ethnic identity has a particular impact upon the construction of landscape imagery in ethnic enclaves as built form is increasingly becoming a tool of community marketing. In particular, since the 1970s, ethnic themes have been used to market American Chinatowns. Orientalist architectures such as Chinese-style gateways and pagoda-tiered restaurants have prevailed as signature elements that enhance the exoticism of the enclave (figure 3).



Figure 3: A view of Chicago’s Chinatown shows the efforts to exoticize the built environment of Chinatown (Photo by author, 2008)

The early examples of exoticizing Chinatown can be traced back to the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, after which its Chinatown was rebuilt on an Orientalist theme of faux-Chinese architectures.

Similarly in the 1930s, with the demolition of the old Chinatown in Los Angeles, a China City replicating a Chinese village was developed by non-Chinese developers. The project, complete with rickshaw rides and faux-Chinese facades, aimed to create a theme park not for the residents but for the tourists. Though the imposition of stereotypical ethnic character on the built environment of Chinatown has a long history in North America, it was not until the 1970s that a systematic and sweeping operation of Oriental themes dominated architecture and landscape design of American Chinatowns. The city officials and Chinatown elites have turned to image making and experience manipulation to boost local distinctiveness and attract tourist dollars. The intentional creation of cultural-historical package to produce marketable environments entails “performative” dimensions of cultural and historical elements.⁸¹ While such marketing strategies may have immediate financial benefits in the tourism sector, they decontextualize ethnicity in all the political meanings and local conditions that are integral to the lives of the ethnic groups. By highlighting the cultural aspects of “Chineseness,” an uncritical relationship between cultural representation and the history of Chinese migration and modern China has been entrenched in the contemporary global market.

This leads to the second theme of the dissertation – *reinventing neighborhood* – that primarily concerns questions of cultural identity and landscape constructions in Chinatown after the 1970s. The questions are fundamentally political, regarding the connection between place-bound identity, cultural tradition, and a broader context of the socioeconomic processes. As argued by Ananya Roy, “the valuation implicit in consumption gives value to tradition,” and “nostalgia as heritage... generates aesthetic icons of value” which “renders invisible the brutal mechanics of capitalist valuation.”⁸² For Roy, tradition has become a commodity whose value is decided by the logics of capitalism. More insidiously, it also serves as a mode of dissemblance that aestheticizes power and the political process of spatial reproduction.⁸³ Zukin, in a similar vein, integrates analyses of cultural production and consumption into urban studies. Shifting the analytical focus from the production to the interpretation of cultural symbols, imagery, and themes, she argues that culture stimulates economic growth and forms the basis of a “symbolic economy.”⁸⁴ The symbolic economy consists of two parallel production systems: the first is the production of space in which cultural meanings, differences, and aesthetic icons are incorporated as a

means of spatial framing and redevelopment; and second is the production of symbols, which reduces cultural aspects to their basic representations in order to facilitate both commercial exchange and the negotiation of social identity.⁸⁵ The study of culture's connection to the urban form provides valuable insight into the politics of space and the dynamics of architecture and landscape transformation in Chinatown.

Grounded on these existing theories and studies of modern urban history, the research contributes specifically to the understanding of the changing roles and imaginations of the ethnic communities in the process of urban redevelopment. By anchoring the spatial struggles in the urban realm, it provides concrete examples and focused analysis of how ethnicity as a cultural and political concept settles for the identity of an urban space and the reproduction of social relationships. The study suggests ethnic history and urban history are intertwined categories, framing a broader social interpretation of the complexity and dynamicity of urban cultural landscape.

Methodology

The research, conducted in the cities of San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, has benefited from a combination of methodologies and a wide range of data including newspapers, government documents, websites, photographs, neighborhood newsletters, and scholarly works. Field investigation has focused on three spatial scales – the city, the community, and individual architectures and structures. The three metropolitan cities studied in this dissertation are located in the West Coast, the Midwest, and the East Coast respectively. The regional differentiations provide distinct contexts for this study to examine the interrelations of the city's agenda of urban development and the spatial evolvement of ethnic communities in the United States. These cities are varied in their economic, social, and political conditions, but they are similar with respect to their strategic use of the space of Chinatowns. The three Chinatowns all have long history of Chinese settlements and have played important roles in the creation of the city and the reproduction of social relations. The comparison of these Chinatowns contributes both theoretically and empirically to our understanding of regionally specific variations to the widespread

processes of urban redevelopment and spatial apparatus that based on racial/ethnic differentiation. It also reveals varying modes of landscape spaces in staging and performing racial/ethnic identity and social activism.⁸⁶ In the fieldwork conducted in the three Chinatowns, everyday walking around the neighborhood, grocery shopping, visiting Chinese restaurants and tea houses, participating in Sunday Church, and using public transportation to get to other parts of the city have provided me first-hand experiences of living in the space of Chinatown, observing community people's everyday lives and their relations with the space. The observation of aspects of group interaction, communication, and group identity is also important in the field investigation. In documenting the individual buildings, I selected those structures with historical significance or representing a specific architectural typology. Archives, newspapers, and field observation provided a partial record of the floor plan, significant architectural details and building history of the structure.

Personal interviews have been conducted with civic leaders, community activists, social workers, business owners, and residents in the Chinatowns. Most of the interviews adopted either English or Mandarin as the languages of communication, and I am fluent in both. They were usually scheduled in advance and planned with an interview outline of identified topics. In most cases, the interviewees gave me permission to record the conversations, and I did so. The fact that I do not speak Cantonese was a limitation to this research as many senior residents in the Chinatowns only speak Cantonese or a dialect know as Taishanese. The intra-ethnic differences and sensibility of the origin of country and region also prohibited me to conduct in-depth conversations with some of the interviewees.

I conducted research in San Francisco in 2007. As the oldest Chinatown in the nation, San Francisco's Chinatown is an important commercial and tourist attraction of the city. The city's libraries and museums have a rich collection pertinent to the history of Chinese Americans and Chinese immigration. San Francisco Public Library, for instance, has a large collection of governmental documents regarding city- or community-initiated plans or proposals for the revitalization and redevelopment of the Chinatown. The Ethnic Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley, provides archives of newspapers and manuscripts about the Chinese community in San Francisco. The

Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage has comprehensive materials documenting the controversies and debates regarding the historic structures in the Chinatown area. Finally, the Society of California Pioneers provides important primary sources including maps, photos, and postcards to this study. My research on San Francisco's Chinatown also draws on the important archive of the *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1970s to 1990s.

The second area of research was Chicago's Chinatown. I have been following the spatial movements in the area since 2003, when conducting research for my master's thesis on the landscape history and historic preservation of that Chinatown. I used the interviews, field observations, and information I collected from earlier field trips, but I also conducted new research regarding the city's process of urban redevelopment, politics of public housing constructions, and land-uses changes in the Chinatown area, drawing on photo and newspaper archives in the Chicago Historical Society and the *Historical Chicago Tribune* from 1950s to 1980s. However, compared to San Francisco and New York, Chicago has a relatively small collection of primary sources on the history of its Chinatown, especially in terms of spatial transformations and movements, which has posed a challenge for my fieldwork.

Finally I did research in New York's Chinatown. Distinct from the other two Chinatowns, New York's Chinatown has a large concentration of Fujianese immigrants in addition to the early Cantonese settlers. My personal experiences as a native Fujianese with fluency in Fujianese dialect helped me tremendously to understand and examine the intra-ethnic differences within the community and to conduct interviews that revealed in-depth information about the values and the powers of memory inscribed in the landscape. The analysis of the politics, economy, and culture of spatial movements in New York's Chinatown has also drawn on the archival resources in the Chatham Square Branch of the New York Public Library, which collects community newspapers and newsletters both in English and Chinese from the 1950s to the present.

The goal of this research is to study the ethnic communities within an agency-oriented ethnographic theoretical perspective that connects macro-level urban transformations to the micro-networks of social relations and spatial changes of the community.⁸⁷ The methodologies of field

observation, interviews, and archival research demand close attention to the distinctly local mechanisms by which the built environment gains meanings.⁸⁸ They particularly focus on the contingent and often contradictory social practices and identity formation processes in constructing a sense of community and space.

Organization of the Dissertation

The core of the dissertation is the relation between the character of place and space with the forces of urban redevelopment, capitalism, changing market, and local economic and political particularities. The chapters trace the landscape transformations in the Chinatowns of San Francisco, Chicago, New York to examine empirical connections between space, ethnicity, and urban economy and politics. The concern is not only with the space of “Others,” but also with the construction and politics of difference. The two parts of the dissertation are organized under the same premise but with a different emphasis. Part I (consisting of Chapters 1, 2, and 3) examines the spatial struggles in the Chinatowns, investigating the role of racial and ethnic discourse in shaping the urban landscapes. More specifically, these three chapters analyze land-use struggles from the 1950s to 1990s, drawing on the critical scholarship of cultural landscape and human geography, which emphasizes the mutual structuring of space and social relations. I maintain that exclusion by not only race but also class is integral to both the process of urban renewal and the production of insurgent space against hegemonic imposition of spatial orders from above. Land-use planning and the discourse of “rational” and “normal” space is central to the ongoing process of capital accumulation and the social reproduction of White hegemony. Part II (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) reexamines how images, narratives, and cultural representations were manipulated to restructure ethnicity. The idea of ethnic culture in multicultural policy and rhetoric practiced in American cities was premised on a bounded category of essential and essentialized differences. By examining the process of “self-Orientalization” and the creation of enclave identity, the chapters in this collection attempt to demonstrate the relevance between cultural representations and discourses with the material struggles for economic advancement and social powers. Moreover, the existence of differences and differential relations within

the Chinese American collectivity, where gender, class, and nation of origin could vary considerably, challenges the dominant view that characterized ethnic culture as fixed and homogeneous. Thus the real issue explored in this section is the politics and social content of the spatial changes in Chinatown, including the manipulation of images and cultural experiences. The contested space of Chinatown epitomizes the complex processes in which the constitution of difference and the process of differentiation are inscribed in the production of urban space.

It should be noted that this dissertation refers to Chinatown as the traditional or historic Chinatowns in the major cities that have long history of Chinese settlements. It is beyond the scope of the dissertation to deal with the many issues raised in other types of emerging Chinatowns such as suburban Chinatowns or the satellite Chinatowns where new settlements accommodate the growing and more diversified Chinese populations. In addition, the study deliberately resists the strategy of defining the Chinatowns through geographical boundaries. Instead, it emphasizes the “core” area, for place identification relies on the landmarks located at the historic core of Chinatown.⁸⁹

The comparison of multiple sites of Chinatown is justified by the need to understand the diversity and variety of the structures and agencies in the constitution of social space of the Chinese community. Doreen Massey points to the significance of geographical variation and spatial specificity in the construction of social relations.⁹⁰ I agree with this and have consciously sought to move beyond the essentialist characterization in terms of the spatial structure and social relations of the Chinatown, to set the ethnic place within the distinct local context in which the ethnic group has been very differentially placed in relation to particular economic, social, and political dynamics of the regions and the cities. Moreover, the particularity of each Chinatown is reinforced by the fact that Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants of each of the Chinatowns have distinct resources, languages, kinship networks, and social traditions with which to respond to the structural changes in the urban economy and society. One of the contributions of this research is its empirical examination of the different ways that transnational and local changes were and are impacting the everyday landscape of these Chinatowns.

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Part I: Land-use Changes and the Politics of Exclusion

Chapter 1: Housing and Spatial Struggles in San Francisco's Chinatown

San Francisco was one of the earliest cities to emerge from the immigration waves brought by the California Gold Rush of 1849. By 1875, San Francisco had become the largest city on the Pacific Coast and benefited from thriving economic activities such as mining, agriculture, fishery, and lumbering in the surrounding areas. The city developed fast and financial, wholesale, and retail districts soon emerged in the city's central area. Following the 1906 earthquake and fire, San Francisco experienced its second upsurge of growth. After the conflagration destroyed the whole downtown area, the city was rebuilt as a new cosmopolitan urban center with modern high-rises. Completion of the Golden Gate and San Francisco Bay Bridges in 1937 facilitated the large influx of automobiles and led to the construction of parking facilities downtown. After World War II, San Francisco's third current of development occurred, creating a new skyline of International-style high-rises. The growing importance of San Francisco and the Bay Area in the trans-Pacific trade and military relations provided a strong stimulus for the city's postwar economic growth.¹

With city planners and developers' strategic efforts to transform a West Coast port into a regional, national and international corporate and service center, San Francisco was expanding at a fast pace that profoundly influenced the city's urban-renewal efforts and impelled its transformation. San Francisco has historically played a crucial role in Asian trade. As a 1970 Wells Fargo Bank report stated, "Geographically, San Francisco is a natural gateway for this country's ocean-going and air-borne commerce with the Pacific area nations... The most important stimulus to San Francisco's economic base has been the increasing U.S. involvement in this century in Asian geopolitics with the concurrent buildup in armament production... and large gains in foreign trade."² To sustain its supremacy as America's gateway to Asia, especially with rising competition from Los Angeles, San Francisco urgently needed to revive its downtown business district which had been neglected due to suburban development. It was also important for the city to provide modern office spaces and other related infrastructure to attract the anchor of multinational corporations and transnational financial services.

One year before the enactment of the 1949 Housing Act, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) was established to assume a strong leadership in the city's postwar urban renewal program. The Agency was compounded with public and private powers, had extensive connections to the corporate state, and had relative independence from the local government. But this model of public-private coalition for urban renewal could not ignore the pressures from corporate representatives. In 1955, city business elites united to form the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee, which assumed responsibility for providing necessary financial, administrative and other resources for the downtown redevelopment. Using Manhattan as their model of development, the committee created the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR) to promote a downtown plan calling for more city facilities to accommodate the growing needs of tourism and commerce. By the late 1950s a powerful coalition launching San Francisco urban redevelopment had come into shape.³ The pro-growth groups were eager to find sites for downtown expansion. The Golden Gateway renewal project provided a wedge for the downtown eastward expansion, in which office buildings, hotels, and prestigious residential complex replaced the city's large wholesale produce market. The South of Market area, to the south of downtown, was regarded as the major area for downtown expansion due to its low land value, low-density land use, and largely low-income population. But the expansion (later known as Yerba Buena Center) turned out to be a highly controversial project and encountered great resistance from the neighborhoods.⁴

From 1965 to 1983, about 36 million square feet of new office space had been constructed in downtown San Francisco. Skyscrapers such as the Bank of America Tower and the Transamerica Pyramid significantly transformed the skylines of the city. The downtown expansion and the urban landscape transformation revealed some of the most fundamental socio-economic changes of the postwar era. To accommodate the nation's economic shift from a manufacturing to a service industry, San Francisco was repositioned in the evolving economy through spatial reorganization and land-use changes. As efficient and profitable forms of land use, high-density high-rises became essential for the city to prosper in the processes of urban economic restructuring and maintain its central positions in the transnational trade.⁵

While the downtown grew fast, urban redevelopment often occurred at the cost of the extensive destruction of old neighborhoods that had been occupied by colored⁶, low-income, and working-class residents generated enormous social problems. During World War II, African Americans came in droves to San Francisco, most of them coming to work in the war industry and as military personnel. Then, during the 1950s, an influx of Asians arrived under a series of refugee acts and reformed immigration laws. With the increasing presence of African, Asian, and Latino populations, San Francisco gradually changed into a “city of color.”⁷ To recapture the centrally located neighborhoods occupied by the minorities after the Whites moved out, urban renewal was employed as mechanism to reclaim central urban spaces and reshape the city’s racial contours. The city found general public support for downtown growth. However, as happened elsewhere, the disadvantaged social groups, particularly racial minorities, did not benefit but instead became victims of the vigorous urban redevelopment. Thus when the city decided to evict residents of the Western Addition and the South Market to tear down the whole blocks of the neighborhoods, there were outbursts of resistance. With the eruption of the civil rights movement in the city beginning in 1964, the formerly excluded groups gradually procured the rights to participate in the political-administrative system and to negotiate the city’s redevelopment projects. Neighborhood activism became continuous and unified.

Within such a context, San Francisco’s Chinatown was by no means a “safe island” that could escape the impact of downtown expansion. In fact, the ethnic community known as Manilatown that was wedged between Chinatown and the Financial District was virtually demolished with the encroachment of the Financial District in the 1970s. By examining the interplay of macroeconomic forces, community political struggles, and housing needs associated with the spatial struggles in San Francisco’s Chinatown, the chapter documents the intricacies of urban renewal as a complex rhetoric at the center of Chinatown’s postwar landscape changes. Despite its highly conservative community leadership, Chinatown was able to take advantage of the city’s ethnicity-based social movements. To understand the forces created by urban redevelopment and racial ideology of the society, it is important to understand the city’s historical attempts to remove Chinatown from the city downtown and redevelop it into a commercial and residential

area serving wealthy classes. An important moment in this process was the battle against the demolition of the International Hotel in Manilatown and its meaning for the Chinatown community. Through examining some of the community struggles and conflicts that occurred in the 1970s, the chapter examines the role of agents in the city and community level, including individuals and social groups.

The Chinatown Community and the Chinese

When the City of San Francisco was established in 1848, the Chinese had settled in an area around Portsmouth Plaza, the hub of the city at that time. Most of the Chinese were brought to America as contract laborers to supply California gold mining companies with a reliable supply of cheap labors. Although they came voluntarily, many had to pay for passage across the Pacific by selling their limited property or by borrowing at exorbitant interest rates. These early Chinese immigrants were considered sojourners who had no intention of staying, but hoped to seek their fortune in America so that they could bring it back to China to retire to a wealthy life. With the increasing presence of the Chinese, Chinatown gradually came into shape at the beginning of the 1850s and was soon recognized as a distinct neighborhood in the city.

The Chinatown was not a major residential settlement at that time, as eighty percent of the Chinese in California lived in the mining areas. Instead, it served as a provision station for the workers in the gold mines and later in agricultural and railroad sites.⁸ The form of the Chinese Quarter was not the result of deliberate planning but rather a series of voluntary and involuntary adaptations for the convenience of Chinese seasonal laborers working in other areas and to accommodate the large demand of domestic workers in the nearby harbors and hotels. In the years after the U.S. Civil War, anti-Chinese movement was aroused by labor disputes in California, which forced thousands of Chinese who lived outside San Francisco's "Chinese quarter" to relocate to Chinatown for protection. The influx of Chinese laborers from mining, agriculture, and railroad sites caused severe overcrowding and sanitation problems. Instead of a transitional station, the Chinese Quarter became a more permanent living area with the poor conditions of a slum.⁹

Because Chinese could not own land due to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the Chinese had to take long-term leases and pay high rents to settle in the Chinatown area. As a historically urban ethnic ghetto, Chinatown was known for its over-crowdedness, dilapidated housing, and lack of amenities. The *San Francisco Municipal Report 1884 – 1885* indicated that the streets and residences of Chinatown were “filthy in the extreme,” and attributed the unpleasant physical conditions to the “peculiar habits” of the Chinese themselves.¹⁰ It suggested that the residents of Chinatown should be placed under “constant watching and close supervision” to make them “adopt somewhat better habits and become less obnoxious... as well as a lesser source of danger to the public health.”¹¹ Responding to the anti-Chinese sentiment, the City government made several attempts to remove Chinatown from its original location. In 1853, the local newspaper identified Dupont Street of Chinatown (later renamed Grant Avenue) as the “most desirable in the city for retail stores and family residences,” and suggested the Chinese area should “be farther... from the heart of the city.”¹²

In 1882, the City Board of Supervisors recommended that the Chinese be moved to governmental reservations (perhaps with the nation’s policy toward native Americans as a model), or settled in a tent city near the city cemetery under police surveillance.¹³ The Chinatown quarantine in 1900 and the accusation of Chinatown as “a hazard to public health” further confirmed the government’s determination to take “the shame of the city” off the city map.¹⁴ The removal crisis was ended with the appeal of the Chinese to the federal government and the federal district court, which decided that the obligation was unconstitutional.¹⁵ However, as argued by David Sibley, “disease metaphors were characteristic of nineteenth-century scientific discourse which attempted to harness scientific knowledge in support of racist myths.”¹⁶ Such minority groups were associated with social disorder, inferiority and pollution, and were held in contrast with the White majority that was associated with order, virtue, and purity. In this way, power was naturalized or concealed as a system of meanings and values rooted in White hegemonic culture.¹⁷ The fear of infection, and the idea of a contagious disease spreading from a deviant or racialized minority to threatening the well-being of the normal majority, legitimated the erection of the social or

physical barricades to exclude the marginalized others.¹⁸ This rhetoric of disease, unfortunately, also called upon in the processes of dispossession and dislocation in the interests of dominant groups.¹⁹

Originally a center of Chinese business, by 1877 Chinatown had become a rigidly segregated community with its core set within the fifteen blocks, from Pacific Avenue at the north, California Street at the south, Stockton at the west, to Kearny Street at the east (figure 4).²⁰ The hub of the Chinese Quarter

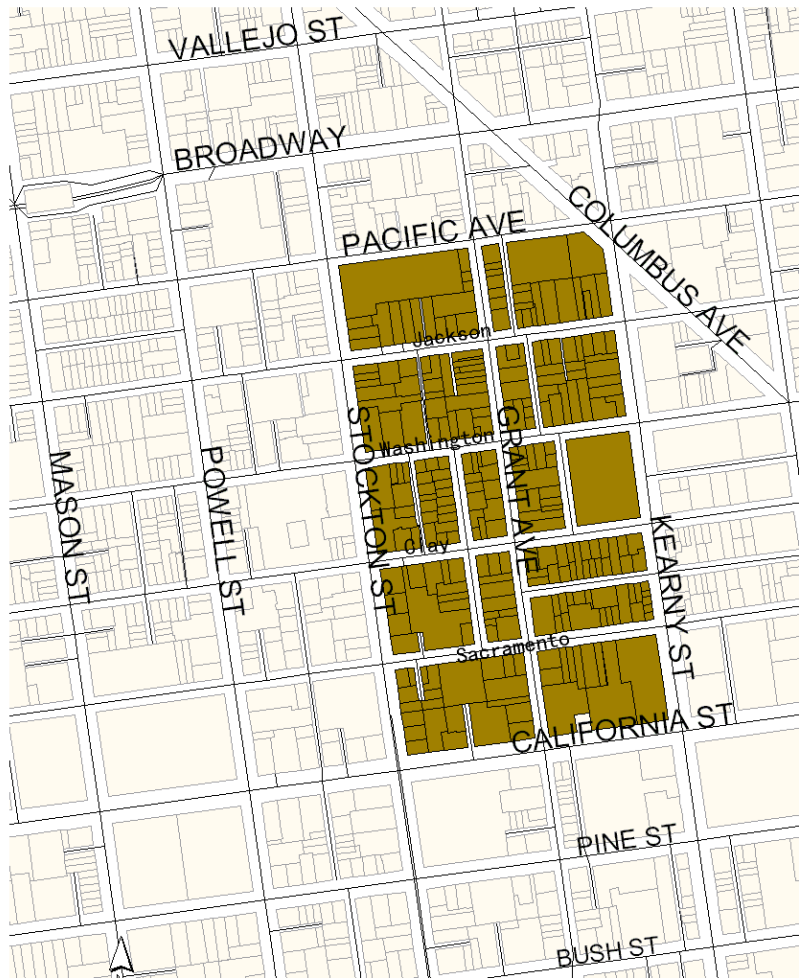


Figure 4: The dark area shows the core area of San Francisco's Chinatown, which had more than 90 percent Chinese population according to the 1970 census account. (Graphic by author, based on the GIS data provided by the San Francisco City government at <http://gispub02.sfgov.org/website/sfshare/index2.asp>)

was located on Sacramento Street, or *Tong Yen Gai* (Street of the Chinese People), with stores spread along Sacramento Street between Dupont and Kearny Streets, which constituted the early social,

commercial and recreational center of the Chinatown.²¹ Among the 930 buildings in Chinatown, 30 percent were retail stores, 20 percent lodges, 18 percent light manufacturing industries, 11 percent prostitution houses, 10 percent gambling houses, 7 percent services, 2 percent opium resorts, and 1 percent joss houses.²² As a bachelor society dominated by male laborers, Chinatown was decidedly associated with disease and immorality for its opium use, gang warfare, and prostitution. But this was partly the result of the city's own zoning practices because the city allowed brothels to thrive only in Chinatown and the neighboring Barbary Coast. Thus the negative stereotypes of the Chinese were entrenched through wide broadcasting of accounts of Chinatown vice, which was located in that area by the city's own design.²³ After the 1906 earthquake and fire, a new Chinatown was rebuilt with conscious efforts to reestablish its reputation and appeal to the western public.

The social, economic, and political transformations of the postwar era significantly impacted the development of the Chinatown. In 1943, the United States repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act, and in 1965 the institution of the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished Asian quotas. From 1940 to 1970, Chinatown's population increased about 25 percent per decade and propelled the expansion of Chinatown.²⁴ Based on the 1970 census, the Department of City Planning defined a core and noncore area of Chinatown. Core Chinatown includes a 17-block area bounded by Kearny, Pacific, Powell, and California Streets, with a concentration of restaurants, stores, and residential units. The noncore area of Chinatown consisted of ten census tracts, mostly residential areas. The low-income ethnic enclave then, and today, is surrounded by the upper-income, largely White neighborhoods and the expanding Financial District (figure 5). The Financial District to the south side of Chinatown has high-rises that are visually distinct from the medium-height buildings in Chinatown. Sandwiched between the expensive neighborhoods of North Beach and Russian Hill to the north and Nob Hill to the south, the plainness of the apartment buildings of Chinatown vividly contrast with the high-quality, more splendid architecture in the surrounding neighborhoods.



Figure 5: Chinatown is located at the central area of the city and is encircled by upper-income neighborhoods such as Russian Hill, Nob Hill, North Beach and the Financial District on the southeast side (Graphic by author, based on the GIS data provided by the San Francisco City government at <http://gispub02.sfgov.org/website/sfshare/index2.asp>).

Grant Avenue, popularly considered the most characteristic street of Chinatown, is lined with Chinese decorative details such as ornate lanterns, ornamental architectural rooflines, and bright colors (figure 6). Not only is it the major corridor to and through Chinatown, but its thriving commercial activities oriented to tourists made it a culturally distinct district. Gift shops and restaurants are among the most popular businesses on the street. Even though the land values of this street are among the highest of the city, unlike its nearby financial district with high-rise office buildings, the buildings on Grant Avenue are mostly three- to four-storied structures with a few exceptions of high rises. Local residents find their everyday needs met on Stockton Street, which runs parallel to Grant. The food markets, shops, restaurants, jewelry stores line the vibrant streets alongside post offices, banks, and professional offices. With many of the store frontages opening directly to the sidewalk, the street becomes a lively social space that both visually and physically connects to the shops.



Figure 6: View of Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown, ca. 2007 (Photo by author)

Perceived as “a City within a City,” the Chinatown contains the essential elements of a lively city, including commerce, light manufacturing, schools, religious institutions, parks and public and private residential buildings. Nowadays, in addition to the central area contained within Grant Avenue, Bush, Kearny, Broadway and Powell Street, the “City” of Chinatown has its “suburbs” extended to Van Ness, North Beach, Parts of Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill. Other sectors of San Francisco such as Sunset, Richmond, Mission, Diamond Heights, Bernal Heights, are satellite areas of the Chinatown.²⁵ Despite the growth of suburban or satellite Chinatown, the historic Chinatown still serves as “capital city” for the larger Chinese American community for the entire Bay Area and beyond, as it is a shopping hub for Chinese goods and a socio-cultural center for services and Chinese institutions.²⁶

The 1906 Earthquake

When the 1906 earthquake and fire occurred, many San Franciscans believed the destruction was an opportunity to erase the vice and filth of the Chinese community (figure 7). As the *Overland Monthly* proclaimed, “Fire has reclaimed to civilization and cleanliness the Chinese ghetto, and no Chinatown will be permitted in the borders of the city. It seems as though a divine wisdom directed the range of the seismic horror and the range of the fire god. Wisely, the worst was cleared away with the best.”²⁷ The city authorities planned to grasp the opportunity to take over the land of Chinatown and rebuild it a White neighborhood and a city commercial center (figure 8). The City Relief Committee, composed of fifty prominent city residents, suggested that Hunter’s Point on the southeast corner of the city would be an ideal location for the future Chinatown (figure 9). Even though the city worked hard to realize the



Figure 7: Grant Avenue (also known as Dupont Street) of Chinatown, north of California Street, ca.1906 (Source: San Francisco Public Library)

relocation plan, the proposal was vigorously resisted by the Chinese residents, who insisted upon moving back to their old quarters. The resistance was successful in many respects. First, Chinatown at that time

had already proved itself an important economic asset to the City. In addition to property taxes and poll taxes, the import duties paid by the Chinese was also impressive, amounting to one third of the total import duties earned by the city by 1906.²⁸ Meanwhile Chinatown business prospered by attracting tourists from all over the world and by virtue of its pivotal position in Chinese communities across North America. The economic benefits of Chinatown were apparent to many. When San Francisco threatened to remove Chinatown, other coastal cities such as Los Angeles, Seattle, and Oakland expressed their willingness to receive the Chinese refugees. The opportunistic attitude of these cities was one factor that undermined the determination of the City of San Francisco to expel the Chinese from their original neighborhood.



Figure 8: A proposed plan for remodeling Chinatown along Grant Avenue, ca.1900 (Source: The Society of California Pioneers).

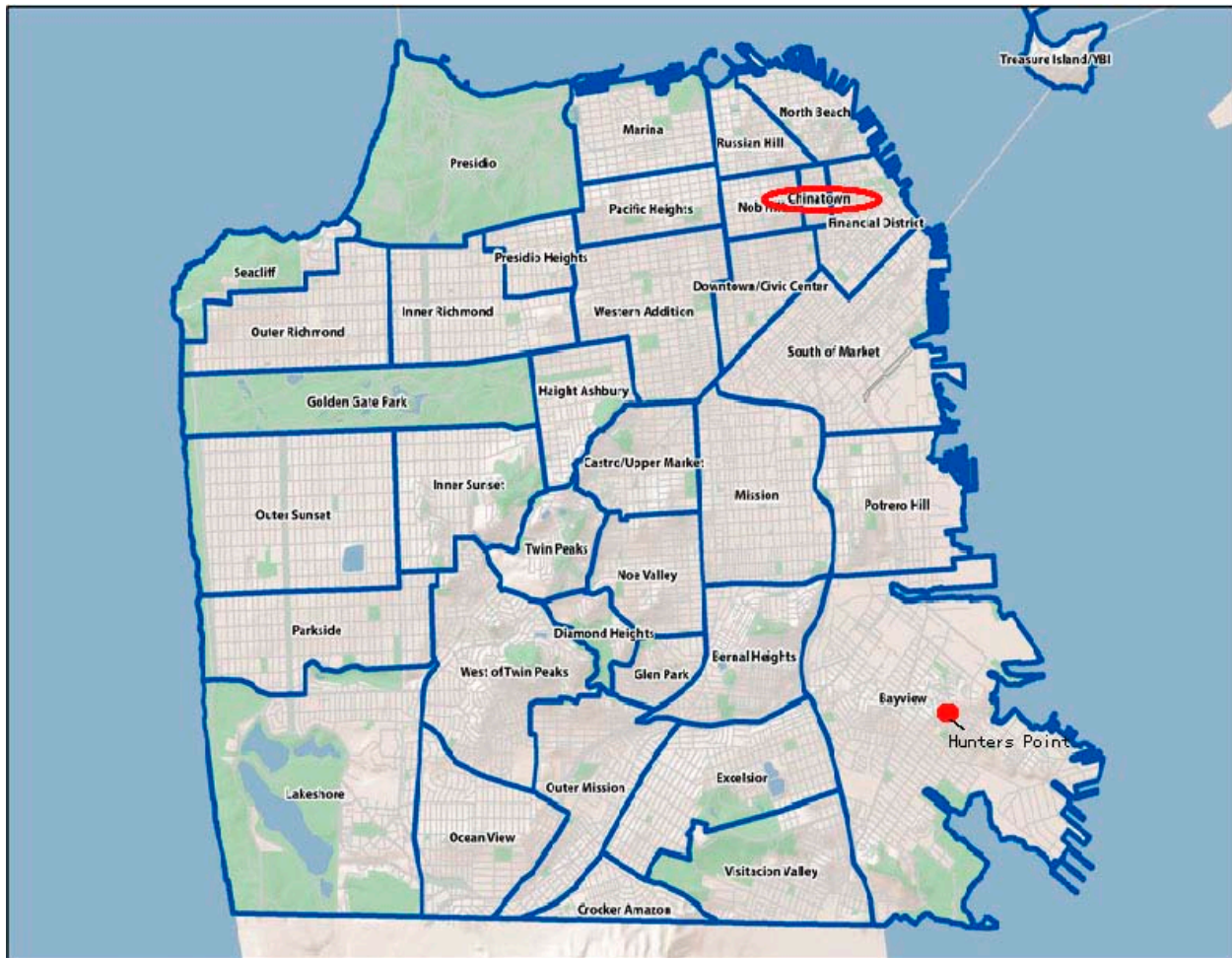


Figure 9: Locations of Chinatown and Hunter's Point ((Graphic by author, based on the map provided by the City and County of San Francisco in 2009).

In resisting the city's imposed relocation plan, the Chinese allied with the White property owners of Chinatown to lobby for the reconstruction of Chinatown on its original site. The support from the White owners of Chinatown properties was fundamentally driven by economic interest, because the landlords were afraid their lands might be expropriated if a new development plan was proposed on the area. With the damage already incurred to their properties in the earthquake and fire, they were reluctant to confront another financial risk. In addition, the Chinese were ideal tenants. They never complained about the dilapidated conditions of the buildings that had been poorly maintained, and they paid as much as twice the rent as compared to the average rent of the region.²⁹ The White property owners took advantage of the discriminatory racial policies and spatial regulations to exploit the Chinese tenants for

significant economic gains. Thus it was in their own interest that they took the side of the Chinese to fight against the relocation proposal. But the alliance between the Chinese and the White property owners also suggested that the Chinese had become more political astute; they organized themselves on the principals of self-determination but also by actively engaging with all possible allies regardless of motivation. Although the interracial coalition was instable and situational, built up on a contingent need of representation, it transcended long-standing racial barriers.

In addition to the economic importance of Chinatown for the city, the transnational networks retained by the community also played a central role in protecting the community from removal. The enactment of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act had provoked the anger of all Chinese towards the unequal treatment of Chinese immigrants in America. At the same time a nation-wide boycott of American goods in China greatly damaged the trade economy of the United States. Thus when the 1906 earthquake occurred in San Francisco, the U.S. government hoped that by demonstrating its care for the affected Chinese residents, diplomatic relations with China would be repaired. Thus, President Theodore Roosevelt sent a message to San Francisco's civic leaders, insisting upon equal treatment of the Chinese in the relief after the earthquake and fire. With this kind of attention, the Chinese community rose in political and economic importance. In addition, the Chinese ambassador also proclaimed his concerns over the proposed relocation plan. With an eye toward the future economic and political interests of San Francisco, the city authorities finally decided to give up the relocation plan of Chinatown.

The efforts of the city to remove Chinatown reflected the desire of the city institutions to secure dominance through socio-spatial control of minority groups. Confronting the crisis of removal, however, the political community of the Chinese Diaspora was nurtured and gained institutional status, and this in turn enabled it to renegotiate relations with the local city government. In addition to the specific political-economic conditions of the Chinese in the San Francisco, the success of the Chinese in the relocation campaign had also to do with the "deterritorialized nationhood" that was constructed by the cultural logics, filial piety, and enduring loyalty of the overseas Chinese to their home country.³⁰ Through nationalist discourse and cultural solidarity, the mistreatment of the Chinese migrants in the United States

was translated into a political dispute in the context of transnationality. Empowered by their far-reaching network and cross-border citizenship, the Chinese migrants anchored their local political activities in the transnational political interconnectivity that was meanwhile dynamic and contingent.

Housing and Recreational Crisis

Since the end of the nineteenth century, San Francisco's Chinatown has been known for its substandard housing and crowded living environment. According to a report conducted by U.S. Congress Housing Committee in 1948, "The great majority of them (the Chinese) live crowded together in rickety and dilapidated tenement houses... Apartments which would be deemed small for the accommodation of a single American are occupied by 6, 8, or 10 Chinese."³¹ The report suggested that several reasons contributed to the housing problems in Chinatown: predominant bachelor populations with sojourner mentality, the growth of family population, racial segregation and restrictive covenants, geographic constraints for Chinatown expansion, dilapidated buildings not complying with city code, and lack of sanitary facilities in the tenement buildings.³² After World War II, the housing situation in Chinatown only worsened, but new repressive restrictions were imposed to protect the surrounding, wealthier areas from receiving the undesirable overflow. A permanent injunction issued by Superior Judge James Conlan barred the Chinese from occupying apartment houses on Nob Hill where owners signed a compact in 1932 restricting the area to Caucasians. Nob Hill has historically been an expensive, exclusive, and largely White neighborhood that is located at the southeast side of the Chinatown. In April 1946, seventeen White property owners on Nob Hill Clay Street between Mason and Taylor Streets filed a lawsuit barring a Chinese woman, Mabel Tseng, from occupancy. Tseng had bought an apartment house in an area covered by the restrictive agreement. The other property owners complained that Tseng not only lived at the apartment house she owned, but also rented apartments to Chinese tenants. Judge Conlan granted an injunction which upheld the racially restrictive covenants, declaring "this agreement is not a violation of the 14th Amendment" of the Constitution.³³ His decision prevented the possible expansion of the overcrowded Chinatown.

The arrival of GI brides brought a sudden increase of Chinatown population while the repeal of the discriminatory immigration law in 1965 also facilitated a major influx of Chinese immigrants. With the tremendous increase of the immigrant population and constricted boundaries of Chinatown, the deficiency of housing became an urgent problem faced by the city government and community institutions. Many Chinatown residents lived in bad conditions. For instance, according to the 1965 Community Renewal Programming Report, 77 percent of the dwellings in San Francisco's Chinatown-North Beach area were designated as substandard or seriously substandard.³⁴ This was partly because Chinatown was the most densely populated area of San Francisco; there were from 120 to 179.9 persons per gross acre compared to 24.6 persons city-wide.³⁵ In a study presented to the Chinatown-North Beach Economic Opportunity Commission, Chinatown housing was described as following:

In Chinatown, the community bathroom is a virtual way of life... 60 percent of the housing lack separate bathrooms... Another facility that is commonly shared in many Chinatown apartments is the kitchen; that is, if a resident is fortunate to have such a facility... Depending on the building and its location, 50 to 100 people may have to be served from one common kitchen... In some apartments where heat is lacking, the (cook) stoves serve also to heat the deficient buildings in cold weather... Apartments in Chinatown are deficient in the lack of natural and in many cases of proper artificial lighting...³⁶

The 1970 census classified some 13.4 percent of Chinatown's housing as overcrowded, and about a quarter of the Chinatown population lived in this kind of overcrowding. The density of 1.01 or more persons per room was three and a half times higher than the city's proportion of overcrowded units to total housing stock.³⁷

In 1939, the United States Housing Authority (USHA) had provided \$1,365,000 for the Chinatown to build low-income housing, but because the high cost of land in Chinatown exceeded the federal standard, the project was deferred. At the urging of the San Francisco Junior Chamber of Commerce, the local housing authority, and the Chinatown community organizations, funds from the city were appropriated to purchase two-and-a-half acres of land in three separate lots in Chinatown in 1941. The housing project known as Ping Yuen (Tranquil Garden) Housing, which is located on Pacific Avenue and has 234 living units, remained an important source of affordable housing for the community, despite controversies

regarding segregated occupancy of the Chinese American residents (figure 10).³⁸ North Ping



Figure 10: Ping Yuan Housing Project on Pacific Avenue, ca. 2007 (Photo by author)

Yuen, added later, is a building of 11 stories and 194 units, most of which are dedicated to senior housing. Although the construction of Ping Yuen provided low-income housing, the demand continued to be overwhelming. There was a long waiting list of individuals and families waiting for a rare vacancy at the Ping Yuen. Among the about 700 Chinese applications for the city public housing in 1968, nearly all were for units in Ping Yuen. In 1969, the number of Chinese applicants increased to 900 while the number of available public housing units remained unchanged.³⁹

The residents of Chinatown would not or could not look elsewhere for housing, because the ethnic enclave provided them with a sense of physical safety and social security. The fear of social isolation because of language and cultural difference was one of the major reasons that the Chinese wanted to stay

in Chinatown. Also, in Chinatown they lived within walking distance of workplace, residence, shopping, educational facilities, banking services, hospital, and other community services, a feature that appealed to immigrants who could not afford a car and relied on public transportation systems for commuting.

Because of high demand, rents for private housing in Chinatown increased dramatically. From 1960 to 1970, the median rent nearly doubled, and from 1970 to 1972, costs increased a further 50 percent.⁴⁰ The 1970 Census showed that units with rental price higher than \$100 increased about three times, while units rented at less than \$100 decreased by 62.4 percent. The Chinatown area had a higher percentage of rental units compared to the rest of the city. In 1970, 83.1 percent of housing was renter-occupied compared with 63.8 percent elsewhere in the city. However, compared to 1960, the number of renter-occupied units decreased by 3.8 percent, while the owner-occupied units increased by 13.4 percent.⁴¹ The Chinese eligible to purchase flats or small apartments in the Chinatown or the North Beach not only were burdened with high mortgage rates but had to pay prices above market value, an insidious form of discrimination that discouraged home ownership.⁴² Thus the private housing market was not able to meet the needs for low- and even moderate-income families; only Chinese families with high incomes could participate.

The growing population of San Francisco's Chinatown was generally considered a key factor responsible for the worsened living conditions in Chinatown. However, despite the fast growth of Chinatown in the decade following WWII, in the next decade (1960 to 1970) the population grew only 1.8 percent (from 55,091 to 56,013).⁴³ The most significant demographic changes were those of age, gender, and household composition. Accordingly, between 1960 and 1970 the age group between 15 and 24 increased 84 percent, and young adults then comprised 17.6 percent of the Chinatown's total population. The number of senior Chinese residents also increased 16.5 percent, comprising 14.4 percent of the population. Meanwhile, the ratio between male and female residents tended to be more balanced, and the family population increased 5.8 percent.⁴⁴ Thus attributing the housing crisis in the 1960s and 70s only to the increasing number of Chinese immigrants was not entirely accurate. A more important factor causing housing shortage in the Chinatown was the polarization of the population between the young and

old, who earned less income than adults in their middle years, combined with the shrinking amount of available housing stock.

During the 1960s, around 1,442 housing units were lost in San Francisco's Chinatown, a decline of 5 percent. The loss of housing units was more severe at the core area of Chinatown, where a 14.2 percent decrease of available housing units was recorded.⁴⁵ As the 1970 Chinatown Census concluded, the loss of housing units was worst in tracts having a high concentration of low-income residents, while the higher-income residential areas gained.⁴⁶ The 1,590 new housing units in the adjoining neighborhoods of Chinatown such as Russian Hill and Northern Waterfront areas were all aimed at upper-income and high-middle income populations, which did not alleviate Chinatown's primary housing crisis.⁴⁷ Commercial developments also replaced some of the housing. For instance, the southeastern corner of San Francisco's Chinatown, a former residential space, was replaced by office buildings, parking lots, and other revenue-generating developments in the 1970s.

In addition to a severe housing shortage, the lack of recreational spaces was also a great concern to the community. According to a study conducted by the students of University of California, Berkeley in 1969, the funds appropriated for recreational purposes in Chinatown by the city's Park and Recreational Department ranked among the lowest per capita during the years from 1961 to 1969. Chinatown's limited public recreation spaces included the Chinese playground (0.58 acres) built in 1927, the Chinese Recreational Center (0.55 acres) from the 1950s, and the historic Portsmouth Square (1.21 acres).⁴⁸ These recreation spaces were far from sufficient for the 9,124 people living at the core area of Chinatown in 1970. Regardless, a group of Chinese developers formed a company known as the City of San Francisco Waverly Parking Plaza Corporation in 1966, aiming to develop a parking lot to replace the Chinese playground. The corporation proposed to build a nine-story underground parking garage with a small park on the top, declaring that the plan would alleviate the prevailing parking problems and would improve the recreational facilities of the playground, which had been worn out due to the lack of maintenance. However, concerned community members opposed the plan by asking for whom the garage was intended, given that few of the residents in Chinatown's the core owned automobiles.⁴⁹ With the congested

conditions of Chinatown, they argued that a new parking lot would bring more traffic into the community, which would worsen the traffic congestion and raise safety problems for the residents, especially for the young children. In addition, replacing a playground with a park that would be furnished with grass surface, walkways, and benches failed to meet the community's urgent needs for active outdoor playgrounds for the growing number of Chinese youths.⁵⁰

The entire Chinatown/North Beach area had only 10 square feet of outdoor recreation space per person, which was much lower than the average city standards of 90 square feet per person. The lack of ground-level residential space and yard space, narrow and congested streets and alleys, as well as the steep topography of the Chinatown made public recreation space a critical need.⁵¹ The scarce of the outdoor recreation space thus posed severe dilemmas for the community's social health.

To address the housing and recreation space crisis in San Francisco's Chinatown, the San Francisco Department of City Planning conducted the "Chinatown 701 Study" in 1970. The Study's aim was to develop workable programs to resolve the pressing needs for more housing and recreation space in the community. One of its objectives was to increase the standard housing stock for low- and moderate-income households in the Chinatown/North Beach area through facilitating new construction and rehabilitation of old buildings. Though the study was well intended, its success was limited by the government's dominant agenda promoting urban growth.

Urban Renewal and the International Hotel Controversy

Although the postwar urban renewal in no way could compare with the impact of the 1906 Chinatown relocation plan on the ideological and physical transformation of Chinese community, it followed a similar process of exclusion. During the rapid urban renewal of the 1960s and 70s, about 30 million square feet of office buildings were erected in San Francisco, most of them in the downtown area. A series of headquarters such as the Wells Fargo Bank Building (1966), America World Headquarters (1969), and Transamerica Pyramid (1972) symbolized the formation of a new downtown. By the mid-1970s, San Francisco had become the second largest U.S. center of international commerce and finance,

and its ratio of office space to population ranked as one of the highest in the country. The demography changed correspondingly from blue-collar to the professional, managerial, and other so-called white-collar workers. The “Manhattanization” of San Francisco was accelerated by the city’s desire to maintain its central position in the cross-Pacific trade and also to participate fully in the nation’s corporate capitalism.⁵² While the urban renewal movement upgraded the city’s infrastructures, it unfortunately also led to the demolition of low-income housing causing the massive displacement of the poor. For instance, the federally aided urban redevelopment program totally transformed some neighborhoods such as Western Addition and South of Market, from which low-income Black and Asian residents were removed to make a way for “higher and better uses”⁵³ serving capitalist development. Chester Hartman has observed that “by and large it has been the city’s low-income and third-world population and its blue-collar workers who have been uprooted and evicted for the benefit of those with larger bank accounts, more political clout, and lighter skins.”⁵⁴ Thus, urban renewal in San Francisco was conducted with the hidden cost paid by the underclass for the benefit of others. How to make the land more productive was the major concern for the city planners. The old hotels and tenement buildings that housed retired miners, railroad workers, or seamen became obstacles to “progress,” condemned to be demolished to make a way for modern structures. Increased property tax, land values, and higher rents led to a coherent pattern of exclusion under the name of urban renewal. Through these socio-spatial strategies, the city became less livable for the poor and racial minorities.

One of these neighborhoods was Manilatown, located at Kearny Street. Manilatown was dismantled when the cheap hotels in the enclave were demolished as part of urban renewal. Under the rubric of “slum clearance” and “blight removal,” the city redevelopment groups aggressively captured as much downtown land as they could. Among the important moments of San Francisco urban movements, the protest of the demolition of the International Hotel (I-Hotel) in Manilatown was engraved in the history. The hotel was claimed as the last remaining building of Manilatown. Located at the intersection of Kearney and Jackson Streets, near the northeast edge of San Francisco’s Chinatown, the three-story, 150-room residential hotel was built in 1854 and rebuilt in 1907 after it fell in the earthquake (figure 11).

In the 1920s, the hotel became a home base for Filipino *manongs* (older brothers) and Chinese men who worked as seasonal workers. But in 1946, the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association proposed a plan for neighborhood urban renewal that aimed to eliminate urban blight by demolishing such structures. This meant that by the late 1960s Manilatown had been gradually replaced with profitable high-rise office buildings, although the hotel itself lingered. The need for parking lot and other commercial endeavors also drove people out and caused the demolition of low-rent hotels.



Figure 11: View of the International Hotel on the left, undated. Note the introduction of another form of exoticism in the Islamic-style café next door, with horseshoe arches, bulbous domes, and slim “minarets.” (Source: Manila Heritage Foundation)

In 1968, Milton Meyer and Company bought the I-Hotel under the management of real estate magnate Walter Shorenstein in order to build a multilevel parking garage at the site to alleviate the parking problem of the expanding Financial District. In the name of “getting rid of a slum” the company

sent eviction notices to the hotel tenants. According to the *Examiner*, one of the key factors in the decision to demolish the hotel was its low profitability.⁵⁵ Most tenants of the hotel were single retired farmworkers and seamen who could barely speak English and lived on social security retirement benefits of between \$90 and \$200 per month, which was much lower than the average social security retirement benefits of the nation. Rents stayed at \$50 per month before the hotel was torn down, and the manager asserted that the hotel had barely made any profits. For its \$80,000 annual income from the 115 rooms and 10 commercial units, half went to Milton Meyer, \$25,000 paid for property tax, \$15,000 for insurance, and the rest spent for other expenses such as utilities and maintenance.⁵⁶

The tenants organized the United Filipino Association (UFA) to fight against the eviction, declaring the I-Hotel as “the last outpost” of the once bustling Manilatown. This was actually a battle of the Filipino American minority to protect their identity and civil rights, and their struggle also indicated the political empowerment and insurgent citizenship of Asian Americans as participants in the larger the civil rights movement. In 1969, the UFA successfully obliged the hotel owner to sign a three-year lease with the existing tenants, a triumph of a wide-range coalition of individuals, private organizations, and civic institutions that had fought to protect the I-Hotel. However, soon after the lease was signed, a suspicious fire occurred, killing three tenants and destroying the north wing of the building. After the fire, Shorenstein cancelled the new lease agreement, but under the pressure from the city and the general public, he eventually agreed to a new lease, in which the tenants would be responsible for rehabilitation of the building and bringing it up to code. The renovation of the I-Hotel depended on volunteer groups that included church groups, University of California -Berkeley students from the Third World Strike and other students, the American Jewish Congress, and individuals who were sympathetic to the plight of the hotel tenants.⁵⁷

In 1972 when the three-year lease was due, the International Hotel Tenants Association (IHTA), which had replaced UFA, requested three promises from Shorenstein: that “the International Hotel be maintained, and will continue to be designated as low-income housing; a “reasonable and human” lease be drawn up with the tenants group; there be no further demolition of Shorenstein-owned, low-income

Filipino housing until other such housing is available in the area.”⁵⁸ Shorenstein agreed to postpone demolition of the I-Hotel but then in 1974 sold the hotel to the Four Seas Investment Corporation owned by investors based in Bangkok and Hong Kong. After taking over the building, the new owner received a Superior Court order requiring the I-Hotel be refurbished to comply with city housing, plumbing, building and electrical codes or be razed. Instead the Four Seas decided to vacate the building within a month. According to the City’s chief building inspector, the hotel only needed electrical work. The Four Seas, however, insisted on evicting the tenants.⁵⁹ In response to the eviction, the controversy revolving around the hotel six years ago once again raged around the city. With public support, the hotel tenants refused to leave and placed a sign declaring “We Won’t Move” at the hotel’s entrance way. Since the Four Sea Company also acquired another property on the same block as the I-Hotel, the public suspected the investment company was using the City Code to justify the eviction of the tenants, in order to make a way for a redevelopment project on the site. In October, 1974, the IHTA organized the tenants to protest in Chinatown and demanded the new owner to lift the eviction notice, repair the hotel, sign a long-term lease, and give the tenants an option to buy the building. Their requests achieved support from the City’s Human Rights Commission, which called for a long-term agreement that would keep the hotel for low-rent housing and community services. However, the request didn’t receive support from the city or the investment company.⁶⁰

In 1975, the Four Seas formally filed an application for a demolition permit for the I-Hotel and proposed to build a Far East Trade Center at the site. Despite all the opposition and protest, the city officials approved the application. The IHTA fought back by taking their cases to the Board of Permit Appeals. In March 1976, The City Permit Appeals Board held a public hearing meeting, in which representatives from Chinatown organizations and other supporting groups vigorously denounced the worsening housing conditions of the area resulting from the expansion of the Financial District. The representatives of the Four Seas, however, emphasized the “horrible” conditions of the building and the urgent need for property improvement. A flurry of lawsuits ensued, with several eviction dates set and

lifted. The Board of Supervisors eventually agreed to allocate \$1.3 million to buy the I-Hotel, but a judge later ruled that the city had no right to buy the hotel and sell it back to the tenants.⁶¹

Overwhelmed with the pressure of eviction, many elderly Filipino and Chinese tenants started to move out of the I-Hotel. By 1976, only 80 of the 130 tenants remained. By the time a new eviction date was set for December 15, 1976, the I-Hotel had become a rallying point for tenants and their supporters to form a human barricade around the building to prevent eviction. Fearing violence, the judge reprieved the order of eviction. On June 17, 1977, the I-Hotel was enlisted as the National Register of Historic Places because the hotel had been a cultural center for Filipino American and Filipino immigrants in the 1920s and made its name by housing the famous “hungry I” nightclub where many entertainment stars launched their career. The national landmark status would provide tax disincentives for the owners, require an environmental impact report to be submitted before demolition, and allow matching Federal grants and special tax incentives for the building restoration. Despite the nomination, the I-Hotel tenants were removed from the building on August 3, 1977. More than 1,000 angry supporters sought to prevent the eviction by forming a human barricade, but SWAT teams forcefully broke down the barrier. Within 36 hours, the last tenant had been removed.

The I-Hotel was eventually demolished by the end of 1977. However, the controversy remained more than a political statement for the elderly Filipino and Chinese tenants. Underlying the issue was the desperate shortage of low-income housing in the downtown area and the city’s insensitive response to that need.⁶² The “Manhattanization” and the urban renewal of San Francisco took the land and housing from the poor and the minority groups, to fulfill the needs of corporation expansion. But there was pushback because the struggle to save the I-Hotel galvanized Asian American activists to engage in “what would become a symbolic fight against capitalism and the plight of urban removal.”⁶³ It was also a fight against racial discrimination. With the rising civil right movement, Asian Americans—like other disempowered minority groups-- had become a political group who coalesced to fight for their civil rights and citizenship. As Holston and Appadurai suggest, cities play a crucial role in renegotiating the notion of citizenship and insurgent identities. The authors define the distinction between formal and substantive citizenship and

argue that the material particularities of citizen have been incorporated into political representation and the citizen's accessibility to substantive rights of citizenship. The disadvantaged social groups with distinguishing identities demand difference-specific citizenship that respects their "authentic needs and interests" and their rights to equal opportunity. By demanding the substantive citizenship to pursue their ideology of equality, the marginalized groups challenge the principle role of formal citizenship that has been used to coordinating and managing modern social identities.⁶⁴ Holston and Appadurai also argue that violence is a form of social action and that transition to democracy brings its own forms of violence that includes "a sustained expansion of political and socioeconomic rights for the urban poor."⁶⁵ Thus the violent confrontation at the I-Hotel was an insurgent social action for the Asian American minority to challenge the hegemonic form of urban renewal. They fought for their substantive citizenship which would respect their differences and specific social, cultural, and economic needs. These kinds of social movement of the urban poor and minority also create new sources of citizenship that engender new notions of membership, entitlement, community, and a new transnational politics.⁶⁶

Not only the Chinese living in San Francisco's Chinatown, but also Chinese immigrants in other cities showed their sympathy and support toward the I-Hotel tenants. They perceived the fight as "the struggle of all Chinese who are forced to live in ghettos like Chinatown" and the "resistance to discrimination and oppression" of the exploitable cheap labor.⁶⁷ Many residents in San Francisco's Chinatown participated in the I-Hotel fight. Accompanied with the long existing discontentment to "over-priced, over-crowded, over-rotten slums the landlords created" in San Francisco's Chinatown, the residents provided tremendous support to the I-Hotel battle.⁶⁸ In New York's Chinatown, donations and petitions gave the I-Hotel groups financial and political support. The I-Hotel struggle inspired the residents of San Francisco's Chinatown to fight gentrification, housing discrimination, and urban removal. In a larger sense, it also was a catalyst for Asian American activism nationwide.

With the gradual demolition of Manilatown, Chinatown which was located near to Manilatown, was also threatened by the downtown expansion. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, some 1,700 housing units in Chinatown were converted to office use, while a flux of overseas Asian capital boosted

the commercial and residential rents to a new height and drove small scale merchants and residents out of the neighborhood.⁶⁹ This had a profound impact on the many Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans who lived in Chinatown. There were 24,813 Chinese living in the Chinatown area in 1950, and in 1960 the number increased to 36,445.⁷⁰ Most of the Chinese residents had modest incomes and relied on Chinatown businesses to make a living. In the core Chinatown, nearly 97 percent of the residents were renters; even in the noncore area renters were consisted more than half of the population.⁷¹ Since they didn't own the land they lived on, they could not even realize a quick profit from the real estate values due to gentrification. The uncontrolled development threatened to turn the community into a commercial tourist area, at the cost of displacing low-income Chinese immigrants and elderly.

However, unlike Manilatown which gradually ran down as the early *majongs* aged, Chinatown thrived, transforming from a bachelor society to a family-oriented community after WWII. Its particular socio-economic conditions and land use patterns helped protect it from state-imposed urban redevelopment projects and sustained its very survival. The land values in the heart of Chinatown were extremely high and were comparable to the adjoining financial district. In 1972, land costs of the Chinatown core area ranged from \$40 to \$60 per square foot, and even in the extended area of Chinatown, the costs were still high, ranging from \$15 to \$30.⁷² Although the inhabitants paid for this in the form of high rent, the elevated values also protected them by making it very expensive to acquire land for redevelopment. In addition, the original land-use patterns of Chinatown consisted of small and fragmented parcels, which made it extremely difficult to assemble a decent size of land for redevelopment. The small parcels in Chinatown were usually owned by a group of people according to a complicated ownership system – known in Chinese as *Hui* – whereby properties are acquired collectively by family or clan associations, and then profits are shared among the members. Thus, to purchase a parcel of land, a developers typically had to get consensus from the association members. Another factor preventing Chinatown from outside encroachment was its dense concentration of residential population, which posed a dilemma for redevelopment because of the burden of tenant relocation. The California Community Redevelopment Act of 1945 stated that clearances and redevelopment of deteriorated districts

would be approved only when adequate permanent housing was provided for displaced families with rents comparable to their previous housing. Thus the high congregation of residential units and the overcrowded conditions of the tenement housing precluded some of the new developments in the Chinatown.

Although the particular social structure and land-use pattern of the Chinatown were key factors in preventing the intrusion of large scale redevelopment projects, they also presented obstacles for the community to get low-income housing. Most importantly, the high cost that discouraged developers from buying land in Chinatown also made Chinatown ineligible for federal funds for low-income housing projects, which favored projects on low-cost lands. There were two major types of land use in Chinatown – commercial and residential. The mixed-use of the built environment was important in sustaining the community because revenue-generating commerce helped to offset the high land costs of the area.⁷³ However, the principal beneficiaries of Chinatown's thriving business were a small group of Chinese elites who possessed sufficient capital and social resources to afford the expensive rents. In contrast, the immigrants who constituted the majority of Chinatown residents struggled on the poverty line. The unique problems of Chinatown placed the residents in a vulnerable position by making the neighborhood an unlikely selection of federal housing assistance programs despite its overriding needs. Federal bureaucratic procedures and regulations for assistance program were not designed to accommodate the specific conditions of the Chinatown.⁷⁴

Programs to improve the community's recreation areas also failed to meet the official criteria for funding.⁷⁵ According to the community report, due to the limitation of Chinatown's land-use patterns, proposed recreation spaces usually had to take an innovative approach incorporating "mini-parks, joint use of school facilities, use of eminent domain, spot renewal, and relocation coordination."⁷⁶ The realization of these programs required the involved agencies to cooperate and respond effectively and creatively to unique situations. Unfortunately, until the 1970s the institutional organizations in Chinatown had not obtained sufficient human and capital resources to coordinate these kinds of programs.⁷⁷ In consequence, federal funding was rarely allocated to build recreational facilities for the community.

As an ethnic neighborhood in the city's center, San Francisco's Chinatown was hit by urban renewal proposals that determined to make downtown San Francisco a commercial, financial, and administrative center of west coast America. But this met with resistance because Chinatown was also a thriving residential neighborhood with a strong sense of identity. Resisting the encroachment of the financial district and battling for affordable housing and a healthy living environment required the residents to constantly claim and maintain their rights to the social and physical space of the Chinatown. The controversies over the sale and demolition of Chinatown's oldest temple, Kong Chow Temple, to make a way for high-rise office buildings in the 1970s provides a useful case for examining the multiple conditions of community-scale events and large-scale pro-growth that accounted for the Chinatown's landscape transformation.

Saving Kong-Chow Temple

Kong Chow Temple is widely believed to be the first Chinese joss house built in the North America. Located at 520 Pine Street, close to the intersection of Pine Street and Kearny Street, the temple was historically an integral part of the Kong Chow Benevolent Association, a district association established by the people from the Sihui and Heshan areas of Guangdong province. The temple, which served as the association's headquarters, was erected around 1857 (figure 12). It was an elegant, two-story, neo-classical structure facing the Pacific Ocean when Pine and Kearny Streets were still close to the edge of the San Francisco Bay (before the reclamation project). During the 1906 earthquake and fire, the temple was dynamited by fire fighters to clear out blocks in order to contain the spreading fire. In 1909, the Kong Chow temple was rebuilt at the same plot of land, financed by members of the Kong Chow Association. The new structure was a three-story building with the temple on the top floor. It inherited the popular layout of Chinatown institutional buildings that had combined features of a Chinese tiled roof and decorations and typical American downtown structural frameworks.⁷⁸

In 1962, an insurance company offered \$350,000 to purchase the temple's land, but the board of Kong Chow Association declined the offer, hoping for a higher price. After several years' bargaining, in

1969 the association decided to sell the property to Title Insurance and Trust Company for \$630,000. The new owner of the temple was Ralph K. Davies, chairman of the board of the shipping company American



Figure 12: Kong Chow Temple at 520 Pine Street, before the 1906 earthquake (Source: *The Unshakable – Rebirth of S.F. Chinatown in 1906* published by *Sing Tao Daily* on April 15, 2006, p.46)

President Lines, who had been assembling all properties between the Pine and Kearney Streets entrances to the St. Mary Catholic Church's Garage for a number of years with the plan to build skyscrapers. The City approved a permit to wreck the temple at March, 1969. However, right after the announcement was made, several community members expressed dismay, claiming the temple as a symbolic historic landmark of the San Francisco Chinatown. A battle to save the temple was soon initiated by Charlotte Chang, whose father, Yee Ah-tye, had originally donated the land for the temple in 1854. Charlotte Chang, who was 93 years old, proclaimed herself to be the only living witness to the words and intentions of her father. She insisted that her father stipulated the land could never be used for any other purpose

than Kong Chow Temple, but couldn't provide papers or records to prove her claims because the 1906 earthquake and fire had destroyed all the documents.

Chang declared the temple's place was a sacred ground because "a temple has been on that land ever since there were people living in San Francisco,"⁷⁹ and the erection of an office building would violate its sacredness. In addition to acknowledging the historic significance of the temple to the Chinese community, Chang also insisted upon the temple's importance in sustaining her personal and family memory, saying that "the temple [was] not important to her as a physical object but as a living symbol of the goals and principles for which her father fought."⁸⁰ With respect to the interests of the whole community, Chang pointed out the possibility of losing Chinatown to the big corporation. She argued that if the temple were sold, the whole portion of the 500-block on Pine would be lost and the continued encroachment of the financial district would have moved one block closer.⁸¹ She worried that if Chinese owners were lured by high prices to sell properties, there would be nothing left of Chinatown but the commercial street along Grant Avenue.⁸²

Even though Chang's argument appeared persuasive, she failed to get consent from the Kong Chow Association. To the Association, the temple had already become a financial burden. A representative of the Association argued that the building required approximately \$50,000 to restore it to conform to the present building code. Instead of "wasting" money to repair the dilapidated temple, the association purchased a new building on Stockton Street and proposed to move the temple there. In recognition of the legacy of the first Chinese temple, Kong Chow Association asked the developers to erect a plaque at the site commemorating the temple's history.

In April, in a suit filed by Chang's attorney to halt demolition, the court upheld the Kong Chow Association. After the trial, in front of Kong Chow Temple, Chang and her supporters protested the sale and eventual demolition of the temple. Meanwhile in response to a plea to save the Kong Chow Temple by designating it as an historic landmark the City Landmarks Board passed a resolution urging preservation. Nonetheless, without organized legal protection, the temple was finally dismantled to make way for a high-rise office building in the 1970s.

The controversy over Kong Chow Temple occurred in a particular historical moment of San Francisco, when the Manhattanization of the city was displacing the urban poor in massive numbers. The urban renewal movement intensified the conflicts between the residents and the corporations seeking expansion, and diminished the already scarce low-income housing in the city. The protest in defense of Kong Chow Temple provides a glimpse of the contested territory and power of Chinatown in the face of gentrification imposed by external forces. Chang and her supporters had good reasons to fear the potential encroachment on Chinatown of the urban redevelopment, especially when she could clearly see Manilatown disappearing due to the uncontrolled expansion of San Francisco's financial district. Feelings of insecurity about territory, status and power brought the consciousness of the enclave into focus. Kong Chow Temple not only signified the historical significance and cultural affiliation of the Chinatown community, but more importantly, stood for the symbolic boundaries of the community. Thus the dispute regarding the demolition of the temple was actually grounded on the competing spatial discourses of ethnicity, economic development, and political imageries.

The Kong Chow Temple controversy was a watershed event not only because of the significant loss to heritage but also because it revealed the internal conflicts regarding the evolving historical value, economic interests, gender roles, and social learning of the Chinese community. The unsuccessful effort of Chang and her followers was partly the result of an asymmetrical distribution of power relations within the Chinatown community. Historically perceived at odds with the national linguistic, cultural, and social norms, the Chinese immigrants had a relatively independent economic and political structure in the ghettoized Chinatown wherein traditional social organizations had arbitrary authority over the socio-economic and political life of the community. The patriarchal culture of these male-dominated organizations put women in a subordinate position to men, traditionally excluded from the boards of the family and district associations. As Chang bitterly complained to a local newspaper, it was the fact that she was a woman that deprived her of the respect of the board members of Kong Chow association who didn't take her advice seriously and simply ignored her letters and phone calls. Chang, as a second-generation Chinese American woman, didn't succeed in mobilizing community activism and ultimately

failed to challenge the patriarchal hierarchies of the male-dominated social constructions. However, her efforts to protect the temple reveal that gender roles and gender tensions within the community were slowly beginning to change. The collision of diverse interests and the imbalances of power still continue to shape Chinatown as a contested space manipulating and sustaining the competing identity discourses and the politics of place-making.

Fighting for Affordable Housing

San Francisco's Chinatown is, after Manhattan, the second most densely populated area in the United States. Its substandard housing conditions and congestion are ranked the worst in San Francisco.⁸³ In 1966, the city's Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) designated four targeted areas for the anti-poverty program, which included the Western Addition, Hunters Point, the Mission, and Chinatown. The former three communities were actively engaging in community building with a strong ideology of political empowerment. Chinatown, however, showed little enthusiasm. Susan Fainstein, Norman Fainstein, and P. J. Armistead have suggested that this is because the community's "organizational leadership has been highly conservative."⁸⁴ The community virtually opposed the designation of Chinatown as an impoverished area and did not mobilize the poor to participate in anti-poverty programs.⁸⁵ Thus there were complaints about the Chinatown leadership that stressed social services without building the community's organizations.⁸⁶ Marilyn M. Chou states that the indifference of the poor residents to the anti-poverty program resulted from the "fear and suspicion of revolution and politics" that had long existed among the Chinese immigrants.⁸⁷ The homeland political trauma could have affected the attitudes of the Chinatown residents and explained the conservative attitudes of the community's traditional leadership toward the program. In addition to the political tradition of the Chinese, I propose that the racial politics and social environment of the U.S. cities also significantly impacted the community development. Kay Anderson has argued that White Europeans have repeatedly built and justified a form of cultural hegemony over "racial others."⁸⁸ Whiteness as an epistemology reveals the privileged status of the White against which racialized identities are considered as different

and inferior, but this epistemology can be hard to grasp, since it has been naturalized as a system of meanings and values rooted in the hegemonic culture of the White.⁸⁹ In categorizing Chinatown as “theirs,” the mentality of “us versus them” or “otherness” has also penetrated the Chinese’s mind, although grounded on different ideology.⁹⁰ In addition to the self-identification of Chinatown as a place “different” from other national space, the relatively independent socio-political structure that has dominated Chinatown’s everyday life for over a century was crucial for understanding the “uncooperative” attitudes of the Chinese towards the city’s poverty program. Although the traditional Chinatown associations tied by kinship or social brotherhood were very community-oriented, it took the form of mutual help (which began with the early bachelor sojourners) and placed emphasis on community service rather than community political organization.

Clearly, there were internal historical factors leading to Chinatown’s indifference to the anti-poverty program. But the failure of the program was also due to the insensitive design of the program itself, which tended to ignore the specific needs and anxiety of the community.⁹¹ Firstly, the publicity and emphasis on problems such as poverty, crime, unemployment, and unsanitary environments called for more attention for the miserable conditions of the poor, which negatively impacted the community’s tourism and commercial development. In 1970, Chou observed, “Tourists no longer visit Chinatown recently publicized as a ghetto torn by crime, delinquency, poverty, and exploitation. Businesses in the community go downhill; Chinatown’s once stable economy becomes less stable.”⁹² The program also failed to mediate the high rate of unemployment in Chinatown because the persistent form of “ghetto living” constrained the residents’ opportunity to find jobs outside Chinatown. Chou stressed the importance of the city making “constructive efforts” in order to provide an open and equal job market for the unemployed Chinese, which would rescue them from the increasingly competitive employment situations in Chinatown, as well provide the city a large source of manpower.⁹³ Chou’s point was valid; however, the firmly entrenched racial hierarchy and the socio-cultural dilemma still presented major obstacles for the Chinese immigrants seeking work opportunities outside Chinatown.

Despite their rejection of the city's anti-poverty program, the Chinatown activists and residents strived for a better community life. Especially for the desperately needed low-income housing, the community activists and residents were allied in negotiating with governmental institutions and private property owners, seeking opportunities to mediate the severe housing shortage in Chinatown. Community members made constant efforts to acquire available lands within the Chinatown area for low-income housing development and to convert existing buildings to affordable housing.

One of the early efforts made by Chinatown activists in the fight for low-income housing occurred in 1972 when a site at the southwest corner of Stockton and Sacramento Street was opened to redevelopment. Situated between the core area of Chinatown and Nob Hill, the block was occupied by dilapidated residential structures and unimproved parcels that were used for parking. Among the eleven residential buildings, seven were seriously substandard, one building of four housing units had been closed by the city and remained unoccupied. Considering the modest relocation of tenants that would be involved in developing the site, Chinatown Coalition for Better Housing (CCBH) proposed to tear down the existing buildings and construct subsidized low-to-moderate income housing in their place. But when the budget of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was slashed in the fall of that year, the Chinese community members were informed that federal matching funds for the Stockton-Sacramento redevelopment project, also known as Mei Lun Yuen, were no longer available. Concerned with the cutting of federal funds, some 200 community members—mostly senior citizens—gathered in Portsmouth Square and walked five blocks to the HUD Embarcadero Center offices to demonstrate their concerns. The demonstration got a lot of publicity in the local media but failed to obtain funds from HUD.⁹⁴

After the demonstration, representatives of the CCBH met with HUD officials in Washington, D. C. to urge the allocation of the federal funds. Although impressed by the cohesive, well-organized, and wide-ranging community support, the HUD officials indicated that their funds were committed to the relief of hurricane damage in Pennsylvania. However, on July 23, 1973, a U.S. district judge ordered HUD to release funds for federal housing subsidy programs.⁹⁵ To attract the support of HUD, Mei Lun Yuen

project's non-profit developer, the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown, invited financial involvement from a private developer, the San Francisco-based firm of Arcon. The church agreed to take charge of the housing portions of the project, and the firm would be responsible for the commercial portions, including 8,000 square feet of shops and a 195-space underground garage. But the Nob Hill Association, Nob Hill Neighbors, and the 840 Powell Street Home Owners Association, objected to the Mei Lun Yuen project and sued HUD on the grounds of the increased traffic, congestion, noise and air pollution that might be brought by the commercial garage and the possibility of blocking the view. These and other disputes delayed the construction of Mei Lun Yuen Housing but they did not prevent it. Finally in 1979, a groundbreaking ceremony for the Mei Lun Yuen housing development was conducted, and in 1982 the first Chinese senior housing was completed (figure 13).



Figure 13: Mei Lun Yuen Senior Housing at the southwest corner of Stockton and Sacramento Street, including parking space, offices, and apartment units, ca. 2007 (Photo by author)

In addition to constructing new public housing for the low income population in Chinatown, the Chinatown activists also strived to convert the existing buildings to residential use. In 1972, a YWCA residence club at 940 Powell Street became available for redevelopment. The seven-floor building was a popular residence club with a capacity of 165 rooms was designed by architect Julia Morgan in 1932 to provide shelter for young women new to the city (figure 14). However, the occupancy rates of the



Figure 14: Previous Women's YWCA at 940 Powell Street. Now it is known as the YWCA Apartments which contains ninety-seven federally subsidized low-income living units, ca. 2004 (Source: NoeHill In San Francisco, website: <http://www.noehill.com/sf/landmarks/sf122.asp>, accessed: 9/25/2010)

building had sharply declined since the 1970s, due to the rigid rules set by YWCA originally to regulate the behavior of the young female tenants.⁹⁶ From 1963 to 1970, the average occupancy of the residence club was over 98 percent, but by 1971 occupancy had dropped to 66.5 percent.⁹⁷ In recognition of the declining occupancy rates and the consequent financial problems, the YWCA board appointed a Task

Force on Housing to suggest an alternative use of the club facilities. Considering the building's proximity to the Chinatown, the Task Force sought advice from the Ad Hoc Committee on Housing of the Clay Street YWCA in order to incorporate the opinions of the Chinese community on alternative uses. The Ad Hoc Committee's preliminary and final reports suggested that the building could be used as Chinatown senior housing, permanent family housing, or temporary housing for immigrant families to comply the community's urgent needs for low- and moderate-income housing. The report envisioned that the Chinatown community would benefit from the federal subsidy program that the YWCA would be using to rehabilitate the Residence Club.⁹⁸ However, the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations received opposition from the Residence Club committee, which urged the YWCA Board to appoint a new task force that would include representatives from the Board, Resident Club, and Clay Street Center to review the Committee's report. The new Task Force on Housing generally agreed with the Ad Hoc Committee's proposal, but no follow-up work was undertaken after that.

In 1973, with the national fiscal crisis, President Nixon declared a moratorium on all new public housing and HUD froze funds for low- and moderate-income housing projects. The policy change and the continuing decline of occupancy rates at the Residential Club prompted the eventual closure of the club by June 1973. After the closure, the Residence Club committee asked the YWCA Board to approve a plan to make the Club co-educational and place it under new management. However, before a final resolution had been formed, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the YWCA board had already turned the residence club over to new management. It asserted that YWCAs in other major cities "have been coed for some time – primarily because women aren't as interested as they once were in sexually segregated living arrangements."⁹⁹ The new management would adopt more attractive approaches such as "a free month's rent" for new residents, serving "two meals a day, six days a week," "bring a pool table, holding dances," and eliminating "the archaic rules."¹⁰⁰ The news immediately drew attention from the Chinese and the Chinatown organizations concerned about housing problems. The CCBH urged the San Francisco YWCA not to sign the proposed contract and to realize its approved recommendations of converting the YWCA Residence Club into desperately needed low- and moderate-income housing.¹⁰¹ The CCBH's

request was widely supported by various community and city organizations including Self-Help for the Elderly, National Committee against Discrimination in Housing, San Francisco Department of City Planning, and many other concerned social groups. A few Chinese American individuals also expressed their concerns. These letters varied in content, but all emphasized poor housing conditions in Chinatown, and the urgent need of the community for low- and moderate-income housing. They asserted that it would be unreasonable for the Residence Club to be used for other purpose because the building was located in the midst of the Chinatown/North Beach area that was always referred to as “the worst housing conditions in the San Francisco Bay Area.”¹⁰²

In December of 1973, the downtown YWCA reaffirmed their commitment to the housing conversion and asked an eight-member committee to draft plans for the financial feasibility of the project. Through the combined efforts of the YWCA, the CCBH and others, in 1977 HUD finally agreed to allocate \$2.95 million for the conversion of YWCA residence club. However, due to the inflation in the construction industry costs, the seismic work required bringing the building up to city and federal standards and costs of the additional units, the estimated cost of the project rose to \$6.3 million. Despite threatening to withdraw funding, HUD finally approved \$6.4 million for the 97-unit senior housing project, to which the city provided an additional \$647,000 from its Community Development fund. Construction started in November of 1979. The project not only provided senior housing units, but also community spaces in which educational and social services, child care were offered to encourage interaction of different community groups.

The success of the Mei Lun Yuen senior housing and the conversion of the YWCA Residence Club were grounded on consolidated supports and widely agreed upon community values. However, when such projects involved dislocation or commercial interests, internal schisms and conflicts within the community were exposed to reveal a more complicated and multi-faceted picture of the transforming social, political, and cultural landscape of the Chinatown. For example, in 1984, Self-Help for the Elderly was awarded a \$27 million housing grant from the federal government. They proposed to build low-income housing for the elderly through a public-private partnership. Since 1973, federal subsidies for

public housing had experienced a major decline. Thus public-private partnership was considered to be an effective way of balancing the developments of low-income housing and commercial activities. The joint project – called Orangeland – was a \$19.5 million, 220,000-square-foot development project named after the local landmark market located at the corner of Stockton and Jackson Streets. For 35 years, the Orangeland produce market and the surrounding shops had supplied the Chinatown residents with groceries, herbal medicine, and other living necessities. But the Orangeland development proposed to displace the market with new commercial and residential buildings, as well as displacing about 60 immigrant families. The new construction would contain an 11-story, 70-unit senior housing financed by a HUD grant in a tower that would be built largely on an adjacent school district parking lot leased by the developer for 75 years. In return, the developer would be allowed to build a seven-story building accommodating restaurant, retail stores, underground parking, and 35-units market-rate condominiums.

Despite the community's historic struggles for affordable housing, the Orangeland project aroused concerns. The community groups resisting the project included the CCBH, the Chinatown Neighborhood Improvement Resource Center, Asian Neighborhood Design, the Asian Law Caucus, the Chinatown Transportation Research and Improvement Project, the Orangeland Merchants Association and the Orangeland Tenants Association. Some of these opposing organizations had played a crucial role in fighting for the low-income housing in Chinatown. They believed that the relocation plan was inadequate to resettle the displaced population. Some residents of the existing buildings, mostly new immigrants, feared they would be left homeless if no adequate housing in Chinatown would be provided for them, especially as the vacancy rate in Chinatown was extremely low. Generally, there was fear that the rent of the new commercial units would skyrocket to match other high rents in the area. Similarly, small business owners were afraid that they would be forced out of Chinatown. In May 1985, some 400 people attended the Orangeland project hearing. The Chinatown groups were divided into two sides. On one side, opponents voiced their concerns about the proper relocation of the 176 people displaced by the project. They noted that none of the development's new living units were going to be allocated to the current residents. On the other side, the Orangeland supporters emphasized the severe housing shortage for the

elderly, pointing to the more than 6,000 senior people who had applied for 145 units at Mei Lun Yuen, one of the few low-income housing projects in Chinatown.¹⁰³ They argued it was a precious opportunity for the community to obtain low-income elderly housing through public-private partnership. In fact, everyone was in support of the senior housing, but they were split on the commercial development on the site, which would require demolition of the two mixed-use buildings and further aggregate the area's congestion problems by bringing in more traffic. The controversial Orangeland project was approved by the San Francisco Planning Commission a week after the hearing. But given the zoning regulations in Chinatown, a special permission for the Orangeland project was required to relax the height permit of the building, and this was rejected by the Board of Supervisors. Despite the developer's promise to donate a portion of the land for the senior housing in exchange for city approval for the entire project, the board vowed to support the senior housing only if it were not tied to the commercial development.¹⁰⁴ The battle was eventually won by the tenants who successfully blocked the eviction of the immigrant families and the construction of the Orangeland project.

In the Orangeland project controversy the needs of the two most vulnerable groups in Chinatown – the elderly and the immigrant families – collided.¹⁰⁵ The internal schism among the community groups was founded on the severe shortage of low- and moderate-income housing and the anxiety toward gentrification. Chinese American activism in lobbying for affordable housing gained wide political support. The successful mobilization for the construction of Mei Lun Yuen and the conversion of the YWCA residence club into a subsidized senior housing were the result of efforts made by Chinese American activists who lobbied for social provisions and social justice. Based on racial claims and the desire to preserve Chinatown as a vital living community, Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants launched crusades for public assistance to improve housing for the senior residents and families. These politics, constructed on an ethnic basis, gave voice to a racial minority; however, they failed to resolve the dilemma of diversity among the ethnic community for which social groups representing different interests continue to struggle against each other for a limited share of social provisions. The changing needs of community development and issues of representation called for a true connection between people in the

neighborhood, community organizations, and civic institutions to access a politics of incorporation, equality, and citizenship in the immigrant community.¹⁰⁶

Conclusions

The struggles of Chinatown activists and residents in the urban renewal movements of the 1960s and 1970s illuminated the ambivalent process by which the landscape of Chinatown was transformed. Chinatown suffered from dilapidated conditions and the possibility of gentrification. About 76 percent of Chinatown's masonry buildings had been built before World War II, and these were among the most vulnerable buildings to earthquake damage. The changing demography under the series of new immigration laws aggravated the housing crisis of the community and its need for more outdoor places of public gathering. In addition to community development pressure, overseas investors and the expansion of San Francisco's financial district drove up the community's real estate values. Even the traditional family and district associations who had formerly charged low rents to the commercial and residential units in their properties couldn't resist the temptation of high profits by selling their buildings to developers. These pressures worsened conditions in Chinatown, but they also were the catalyst for a new sense of mission to preserve Chinatown from urban encroachment and neighborhood displacement. This in turn became a powerful way to retain the ties of Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants to the place of Chinatown where their ancestors had been forced to live due to racial segregation. From the activism to save I-Hotel and Kong Chow Temple, to ethnic politics making claims to improve housing and community facility, the existing categories of ethnicity, cultural identity, and racial ideology have been contested, renegotiated, and reconstituted. The rise of post-industrial economy after WWII generated a "privatist political culture" that privileged capital accumulation and market forces.¹⁰⁷ However, the urban pro-growth machine was challenged by the production of minority spaces, which negotiated and contested the contradictory structures of modernity and liberalism. By examining the context-specific struggles over space in San Francisco's Chinatown, the chapter has emphasized the ways that the urban redevelopment process was intermingled with the social and cultural tensions inherent in a plural and

liberal urban society. The issue of race permeated the grass-roots struggle over the housing and landscape changes in the Chinatown, which revealed the exclusionary kernel of urban renewal and redevelopment policies.

Within the context of a marginalized ethnic enclave wherein individual voices—especially those of women—were generally ignored, the Chinese American activists mobilized their political resources to make a racial claim for community needs. When exclusion by race and by class played a central role in the discourse of urban planning, the Chinatown that had historically protected the Chinese immigrants from oppression and job discrimination in the larger spaces of the modern metropolis retained its importance by insisting on the continued economic viability and socio-cultural cohesion of the Chinese American community.¹⁰⁸ Michel Laguerre suggests that “the analysis of minoritized space – the myriad forms of positionality that generate social distance and that maintain and reproduce social hierarchy, oppression, and discrimination in society – affords a productive way to explain the disparities of social conditions among diverse groups of people and their reproduction through time in American society.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, space functions as a mechanism to maintain and reproduce power relations and racial hierarchy of the dominant society, separation and difference between the racialized minority and mainstream, and an inferior and subaltern position to the dominated. Chinatown was historically imagined as an ethnic ghetto and a place of “otherness.” The stereotypical representations of Chinese immigrants as alien, barbaric, and deviant from the national categories were strengthened by a series of anti-Chinese exclusion acts before WWII and the systematic social construction of otherness throughout the century. As a result, Chinatown, as a ghettoized community, was subject to the racist practices that consistently excluded the Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans from the national space and polity. In this sense, racial oppression and discrimination have been manifested and reinforced in the construction of “minoritized space” in which subaltern subjects have been produced. Space becomes an important mechanism for the dominant to exert hegemonic power over the dominated and allocate the racialized minority in a subaltern position.¹¹⁰

Yet while Chinatown was a minoritized space containing subordinated subjects, I see it also as an insurgent socio-political space containing the distinct cultural values and economic purposes of the marginal groups. The particular political and socio-economic system of San Francisco's Chinatown reinforced social construction of spatial boundaries, for which space functions as a device that could challenge the dominant values of the elite control. Emphasizing the community's spatial integrity and ethnic identity, the Chinatown activists protected the community from displacement and the encroachment of the growing downtown. In this way, "minoritized space" was not simply a mechanism of the hegemonic power of the dominant group, but empowered the subaltern minority by developing it as an infrastructural basis of resistance and ultimately support.

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Chapter 2: “Urban Renewal Comes to Chinatown with Ease?” – The Case of Chicago’s Chinatown

By 1870, the city of Chicago had experienced a fast rate of growth and became one of the manufacturing and transportation centers of the nation. Although the Chicago Fire of 1871 razed almost the entire downtown and near north, the city’s transportation and industrial infrastructure remained untouched so that the city could rapidly recover. In 1893, the World’s Columbian Exposition signaled that Chicago both socially and physically had become a world-class city, a stature that it has maintained ever since.¹ However, after WWII, the demography and racial composition of the city of Chicago underwent a major transformation. The city’s postwar industrial growth attracted many of the African Americans migrating northward from the South. During the decade between 1940 and 1950, the African American population increased from 277,731 to 492,265, while during the next decade, the population almost doubled to 812,637.² The increasing presence of the Black population in the city motivated the so called “suburban exodus” of middle-class Whites which had ramifications for the inner city. The suburban expansion drew away not only many of the city’s tax-payers, but also its commercial and industrial establishments. Due to the “white flight,” the percentage of Whites in the city’s total population continuously dropped from 68 percent in 1950, to 51 percent in 1960, and 39 percent by 1970.³ In contrast, during the same period, the African American community was left behind in the increasingly impoverished city ringed by White suburbs from which they were explicitly excluded. The White “suburban exodus” left behind many vacancies in the inner city where available housing units were desperately needed by the growing Black population, and accordingly, during the 1950s, three-and-a half blocks changed from White to Black occupancy per week. Most of the changes happened in the city’s declining neighborhoods from which Whites fled to more pleasant locations in the city or its exclusive suburbs.⁴ By 1970, African Americans constituted about 33 percent of the city population in total. With a simultaneous growth of Latino and Asian populations, Chicago had turned to a “minority-majority” city by 1980.⁵

The changing demography and especially the fast growing Black population inevitably accelerated the tensions of the city's already entangled racial relations. The post-war adoption of Keynesianism increased governmental interventions in the everyday life of traditional neighborhoods. Meanwhile liberal environmentalism advocating a "full codification of the new egalitarianism" found a growing audience in the United States. It aggregated the ideological forces concerning race relations in the country and led to the call for the complete integration of Blacks into society.⁶ However, in Chicago the process of Black integration encountered tremendous resistance. The democratic political machine dominating the city took great effort to preserve the city's existing racial patterns in housing by reaffirming racial borders and segregating Blacks in a new ghetto of monstrous public housing projects. Public housing, in a sense, was employed as a subordinating tool for urban renewal by not only removing objectionable residents from the better areas but also "reducing the likelihood of racial transition in neighborhoods beyond black Chicago."⁷ In the process, the city government played an active role in making lines of racial segregation both physically and socially. Buttressed by private business interests, the urban revival of Chicago's inner city was conducted at the cost of dislocating minority groups. It reasserted the segregated forms of housing by using public housing as a new form of ghetto.

Although racial hierarchy and discriminatory patterns were firmly entrenched in the social and geographical structures of the city, the ideological shift at the national scale, changing demography and racial composition, and increasing governmental intervention rendered its long-standing racial borders unstable and contested. This eventually led to the renegotiation and redefinition of the city's geographical racial patterns. To explain how this occurred, this chapter starts with the examination of how race riots and public housing projects helped to reshape the city's physical and social racial structures. By placing Chicago's Chinatown in the rapidly changing urban forms that were partly motivated by intensified tensions between Black and White, the chapter engages with the question of how the space and place of Chinatown was reproduced to accommodate the evolving urban environment that reinforced and justified spatial and social segregation along the lines of race, ethnicity, and class. Unlike the Chinese in San Francisco, as described in Chapter One, who actively fought for low-income housing through negotiation

with the city and national institutions, the ethnic leaders in Chicago's Chinatown tended to employ the narratives of "model minority" and "self-help." The notion of "model minority," which first appeared in 1966, relies on the empirical evidence for success and a culturally based interpretation for achievement to define the Asian Americans as a successful minority capable of overcoming obstacles and moving up the socioeconomic ladder on their own.⁸ Through examining the social implications and political meanings of such efforts and intra-ethnic relations involved in community building, the chapter reveals the political and economic basis and ideological ground for the Chinatown community's housing and territorial struggles. It also explores the role of ethnicity and its discursive representation, with special attention to the manipulation of ethnic identity as a kind of social and cultural currency in spatial production and reproduction.

Border War and the New Geography of Chicago

To study Chicago's war on racial borders, it is necessary to understand the impact of two major race riots that occurred in the city. The first was the devastating 1919 riot, known for its brutal confrontations between Black and White citizens. The territorial clash accompanied by ideological, political, and economic conflicts was usually referred to as a typical "communal" riot.⁹ After the 1919 riot, a South Side "ghetto" was firmly settled with predominantly African American occupancy, which extended from 22nd Street to 55th Street, between Wentworth Avenue and Cottage Grove Avenue (figure 15). During the next several decades, it gradually expanded southward to incorporate the previously White neighborhoods. The riot revealed the existence of severe racial tensions in the city of Chicago, which had been previously grounded on a long-standing racial apartheid. The bitter experience led the city to fear another racial riot and to worry about racial relations, but ironically, as Janet Abu-Lughod has pointed out, rather than mediating the racial apartheid, the city adopted a more restricted planning policy to increasingly segregate the racial groups.¹⁰ During the two decades between 1940 and 1960, the city of Chicago witnessed a massive influx of the African Americans and a subsequent expansion of the city's

Black ghetto which greatly transformed the original patterns of racial order. Accordingly, the number of

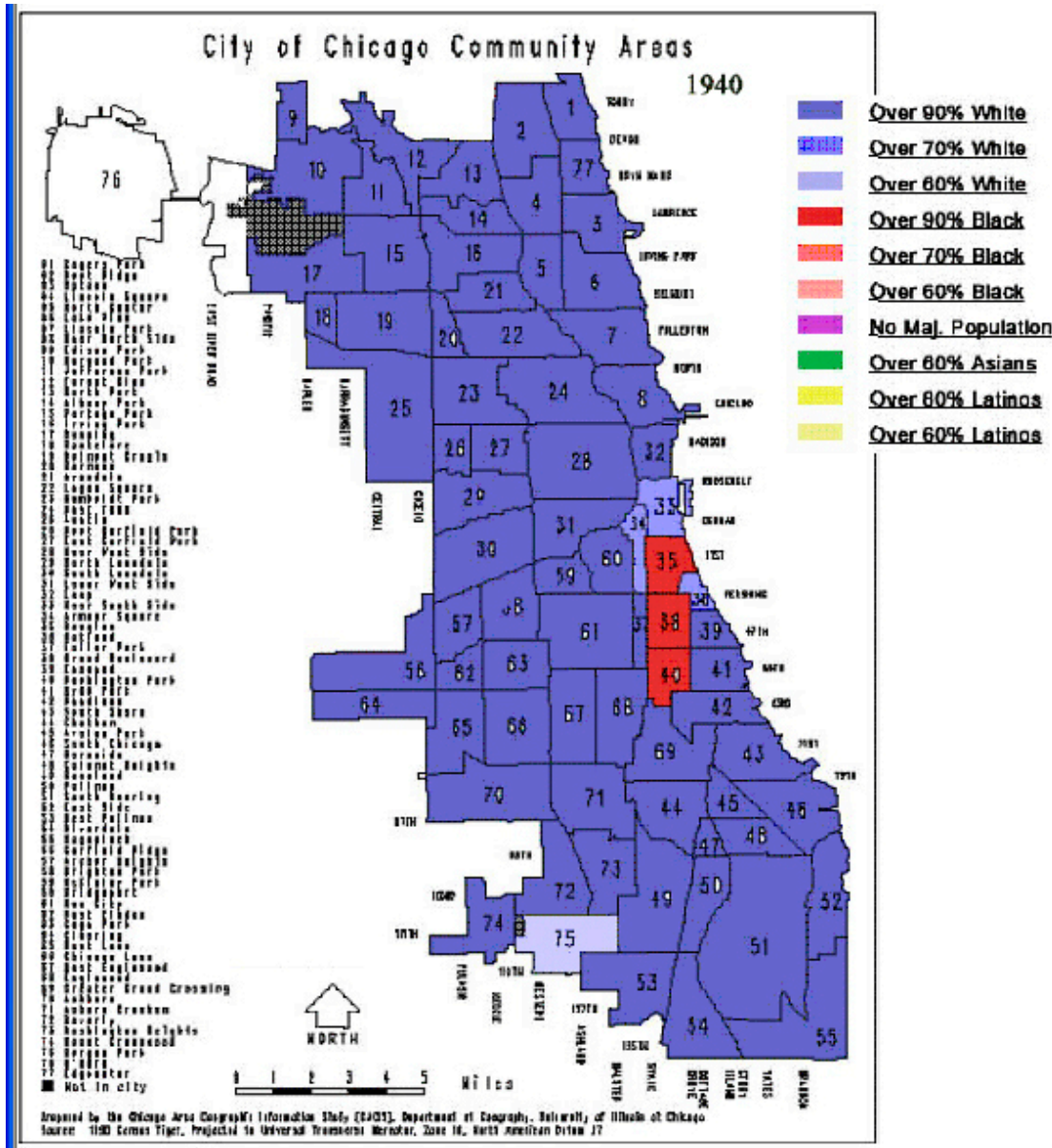


Figure 15: The map shows the concentration of Black population at the South Side of Chicago in 1940 (Source: City-data Forum, website: <http://www.city-data.com/forum/general-u-s/1090967-segregation-us-cities-visualised.html>, accessed April 9, 2011)

census tracts identified as “mixed” increased from 135 to 204 in the period from 1940 to 1950.¹¹ The increasing number of “mixed” census tracts, as suggested by historian Arnold Hirsch, however could not precisely represent “a reversal of the city’s march toward complete segregation.” Rather, it showed a process of redefining the racial borders.¹² Hirsch asserts that Black isolation was heightened with the

growth of the Black Belt. (The Black Belt refers to the chain of neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago which had a large concentration of African American population by the mid-20th century. It stretched 30 blocks along State Street on the south side and expanded only to the east and south in the second-half of the 20th century.) The percentage of Blacks who lived in exclusively Black census tracts increased 3.3 percent during the decade between 1940 and 1950. More Whites felt threatened by the presence of Blacks in their turf, and thus the number of “mixed” areas tended to be temporary, so that a new racial contour gradually began to take shape.¹³

To revive the inner city and draw investment to the downtown core, especially the Loop area, Chicago business elites actively promoted urban redevelopment of the city. The big corporations such as Marshall Field and Chicago Title and Trust Company played a seminal role in devising plans for the revitalization of the central districts. These corporate pioneers, with the support of the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (MHPC), a private reform group comprised by the city’s realty firms and prominent lawyers, architects, bankers, and industrialists, proposed plans for the public agencies to acquire land for private development.¹⁴ They advocated that public infrastructures and public housing should be constructed by state funds to clean up the “slums” and resettle the population dislocated by urban redevelopment, for which the city’s Land Clearance Commission was established “to purchase, condemn, clear and resell slum properties to private developers.”¹⁵ From the 1950s to 1970s, major infrastructural development such as the O’Hare Airport and the expressway network had been constructed, while several public housing projects were also built to accommodate dislocated populations. The city’s public authority, business elites, and city planners were allied to maintain the city as an economic power through the post-industrial transformation and expansion of the downtown area. Their efforts led to the demolition and reconstruction of the large areas surrounding two major institutions at the near south side of the Loop, Michael Reese Hospital and the Illinois Institute of Technology. These redevelopment projects, despite their success in attracting middle- and upper-middle class populations to the city, were intended to eliminate decayed dwelling tracts and anchor the sites of two prominent institutions.¹⁶ In 1958, the Department of City Planning released the “Development Plan for the Central

Area of Chicago,” which was prepared in consultation with private groups constituted by members from the leading corporations from the city downtown. The plan placed great emphasis on the physical restructuring of the downtown core, focusing on the development of office space and new activities that would contribute to economic growth.¹⁷ The document also called for the construction of a new civic center and an expressway system that would link the central district to the rest of the city. It promoted a substantial shift to a second-circuit economy characterized by finance, services, retailing, and management, aiming to reinvent the city as a postindustrial metropolis.¹⁸ In 1973, another important planning document, “Chicago 21: A Plan for the Central Area Communities,” was released as a joint effort of the city government and the Chicago Central Area Committee. The plan carried on the focus of the previous proposal and stressed physical expansion of Chicago’s downtown core. It explicitly discussed the neighborhoods to the south of the Loop such as Chinatown and Pilsen as sites for residential upgrading.¹⁹ Although, for various reasons, these two planning documents were not comprehensively implemented, they did achieve some significant success including the revitalization and residential conversion of the Printer’s Row area and the construction of Dearborn Park to the south of the Congress Parkway.²⁰ But the domination of private business interests in the coalition between the public and private sectors suggested that the primary value of urban redevelopment lay in profit maximization and economic gains. In these redevelopment projects, public good, as argued by Hirsch, was never the primary motivation, but merely a by-product.²¹

One of key concerns in Chicago was the physical dilapidation of the city’s South Side. The history of racial segregation, White opposition, and “the peaceful cooperation of local real estate boards” played a paramount role in retaining Black residential boundaries and resulted in horrific overcrowding and residential blight.²² Government support for segregation also had direct impact on the evolution of the racial borders of the city. As explained by Robert C. Weaver, the city government tended to create more ghettos during the postwar redevelopment, in which Chicago’s urban renewal programs and public housing projects accentuated artificially created racial boundaries and produced a “second ghetto” at the West Side where residents were even poorer and had less political voice than those of the South Side.

Unlike the old South Side ghetto, this second ghetto was formed with deep governmental involvement – the city-sponsored slum removal and the construction of high-rise public housing projects not only reshaped and transformed the Black Belt at the South Side, but also created a new “vertical ghetto” at the West Side to supplement the old one.²³ In a sense, public housing not only served as a strategy for the private business agents to jumpstart the urban redevelopment of Chicago, but also as a tool to redefine segregation lines by race and class.

The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was established by the State of Illinois in 1937, in response to the federal legislation creating the public housing program. In the postwar era, among the 7,644 low-income housing units operated by the CHA, about 4,000 segregated Blacks lived in the Ida B. Wells, Robert H. Brooks, and Altgeld Gardens projects.²⁴ Since 1949 when the federal Urban Redevelopment Act was instituted, the affordable housing available to the minority groups in Chicago had become scarcer due to the preferable investment in the profitable areas near the Loop which had been gradually gentrified. In addition, the slum clearance aimed at demolishing the “non-White” neighborhoods worsened the housing crisis for the city’s minorities. The Chicago’s City Council overruled the intentions of the CHA, in particular those of Executive Director Elizabeth Wood, who wished to encourage racial mixing and believed some of the new housing should be erected in White areas of the city.²⁵ Although Wood together with Robert Taylor, the first African American chairman of the CHA board, fought very hard to oppose the segregated patterns of public housing, they were forced out by the City Council in 1954 and replaced by someone “with strong connections to city hall and Chicago’s notorious Democratic machine.”²⁶ Their removal indicated a turning away from the effort to create integrated and low-density housing developments by the CHA, after which substantial policy changes occurred. Under Wood’s two immediate successors, William B. Kean (1954-1957) and Alvin Rose (1957-1968), the CHA built several public housing projects that were large, high-rise, and “prison-like” apartment buildings exclusively in poor, Black neighborhoods or areas undergoing racial transition.²⁷ These public housing projects were dominantly occupied by Black tenants, while the few projects located at the White neighborhoods such as Chicago’s Lathrop and Trumbull Park Homes only

served White tenants.²⁸ In 1964 the CHA displaced 259 families for public housing constructions, of which 234 were “non-white” households.²⁹ And by 1976, nearly 40,000 segregated low-income housing units contained in 1,273 separate buildings housed nearly 5 percent of the city’s total population.³⁰

These efforts to containing the Black and poor population within a walled city inevitably intensified the racial hostility in the city. In 1966, Dorothy Gautreaux, a CHA resident and civil right movement activist, filed a discrimination suit in site selection and tenant assignment for public housing. The Gautreaux case was settled with the court ordering the CHA to provide small-scale and scattered public housing primarily in the White districts.³¹ Meanwhile the new policy of Public Housing Authority was no longer to reproduce the existing racial composition of an area. However, in actual practice, despite the Gautreaux decision and the changing national policy, the members of City Council representing White wards vetoed relocation housing projects that would be built on the vacant lands in White districts. In addition, the reduction in federal aid for public housing due to the federal fiscal crisis also presented obstacles for the CHA to continue building public housing. Thus by the 1970s, the CHA became an “administrative backwater,” losing its political connection, financial support, and human resources.³²

Compared to its counterparts in other metropolitan cities such as New York and San Francisco, the CHA had much weaker political power and support.³³ But according to Abu-Lughod, the public housing controversies and “border wars” in Chicago were fundamentally built on “the deep racial animosities that drove Chicago’s transformation in the booming postwar decade.”³⁴ The rubric of urban renewal and slum clearance safeguarded and justified the relations of exclusion and marginalization that undergirded the city’s planning efforts, which generated social polarization and class violence.

The 1968 race riot in Chicago, also known as the King riot, was an expression of the black community’s outrage. Characterized by vandalism and destruction of properties, the riot took place at the West Side’s second ghetto. Although the second ghetto had poorer and less organized black residents compared to the South Side ghetto, the existence of the South Side ghetto provided important ideological and social foundations for the rise of the second ghetto.³⁵ The South Side ghetto presented as an entity of clearly defined racial borders, traditional acceptance, and unsettled tensions. In order to control its

expansion and the racial succession that occurred after the suburban exodus of middle-class Whites, the city government buttressed the second ghetto.³⁶ The formation of the second ghetto was also a result of the practice of the 1919 riot commission's recommendations for solving the racial hatreds and housing difficulties in the city. Instead of "forceful segregation," the commission suggested "better Negro housing" as a way to relieve racial tension while preserving the existing structure of racial segregation largely intact.³⁷ After several decades, however, the "better Negro housing" consisted of nothing more than high-rise public housing projects erected along State Street, extending from the Cermak Road (22nd Street) to 55th Street, forming a new wall in the segregated pattern of the second ghetto. As argued by Hirsch, the maintenance of the South Side ghetto and the creation of the second ghetto were both the result of the continuous forces and pressures sustaining the unequal racial relations. The "'invisible' violence of the postwar era" applied various measures of influence to maintain and expand Chicago's ghetto in both a social and physical sense.³⁸

The overwhelming racial tensions between Black and White in postwar Chicago were translated into urban forms that were fragmented and unevenly developed. The urban space was produced by spatial strategies grounded on racial beliefs and the dual forces of repression and exclusion. As the decision-making mechanism for Chicago's urban redevelopment was decidedly monitored by corporate and private interests, the postwar rebuilding of the city emphasized the economic revitalization of downtown area and investment in building transportation infrastructure and luxury housing. At the same time, it facilitated the displacement of the central area and promoted public housing projects that could absorb the dislocated population and sustain segregated residential forms. Within the context of urban segregation and uneven development, the Asian Americans in general, and Chinese Americans in particular, carefully articulated their own racial discourse to situate themselves in the Black-White binary of the racial landscape. Chinatown was a minority space inscribed with the imprints of racialized bodies. Thus it reinforced the socio-legal category of the "outsider" and became a material and spatial metaphor of racial and cultural "otherness" for the dominant society. Chinatown evolved within this context of the city's postwar urban redevelopment.

Chinatown on the Border Line

Chicago's Chinatown is located in Armour Square, west of the Near South Side and east of Bridgeport (figure 16). Armour Square has historically been an area converged with diverse ethnic groups

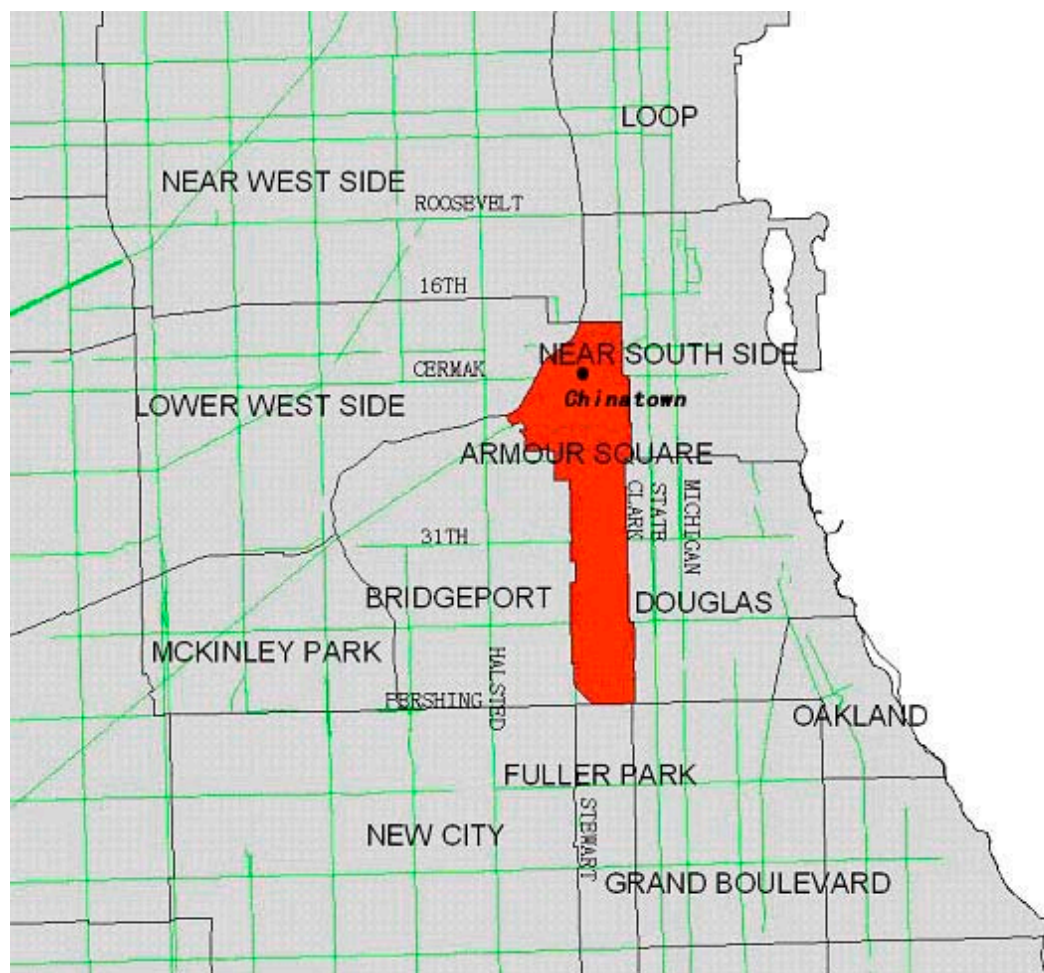


Figure 16: The location of Armour Square and Chinatown (Graphic by author, based on GIS data provided by the City of Chicago website: http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/doit/supp_info/gis_data.html)

where the Black Belt, Chinatown, and the working-class White communities were contiguous. The first settlers of Armour Square were working-class Irish, German, and Swedish laborers. In 1865, the Union Stock Yard was opened at the southern part of the neighborhood. With the establishment of new railroad trunk lines and the growth of the meat-packing industry at the edge of the neighborhood, nearly all the building lots in Armour Square were filled by the end of the nineteenth century. The various ethnic

communities in Armour Square lasted from one to three generations but started to break up as the younger generations advanced socially and economically. They moved outward in a somewhat linear pattern to the outer, newer parts of the city and often eventually into the suburbs, and they were replaced by poorer ethnic groups seeking low-rent. Thus, when the early immigrants moved out during the 1900s, Italians and Yugoslavs began to settle in Armour Square. In the 1912, the Chinese moved from the Near South Side where the first Chinatown was built (at Clark Street) to Armour Square.

Dong Jue Moy, who arrived in Chicago during the mid-1870s, was considered the first Chinese pioneer in the city, followed shortly afterwards by his brothers Moy Dong Hoy and Moy Dong Yee. Finding Chicagoans more welcoming to the Chinese than the people of the Pacific Coast, they wrote to their friends and relatives, urging them to move to Chicago. By 1928, about eight hundred Moys lived in the city, comprising a quarter of the city's Chinese population. Although the Chinese of Chicago suffered the same restrictive immigration laws and had the same disproportionate gender ratio as those on the West Coast, from 1870 to 1920 their population grew steadily.³⁹ After the first Moy settled in Chicago, he opened a dry goods store known as Hip Lung Ying Kee at Clark and Madison streets. In 1880 the store was moved to 323 South Clark, where the first Chinatown in Chicago came into shape. By the late 1880s, the early Chinatown had twelve grocery stores and three chop suey houses.⁴⁰ Unlike San Francisco's Chinatown, which had successfully remained in place despite the relocation plan of 1906 earthquake and the waves of urban renewal, Chicago's Chinatown was removed from its original Clark-Madison Street location because of the raising rents and urban revitalization. In addition, the Tong War between On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong also forced a large number of the Chinese population to move southward in 1912 to Cermak Road and West Wentworth Avenue, an area located in Armour Square.⁴¹

The Chinese were restricted to the one-square-block area at 22nd Street (Cermak Road) and Princeton Avenue with a series of ten-year leases, totaling \$50,000 in annual rents. As Italian residents began to move out, the Chinese gradually occupied the area around Cermak Road and Wentworth Avenue, which soon became the hub of Chicago's Chinatown (figure 17, 18).⁴² When the Chinese settled in the area, they didn't make much effort to alter the buildings or make them look more like the buildings

in China but instead adapted themselves to the existing buildings. Because the early Chinatown was dominated by male laborers, the standard American downtown structures were reused as tenement buildings for the single men. The buildings on the commercial street of Wentworth Avenue evolved for mixed uses such as residential hotels, shops, restaurants, warehouses, and light manufacturing businesses. The street frontages often opened directly to the street in the manner of an Asian shop house, though later they commonly adopted large expanse of glass with a recessed entry placed symmetrically in the façade.⁴³ Typically the buildings covered their lots to the allowable maximum, thereby adjoining the edge of the sidewalks and rising to a height of three to four stories.

Laundry was one of the major businesses for the Chinese settlers in Chicago, and about 28 percent of the Chinese were engaged in laundry business in 1928.⁴⁴ Another popular occupation for the Chinese was the grocery store business. Usually Chinese grocery stores provided not only groceries, but also stocked herbal medicines, clothing, house wares, and laundry supplies, most of the stock imported directly from China. In Chicago the Chinese grocery stores were concentrated in the Chinatown area. One of the first was the Hip Lung Ying Kee & Company on South Clark Street, which later moved to 233 W. Cermak Road. During the 1930s there were forty-two grocery stores within that three square block area of Chinatown. The same area also accommodated a large number of Chinese laundries and restaurants.⁴⁵ The number of Chinese restaurants grew as more Chinese immigrants arrived and more Americans gained a taste for Chinese food. With the expansion of the restaurant business, new companies were formed to provide the supplies needed by the restaurants. Some Chinatown companies specialized in certain products such as noodles, wonton, and egg rolls.⁴⁶

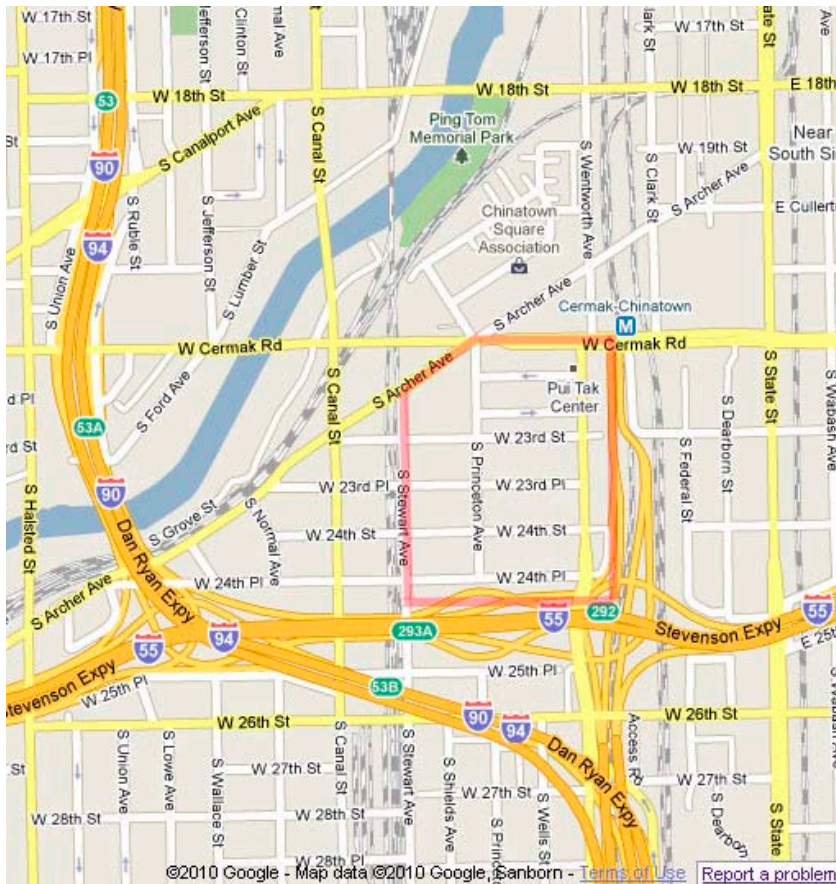


Figure 17: The core area of Chicago’s Chinatown is bounded by Cermak on the north, Stevenson Expressway on the south and east, and S. Stewart on the west (Graphic by author, based on Google map).

Compared to the old Chinatown on Clark Street, the relocated Chinatown on Wentworth and Cermak was in a much more isolated location. But perhaps because of the undesirability of the location, the Chinatown had the opportunity to flourish and development as most of the non-Chinese businesses continued to move out of the area in the 1920s and 30s and the area became dominated by Chinese businesses. The Chinatown was also fortunate to survive the widening of 22nd Street (Cermak Road) in 1922 when new buildings were erected and the construction slowly pressed southward along Wentworth Avenue.⁴⁷



Figure 18: View of 22nd Street (Cermak Road), ca. 1916 (Source: Chicago Historical Society)

The African American settlement in Armour Square was started in World War I because of the expansion of the Black Belt on the east along State Street. By the 1920s, the African American constituted 23 percent of the population in Armour Square. In the 1919 Chicago riot, many assaults and confrontations took place in the Stock Yards area, immediately west of the Black Belt. Wentworth Avenue, the major street cutting across Armour Square, was referred as the “Dead-Line” because of its role as a border separating the Black area to its east from the almost exclusive White turf to its west.⁴⁸ During the riot, Wentworth Avenue witnessed the most brutal confrontations, injuries, and fatalities. It also worked as the key policing line for the city police to separating the black and white fighters. According to the investigation conducted by the Lowden Commission after the 1919 riot, both Bridgeport and the Back of the Yards district were so hostile that the African Americans “not only (found) it impossible to live here, but expose(d) themselves to danger even by passing through.”⁴⁹ Thus despite the

geographical proximity of the respective ethnic communities, the racial composition of each enclave remained relatively homogeneous because neither Black nor Chinese could move into the hostile White areas.

Even after WWII, the segregated residential patterns remained largely untouched. In 1960, Bridgeport had 90 percent White residents, while Blacks constituted 9 percent of the population and the Chinese only 1 percent. It was constant violence towards the Black and other racial minorities, rather than restrictive covenants as that prevented the racial transition of these White working-class neighborhoods in Armour Square. In the 1970s, the Black and the Chinese population still showed little increase in Bridgeport; however Mexican immigrants then constituted about 11 percent of the total residents, indicating the beginning of Bridgeport's transformation into a racially "mixed" neighborhood.⁵⁰

Probably because of its diverse racial compositions and working-class majority, Armour Square became one of the favorite spots for the city to implement the public housing projects. According to the *Chicago Defender*, the largest African American newspaper in the nation, the sites for public housing projects "were carefully selected in areas that would present little racial friction," and "on which business, political, and racial interests can agree."⁵¹ Due to the fierce resistance from the White neighborhoods in the area, nearly all the projects were built within or close to the minority neighborhoods such as Black Belt and Chinatown, or abandoned industrial sites. During the 1940s, the public housing program built around 40 percent of new housing units in Armour Square while the other 60 percent were mostly projects converting old apartments into smaller units. By 1950, the population of Armour Square experienced a steady increase with African Americans comprising 46.9 percent of its total population.⁵² The growth was largely due to the extensive public housing projects.

During the 1950s and 60s, the construction of the Dan Ryan Expressway and the Stevenson Expressway greatly impacted the demographic and physical landscape of Armour Square. The demolition for the expressway construction caused the number of residential units in the neighborhood to decline about 25 percent, while in 1960 the population dropped about 32.4 percent compared to a decade earlier.⁵³ Nevertheless, the loss of older housing units was offset by waves of new public housing construction in

the area. In 1952, the CHA completed 147 units in two seven-story buildings known as Archer Court at 23rd Street and Princeton Avenue, on the west side of Chinatown, wherein occupants were dominantly Black with a small number of Chinese tenants. During the 1960s, two more major public housing projects were constructed: the 198-unit Armour Square apartment building located at South Wentworth Avenue, and the Raymond Hilliard Homes at 22nd and State Street.

With the introduction of the CHA public housing projects in Armour Square, the racial composition of the neighborhood underwent substantial changes. Firstly, Whites continued to move out the area in the 1960s, so that the neighborhood population had dropped about 12 percent by 1970. Following the exodus of the Whites came an influx of new Chinese immigrants due to the more lenient immigration policy instituted in 1965, as well as the African Americans moving into the public housing projects. Although Chicago's Chinatown had a relatively small Chinese population, after World War II its population experienced fast growth, like other major Chinatowns in the U.S., because of the liberation of American immigration restrictions and the Civil War in China. The Chinese population in Chicago grew from 3,094 in 1950 to 6,214 in 1960.⁵⁴ In 1970, Chicago had the nation's fourth largest Chinese population and of this group of 12,653 Chinese, one fourth chose to dwell in Chinatown.⁵⁵

By 1970, Armour Square was hardly a neighborhood itself, but rather divided into a number of enclaves, with Chinatown located at the few blocks on Cermak and South Wentworth, the Blacks concentrated south of 35th Street, while the Italians, Croatians, Spanish, and a few Irish and Germans lived in the middle of the area bounded by Comiskey Park on the south and the Ryan and Stevenson expressway on the north. At that time, Armour Square was a low-income community with very low education levels.⁵⁶ The physical landscape of the community deteriorated rapidly because of poverty and the extensive construction of public projects. Thus Armour Square became one of the neighborhoods in decline with "row upon row of dilapidated buildings, overcrowded and pest ridden."⁵⁷ A study conducted by Real Estate Research Corporation suggested that "neighborhood decline is an inherent part of the basic urban development process—the "trickle-down" process—that dominates American urban areas."⁵⁸ The research classified the neighborhood decline into five processes: decreasing socioeconomic status, ethnic

change, physical deterioration and decay, increased pessimism about the area's future, and economic disinvestment. The forces causing neighborhood decline are "super-complex," and they combine "social, racial, economic, physical, historical, political, and psychological elements."⁵⁹ In the case of Armour Square, the neighborhood decline was to a large extent caused by the city's deliberate imposition of the immense public housing projects in the area, which forcefully transformed the demographic and racial composition of the area. The massive postwar slum clearance also aggravated the decline of the old neighborhoods.

The governmental involvement through urban renewal, public housing, and slum clearance actively intervened in the neighborhood's transition and historic fabric. The politics of site selection for public projects, which were usually imposed on the least empowered social groups, further marginalized the social disadvantaged, especially the racial minorities. The Black and the Chinese in Armour Square were confined in their own enclaves, which physically, economically, and socially suffered the impacts of neighborhood decline. As an ethnic minority that was "minor" not only in term of its population but also its political economic and social powers, the Chinatown residents were also affected by the extreme housing segregation and discriminatory public housing policies practiced in Chicago. As critics have pointed out, the CHA was building "almost a solid corridor of low rent housing along State Street and nearby streets from Cermak Road (22nd Street) to 51st Street." The high concentration of public housing led to the "pyramiding of existing ghetto" and the concentration of urban vice.⁶⁰ The extreme economic and social segregation and inadequate quality of public services, including police, schools, and sanitation, resulted in high rates of unemployment, concentration of poverty, and an upsurge of the underground (often illicit) economy.⁶¹

Growing from a minor ghetto, the West Side had become a major ghetto in the city by the 1970s. In 1979, a Chinese-Canadian tourist who was visiting Chicago's Chinatown was killed at the tunnel under the Dan Ryan expressway which served as a physical boundary between Chinatown and the city's public housing complexes. The crimes had serious repercussions in Chinatown, where tourism was the pillar industry. Merchants in Chinatown complained that they bore "the brunt of the bad publicity because the

news media often unfairly link(ed) Chinatown to crimes that occur near the housing projects.”⁶² In a newspaper article titled “Chinatown still peaceful kingdom,” many Chinese residents voiced their criticism of the biased media portrayal when they realized that the community was “financially harmed by unfair publicity.” They emphasized that the Chinese were law-abiding citizens, citing the low incidence of crime among the Chinese, compared to other ethnic groups in Chicago. A Chinese interviewee explained to the journalist that the Chinese were taught to honor their parents and obey the law from a young age; she said “Our aim is always to become better citizens and to play a more important role in American affairs, to contribute our culture to the American culture.”⁶³

The way that physical distance between the two communities was discussed also revealed the eagerness of Chinatown residents to differentiate themselves from the neighboring “second ghetto.” A newspaper article asserted that the railroad viaduct and the Dan Ryan expressway were barriers that divided the region into “two very different worlds” (figure 19). On one side was Chinatown, “a well-



Figure 19: The channel under the railroad viaduct at the west side of the Chinatown connecting the community to the West Side ghetto. It was deemed dangerous to cross through the channel which has a

high incidence of crime. The Chinatown community requested the city to close down the channel in the early 2000s, but the request was denied, ca.2010 (photo by author).

ordered community and one of the city's top tourist attractions," while on the other side was "a couple of public housing complexes, along State Street on both sides of Cermak Road, where the crime rate is high and the danger to out-of-towners who stray is real."⁶⁴ David Sibley has indicated how Whiteness has been associated with order, rationality, and qualities, in contrast with Black disorder, irrationality, and looseness in a colonial context.⁶⁵ He argues that the use of White and Black to represent these qualities is intended to make White social behavior virtuous and to legitimate White rule. In the system of values, Whiteness has become a symbol of virtue, goodness, and order.⁶⁶ By drawing an analogy to White virtues, the Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants engaged in the process of portraying themselves as a "model minority" and sought ways to improve their positions in the racial social ladder. The fear of crime and the idea of encumbrance by deviant Blackness to threaten the normal society justified and legitimated the erection of real barricades demarcating spatial boundaries. The boundaries were both spatial and social. Panic feelings and intensive suspicion heightened boundary consciousness among the Chinatown residents. The social cleavages between the residents of the so-called "two different worlds" were virtually a social product of the mainstream society. To relegate dominated groups to the social margins by claiming for them inferior and immoral attributes was historically a way of legitimating exploiting and excluding. In the urban renewal process, urban planning and public housing have allied in a common effort of segregation and control. The asymmetrically distributed power relations of surveillance were disguised by interethnic conflicts in which ethnic minorities struggled against each other for a better publicity and community life. In the context of urban transformation, the Chinese immigrants used the rhetoric of "model minority" to try to win the advantage for their own urban agendas. Especially when tourism became a dominant aspect of Chinatown development, such discourse was also used in Chicago as well as other Chinese communities to project a positive image as a safe and family-friendly place. As shown in Chapter One, for instance, the refusal of the Chinese in San Francisco to participate in the city's anti-poverty campaign was a result of their

rejection of publicity emphasizing the unpleasant aspects of Chinatown as a low-income community. However, their efforts couldn't change the fact that their neighborhood was further marginalized and segregated through the planning mechanism implemented by the institutional apparatuses. The external constraints and spatial obstacles limited the range of choices that Chinatown would have in developing the community's social and political revenues.

Freeway Construction and Urban Segregation

Post-war redevelopment in the city of Chicago, as mentioned before, was due to private capital. The decision-making mechanism of the private/public coalition tended to be directed by corporate business interests. Because these focused on reviving the city's downtown area, the urban renewal program failed to provide a concerted redevelopment policy for the regions outside the central area. As Squire, Bennett, McCourt and Nyden have observed, "No other part of Chicago away from the Loop and the near north lakefront has been subject to a comparable expenditure of public or private resources."⁶⁷ However, despite the uneven distribution of redevelopment resources, the areas outside the downtown district were not immune to the forces of urban renewal and did not remain intact. In fact, the impact of urban renewal substantially transformed the landscape of these non-central areas and profoundly influenced their future development. The authors observe that "South Side and West Side renewal set in motion huge migrations of displaced residents, for the most part black, into neighborhoods more removed from the central city."⁶⁸ The *Chicago Defender* published an article titled "Urban Renewal for whom?" which resolutely argued that the city's redevelopment plan failed to supplement the shortage of "low and middle income housing both private and public," and moreover, that the plan maintained extant lines of segregation that denied African Americans "free access to the housing market."⁶⁹ Compounded with the extensive program of public housing construction, the city successfully reorganized its spatial patterns through reconstructing the downtown area, improving affluent neighborhoods, and building transportation networks, but at the cost of displacing the poor and the racial minorities.⁷⁰

During this era when urban renewal programs dramatically transformed the city landscape, Chinatown as an ethnic enclave was influenced by these urban trends. The unequal distribution of urban renewal funds made the poor and working-class neighborhoods suffer long-standing neglect and pay the costs for the economic growth of the private sector and the expansion of the dominant institutions. Chinatown, adjacent to the Black Belt and other “mixed” working-class neighborhoods, was itself classified as a “slum” or “blighted area.” It was one of the neighborhoods that was neglected as resources were diverted to downtown commercial development, construction of transportation network and luxury waterfront condominiums. The Housing Act of 1949 and 1954 legitimated the local government practice of acquiring and cleaning lands in blighted areas for resale to private or government developers. Ironically, despite the fact that Chicago was a major beneficiary of federal funds for urban renewal, the poor and minority populations were not the beneficiaries of the urban renewal projects. To the contrary, they were forced out of their own neighborhood, but seldom provided alternative affordable housing.⁷¹

After the war, the Chicago Plan Commission recommended that the City Council build a comprehensive superhighway system in the city.⁷² Seven expressways would “relieve traffic jams on local streets which depreciate surrounding property values and at the same time set up boundaries for neighborhoods, which is a part of the master plan for rebuilding Chicago.”⁷³ Among the seven proposed highways, two of them, the Dan Ryan Expressway⁷⁴ and the Stevenson Expressway, would bypass Chinatown and connect at a location around 26th Street and Lowe Avenue. As a major branch of Chicago’s free superhighway system, the Dan Ryan Expressway was the biggest single highway project in the Midwest. Its route was designed to start from Congress Street at Union Avenue, cross to the west side of Chicago River and connect with the Stevenson Expressway at Archer Avenue (figure 20, 21). It then would roughly parallel Wentworth Street to 63rd Street and swing to follow State Street through the south. During the summer of 1957, the state, county, and city highway departments started to acquire land for the expressway construction. The three levels of highway departments separated their responsibilities for three sections of the highway – the city was charged with the section from Congress to 39th Street; the state was responsible for the section from 39th to 63rd, and the county charged section from 63rd to 103rd

Street. The federal government provided 90 percent of the construction cost; the rest was covered by the local government.



Figure 20: Locations of Dan Ryan Expressway and Stevenson Expressway (Graphic by author, based on map on website: <http://www.rosals.com/images/chicagoarea.gif>)

Despite the relatively easy settlement of the expressway funding, land acquisition for the highway didn't go smoothly because of the vigorous resistance from the neighborhoods in the south. Local civic groups in the Roseland area opposed the proposed traffic interchanges at Cottage Grove Avenue and South Park Avenue, claiming that the interchanges were "unnecessary and detrimental to the highway and the residential neighborhoods."⁷⁵ The two avenues were also considered too narrow to accommodate heavy traffic between 95th and 103rd Street.⁷⁶ Their opposition was successful and the area traffic

interchanges were eventually eliminated from the planned east leg of the Expressway. In addition, some south side residents worried that the expressway construction would interfere with their homes and business. Representatives of the Richton Park village board, for instance, urged the county and state highway engineers to move the route in Richton Park at least one-mile west, asserting that the village had already filed a plan for expansion with the county before the expressway was planned. This was an important argument because state law entitled villages to expand within one and one-half miles outside village limits. Since Richard Park is bordered on the west by factory land and bisection of the area might invite slummification, location engineers for the county highway department agreed to reconsider the route of west leg of the Expressway crossing the Richton Park village. After a year of difficult negotiation, the last parcel of land was procured in the summer of 1958.

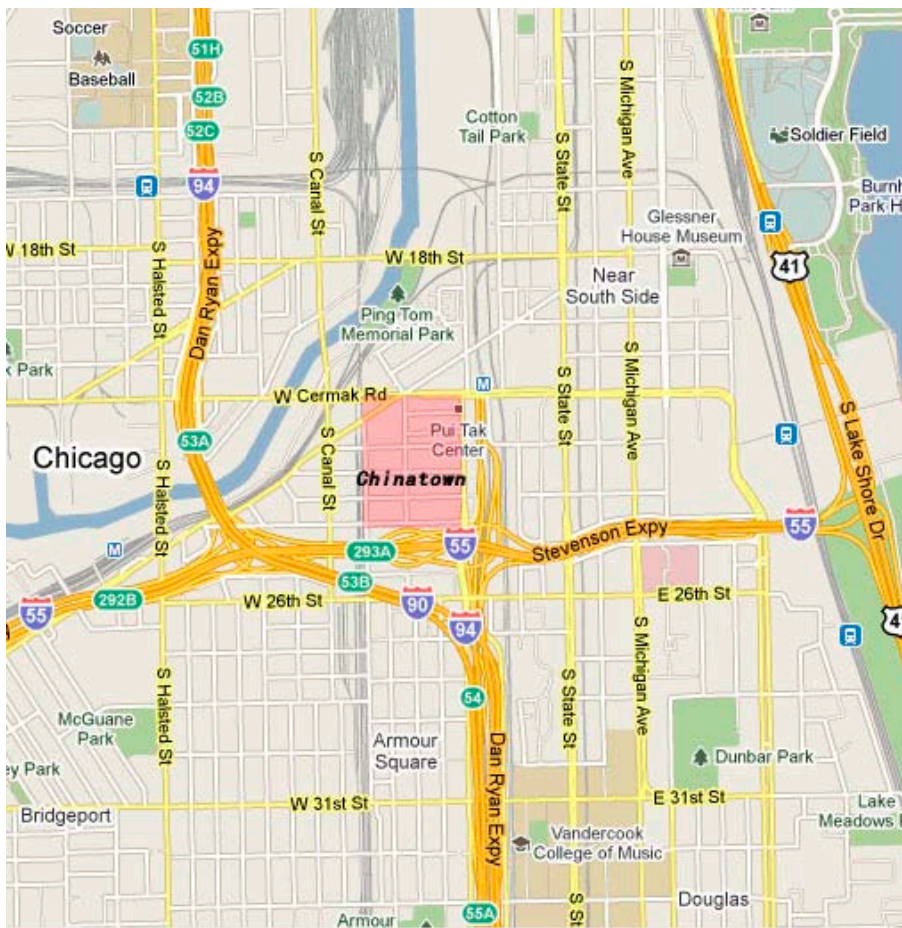


Figure 21: Dan Ryan Expressway and Stevenson Expressway has posed as physical barriers restricting the expansion of Chinatown (Graphic by author, based on google map)

In December 1961, at the opening of the first section of the Dan Ryan Expressway, Mayer Daley optimistically declared, “Congress and Northwest expressways, with this Dan Ryan expressway to be finished next year and with the Southwest expressway now underway is bringing a renaissance to the central business district. New skyscrapers are announced almost daily. The dispersal of population and business to the suburbs is being reversed.”⁷⁷ However, the expressway construction was delayed due to a controversy over whether the Chicago River should be crossed by a fixed bridge, a lift bridge, or a tunnel.⁷⁸ When a fixed bridge was eventually built over the Chicago River, the Ryan Expressway was officially opened in December of 1962. To the east of the expressway, public housing projects including Stateway Garden and the Robert Taylor Homes were erected overlooking the expressway, which were named “Daley’s legacy as the creator of modern Chicago.”⁷⁹

By cutting through the densely populated south side neighborhoods, the Ryan Expressway was like a “knife through the Negro community.”⁸⁰ With the “slum clearance, several poor neighborhoods in the south—among them the Armour Square—disappeared as communities. As Pacyga has argued, the placement of the Dan Ryan along Wentworth Avenue “somehow contain(ed) the city’s growing African American population behind its traditional borders.”⁸¹ Along with the rows of public housing projects congregated at its east side, the Dan Ryan replaced the Wentworth Avenue to become a new, more powerful racial divide of the city. While the Black population experienced a major decline of 50 percent in Armour Square, it meanwhile became heavily congregated in the southern part of the area. The Fuller Park, at the south of Armour Square, for instance, had a dramatic increase of the Black population, which made up 96 percent of the residents as the Dan Ryan was being constructed. In Englewood, further down south of the Fuller Park, the Black population grew about 59 percent.⁸² In a sense, the Dan Ryan not only redrew the racial lines of the city by driving the African Americans to the south, but also contained them in the second ghetto on the expressway’s east side. As one of the oldest ethnic neighborhoods in Armour Square, Chinatown was also significantly impacted by the demographic and socio-economic changes brought to the area by the expressway construction. It didn’t suffer the demolition that the Black area had suffered, because Chinatown stood at a distance from the swathe of construction.⁸³ The Ryan Expressway

was mostly criticized for razing the old neighborhoods at the south and intentionally segregated the growing Black population. But for the Armour Square, the expressway together with public housing projects dramatically transformed the historical fabric of the neighborhoods and hindered their social and spatial mobility. Within the declining area where traditional neighborhoods were deteriorated, the tropes of spatial practices maintained and reinforced Chinatown as a subordinated “minority space.”⁸⁴

A major highway construction that more directly affected the Chinatown community was the Stevenson Expressway.⁸⁵ The expressway’s 17.5 mile route starts from the Dan Ryan Expressway near 26th Street, extends southwest in the bed of the long discarded Illinois-Michigan Canal, and connects to the U.S. Route 66, the Chicago-Springfield-East St. Louis highway. The expressway was proposed to provide a high-speed connection between the central district and the Chicago Midway airport, and it was advantageous for the highway department to use the relatively vacant right of way offered by the canal. However, the state department held up approval of the project while challenges to the state’s ownership were decided.⁸⁶ After several years in court, the land title controversies were settled, and in 1961 the Stevenson Expressway construction was eventually approved. Similar to Dan Ryan Expressway, county, city, and state highway departments collaborated on the construction and the federal government provided 90 percent of the construction fee under the inter-state highway program.

In 1962, land clearance for the Stevenson Expressway started. Compared to the Ryan Expressway, Stevenson Expressway has a shorter route, and most of which passes through industrial, railroad, or vacant sites. Thus there were few controversies with respect to land clearance and residents’ resettlement during its construction. Nevertheless, two groups of south side residents, the Longwood Civic Association and the Organization for the Southwest Community, began to watch the Aberdeen Street site after learning that the house at 9903 Aberden St. would be moved to 9643 Genoa Avenue, a site not zoned for the flat buildings. The organizations organized some 50 neighborhood residents to protest the removal of the building by parading on the sidewalk. By then the building had already been moved part way into the street, whereupon the building engineer was charged with moving a dwelling without proper permit. In contrast to the resistance from the southern neighborhoods, Chinatown remained relatively silent, even

though the expressway's path would tear the community into two parts by running across the southern part of Chinatown. In addition, the expressway would effectively prevent any future southward expansion of Chinatown.

If the Stevenson Expressway had set a physical barricade on the south side of Chinatown, the construction of the Franklin Street Connector placed another wall on the eastern edge of the community. Because the Dan Ryan Expressway was considered the busiest and "most dangerous" in the city, to relieve the traffic load, the city proposed a new extension known as the Franklin Street connector to provide a direct connection with the Loop. Concerned that the highway extension might take away their housings on South Wentworth Avenue, the Chinatown residents voiced their concerns. The city soon clarified that the path of the connector would leave the buildings in Chinatown intact.⁸⁷ However, a new route for the Franklin extension was proposed a year later. The new route would start at the Cermak exit of the Dan Ryan at 24th place and would continue along the eastern bank of the south branch of the Chicago River to connections with the upper and lower levels of Wacker Drive at Harrison Street.⁸⁸ Before the construction plan was finalized, the city decided to acquire 22 parcels of land in the heart of Chinatown, with the expectation of acquiring all the necessary rights by the year of 1969.⁸⁹ A wrecking company was awarded a contract to demolish stores, apartment buildings, and warehouse structures located on the east side of Wentworth Avenue from 18th Street to Cermak Road. Hardin Square Park, the only nearby recreation space to the Chinatown community, as well as several historic structures, including Sun Sing Theater that had catered to the Chinese laborers since the Chinatown was formed, were torn down to make way for the expressway extension.

The land acquisition for the Franklin extension severely disrupted the historic and social fabric of the Chinatown and decreased the available land for affordable housing. Like the Chinatowns in San Francisco and New York, Chicago's Chinatown also experienced rapid population growth and severe housing shortage after the war. Nevertheless, the city officials and state highway spokesmen ascribed the rash demolition of the Chinatown buildings to the "hazardous conditions" of the area, wherein "the buildings, nearly all of which are vacant, have missing windows and segments of walls, and debris is

scattered around.”⁹⁰ Throughout the end of nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Chinatowns were historically perceived by the western public and the city officials as blighted, unsanitary, and districts harboring vice. Because of this perception, they were also regularly the objects of slum clearance or urban renewal programs to make a way for the city’s modernization.⁹¹ The imagery of a typical slum, as mentally attributed to the area, justified the city’s imprudent decision to raze the properties and dislocate the local residents even before a final decision on the expressway route had been reached. Ironically, the razed site remained vacant for several decades because the expressway extension project eventually took a different route. In 1980, the vacant lots were converted into a parking lot to mediate the parking problems in Chinatown.

The Department of Urban Renewal was responsible for relocating the residents in the razed area, but most of the dislocated residents did not want to leave Chinatown, to which they were emotionally and socially connected. Of the twenty-five families and fifty-nine single persons affected, the agreement between the city and the Chinatown organizations caused the removal of four families to the nearby Raymond Hilliard homes and the rest stayed within Chinatown. The relocation process went surprisingly smoothly. Representatives of the Department of Urban Renewal declared that they had “excellent cooperation from the community in finding new homes for the residents.”⁹² In *Chicago Tribune*, an article titled “Urban Renewal Comes to Chinatown with Ease” applauded Chinatown as “a proud community that preserves its traditions” and praised the community for the way that they handled the urban renewal process. It asserted that the relocation process in Chinatown didn’t receive as much resistance as in the south side of Chicago where the process was “resented” and urban renewal was “viewed as ‘people removal’.” It further emphasized the “dignity” of the Chinese residents by highlighting Chinatown as the most impacted by potential loss of land because of its constrained geographical condition and the estimated number of people who would be relocated.⁹³ In contrast to the historic stereotypes of Chinese immigrants as uncivilized and immoral, the article perpetuated a new stereotype of “model minority,” by which the Chinese immigrants were perceived as docile, modest, and cooperative. The myth of “model minority,” which held that the Chinese merged into main stream society quietly and unobtrusively, was

used in the newspaper article to compare them favorably with people from “south side areas” where African Americans were historically congregated. While this may have served the Chinese well, as a strategy for differentiating between ethnic groups, its racial biases were clear.

Although the relocation occurred peacefully, Chinatown was left with a severe housing problem. To relocate those displaced within the Chinatown area, the city sold a 3-acre vacant property adjacent to the Ryan-Stevenson expressway exchange to the CHA for construction of moderate-income housing. The project developer decided to install modular townhouses on the site and sell them to the families. However, although financial package was supposed to enable the families to buy the housing units, the housing was still out of reach for most low-income families. Without a committed effort to create new affordable housing for the community, the city placed the community in a desperate situation.

With the construction of the two major expressways in the 1960s and the completion of the Franklin Street Connector in the 1970s, Chinatown had been firmly surrounded by physical barriers segregating the neighborhood from the rest of the city. Unlike the old Chinatown whose boundary was policed by constant social surveillance and racial violence, the postwar Chinatown was formed through the imposition of physical enclosure walls. The 1934 census showed that tract 3401 (located at the north side of core Chinatown bounded by Clark Street at the east, 18th Street at the north, Cermak Road at the south, and the South Branch of the Chicago River at the west) had 553 residents, among which 79 percent were Chinese. In 1980, the census tract showed that Chinese occupancy in the same area dropped to 71 percent of the population. This reduction in occupancy, especially in the face of the dramatic growth of Chinese population in the core area of Chinatown,⁹⁴ was almost certainly caused by the demolition of affordable housing in the construction of Franklin connection. With the completion of the expressways surrounding Chinatown, a large number of Chinese started to congregate at the core area of Chinatown. Here the Chinese had constituted less than 10 percent in 1934, but by 1980 the figure had risen to more than 74 percent.

The city-sponsored public projects not only forcefully defined the geographical territory of the Chinese community, but also marginalized their status, identity, and social relations. It effectively

performed their status as subordinated subjects. The built environment is not a neutral stage for the unfolding of social relations, and the construction of walled enclaves can't be understood simply in terms of geographical or physical location or distance: it entails qualitative relationships circumscribed in space.⁹⁵

The expressway constructions were celebrated by the city elites as the symbol of Chicago's entry into the new modern world as imagined by modernist architect Le Corbusier and his followers in the 1920s. Accordingly, the city was improved with a new airport, numerous skyscrapers, and the superhighway system, which gave great impetus to the economic development of the city. However, the triumph was achieved at a cost to the inner-city neighborhoods because the "renaissance" was grounded on the depreciation of the civil rights of the urban poor and minority groups, whose "blighted" neighborhoods were torn asunder or demolished to make a way for the public projects and redevelopment programs. A report evaluating land values in Chicago before and after expressway construction selected eleven areas along the major expressways for investigation and concluded that all areas "exhibited net value increases over time," which generally proved "the hypothesis that increased land values are associated with increased accessibility, resulting from expressway construction and measured by distance to the roadway." Significantly, the only exception was the area delineated along Eisenhower Expressway where "(a)nticipation of the ghetto expansion westward into the Eisenhower test areas appears to have lessened the desirability of owning land in those areas, contributing to lowered demand and, in turn, decreasing land value." Thus, only in those areas where racial change did not occur, the land values were increased.⁹⁶ This study, to an extent, revealed that the expressway construction not only reinforced or reshaped the racial geography of the city through entrenching physical barriers between the neighborhoods, but also intervened in the social and demographic transformation of the old neighborhoods via changing land and housing prices. The racial minority and urban poor became the most vulnerable groups, not only excluded from the potential benefits of increased land values brought by expressway construction, but actually suffering property devaluation when their neighborhoods experienced racial change due to urban restructuring.

David Sibley has argued that “Locations are selected which remove the minority from areas valued by the dominant society, and in isolation, the design and regulation of space are supposed to induce conformity.”⁹⁷ These schemes demonstrate the state’s role in securing the interests of dominant society through socio-spatial control of the marginalized groups. Michel Laguerre also asserts the importance of spatial analysis in identifying hegemonic and subaltern sites of relationships and understanding minority question and minority status in American society. He points out that the organization of space is a reflection and mechanism of the way in which “power is parceled, stratified, and deatomized.”⁹⁸ Thus the imposition of a new spatial order on the Chinatown can be understood as hegemonic sector’s attempt to provide an infrastructural basis of domination and control. The agenda of urban growth and urban renewal legitimated these spatial practices of positioning and maintaining the subaltern sites.

“Self-Help” in Chinatown

As discussed above, population growth and the imposition of city urban renewal projects led to an acute shortage of affordable housing in Chicago’s Chinatown. Compared with San Francisco’s Chinatown which was surrounded by upper-income white neighborhoods and the Financial District, Chicago’s Chinatown was physically constricted by the new expressways, leaving it no space to grow. To relieve the housing shortage, the Neighborhood Redevelopment Assistance (NRA) actively participated in the campaigns to provide more housing for the community. The organization is a non-profit organization founded by G. H. Wang, a former diplomat from Nationalist China in 1959. The Chinatown Coalition for Better Housing (CCBH) that played a leading role in the housing development in San Francisco’s Chinatown, grew from the city-sponsored Chinatown Citizen Advisory Committee for the 701 Project for Chinatown Housing and Recreation. In contrast, the Chicago NRA was an organization heavily relying on community resources and private partnerships. Since the 1970s, the Civil Right movement had inspired nation-wide activism in Asian American communities. Thus motivated, the NRA started to take a more active role in the housing development in Chicago’s Chinatown. The organization built several housing

projects in the 1970s, which included three-story buildings with twelve condominium apartments (at the northeast corner of 24th Place and Wentworth Avenue), twelve two-story townhouses (at the south side of 24th Place), and eight townhouses (at the northwest corner of 25th Place and Wentworth) (figure 22). All these housing projects were private funded and targeted to middle-class Chinese Americans. Instead of seeking government subsidizes, the NRA adopted an innovative strategy of fund raising, which was to pre-sell the housing to those who were willing to make down-payments of 25 to 40 percent. The prices of the condominium housing ranged from \$27,000 to \$29,500 per unit, and the townhouses were priced at \$37,000. In addition to the down-payment, the buyers had to qualify for mortgages from the First Federal Savings & Loan Association of Chicago. In these ways, the developers secured the financial sources for the new housing construction and significantly decreased the investment risk.⁹⁹



Figure 22: Townhouses at the south side of 24th Place, ca. 2004 (photo by author).

Noticing the rapid development of Chinatown housing, a newspaper article titled “No Government Aid Sought” argued that it was the character of the Chinese themselves that drove the community’s autonomy in developing the housing projects. In the interview with the author, Wang asserted that “With our people, it’s a question of our philosophy of saving face... Much as they might need to, they do not want to take any federal or any other government aid... Our Chinese-Americans in Chinatown believe in self-help and in helping each other.” Based on Wang’s assertion, the author explained how the Chinese virtues of hardworking and “saving for the future” meant that they did not have to rely on the government to improve their community.¹⁰⁰ Although intended as praise, this idea that Asian Americans could “make it on their own” deflected attention away from societal factors contributing to racial inequality, and was linked to the political and ideological construction of a non-racial discourse that focused primarily on culturally based differences. According to this perspective, the fate of the Chinese was not caused by external economic and political forces but by their own behavior.

Although the housing development in Chicago’s Chinatown seemed successful in terms of fund raising and making maximum use of community resources, the projects did not actually suit community needs. The new housing projects that were intended to attract middle or upper-middle income Chinese Americans back into Chinatown, in fact *excluded* most of the existing Chinatown residents who were working-class laborers, with a median household income level well below that of the city. Chinatown also had a high percentage of elderly, many of whom had lived there all their lives as part of the old “bachelor society.”¹⁰¹ Chalsa Loo observes that where discrimination had previously forced the development of a homogeneous neighborhood along ethnic lines, a new homogeneity along class lines emerged after the war.¹⁰² With the postwar repeal of discriminatory anti-Chinese laws, the Chinese Americans with better incomes tended to move into adjoining outlying neighborhoods or suburban areas, while the poorest people remained in the Chinatown. Rental units continued to be the dominant form of housing in Chicago’s Chinatown, exceeding 50 percent.¹⁰³ The units were overcrowded and lacked necessary amenities, but the rents were generally lower than the city median rents, and so large numbers of new

immigrants went there in search of affordable housing. Thus, although Chinatown had undergone many important changes in the 1960s and 70s, it remained a low-income community.

In 1972, the NRA group proposed to build a low-income rental building in Chinatown for the growing numbers of the Chinese elderly, many of whom lived in substandard housing but paid more than one-quarter of their income for it. The NRA leased a one-acre site at 23rd Street and Princeton Avenue from the CHA in 1977 and planned to build a nine-story, 139- one-bedroom unit apartment building on the site. Duane E. Linden & Associates was commissioned to design the building with an “oriental motif and landscaping similar to that of an oriental garden.”¹⁰⁴ Subsidized by the HUD mortgage insurance of \$4-million through the 1968 Housing Act, the development was also designated for Section 8 support, which provided payments to individual landlords to cover the gap between the tenant’s income and the prevailing fair market rent evaluated by HUD. When in 1979 the Chinatown Elderly Apartment building was completed, it was the first housing project in Chinatown constructed through public-private partnership (figure 23).



Figure 23: Chinatown Elderly Apartment building with pagoda roof over the central entrance and oriental motifs in the panels between the vertical supports, ca. 2004 (photo by author).

Despite the success of the elderly housing, no such efforts were made in the following decade. Instead, the community leaders and developers focused on projects that would attract young Chinese American families and professionals return to the Chinatown. This idea of developing Chinatown as a middle-class community had been in the mind of the community leadership. For a long time In 1945, Gerald H. Moye, the honorary mayor of Chinatown, had asked the City Council to pass an ordinance that would declare the Chinatown district a “blighted area.” He hoped that the city would be able to acquire the land of Chinatown under the slum clearance law and then sell it to the Committee for Chinatown Redevelopment constituted by Chinese elites and merchants. The Chinatown Redevelopment Committee planned to build 80 single dwelling units and apartments to house 900 Chinese families. Moye projected that the rent would range from \$12 to \$15 a room. However, the City Council rejected this proposal, believing that the rent was too high to justify terming the project “slum clearance.” The proposal didn’t get through, but it revealed the efforts of the Chinese elites to make Chinatown a desirable place for the well-to-do families and then create an imagery of “model minority.”

Driven by profit, the Chinese elites and developers introduced townhouses and luxury condominiums that only middle or upper-middle income Chinese families could afford. According to the 1990 census, Chicago’s Chinatown had the smallest proportion of one room units (habitation affordable by individuals) and nearly half of its housing units had more than four rooms. In contrast, San Francisco’s Chinatown had 67% of its housing accommodating units with less than four rooms.¹⁰⁵ In addition, while over one-half of the rental units in San Francisco’s Chinatown were located in multi-unit housing complexes, only one-third of the rental units in Chicago were in multi-unit structures.¹⁰⁶ Peter Kwong’s work *The New Chinatown* exposed the reality of vicious oppression and exploitation imposed on Chinese workers that were concealed under the myth of “model minority” and economic boom of Chinatown.¹⁰⁷ Although housing stock in Chinatown did improve, the improvements were not felt by the working class members of the community who could no longer afford to live there. The “model minority”

myth that portrays Asian as the most assimilated and successful minority group, as Lisa Lowe has argued, tends to “underscore Asian American heterogeneities” in terms of class, gender, culture, and national origin.¹⁰⁸ With the increase of the land values, Chinatown experienced an intra-ethnic gentrification of the community. The poor Chinese immigrants became more segregated in the old core area of Chinatown, while the new developments were mostly occupied by well-do Chinese families.

The promotion of the Chinese as an independent, hard working ethnic group able to take care of itself was used to justify the inadequate federal funding subsidies and lack of governmental involvement in solving the severe housing crisis. The oblique stereotypes of “model minority” obscured the actual living conditions and the fact that most Chinese immigrants were still struggling with poverty and substandard housing conditions. The Chinatown community redevelopment groups who sought self-funded financial resources for new housing projects weren’t trying to solve the shortage of affordable housing, but rather to construct Chinatown as a middle-class community. The attribution of the Chinese virtues of “saving face” and “self-help”—although voiced by the Chinese themselves— were picked up by the media as a convenient racial ideology that distinguished the Chinese from the stereotype of welfare-dependent African Americans.¹⁰⁹ It also perpetuated the myth of “model minority” by ignoring the fact that the lack of institutional and political support left the Chinese with few choices but relying on themselves. The Chinese families were regarded as “excellent tenants” who “are neat and orderly” and “discipline their children... pay their rent... don’t wreck the property.”¹¹⁰ When the number of Chinese families in Archer Courts public housing dropped from 57 to 19 in 1958, the local newspaper asserted that “the Chinese Americans are industrious, which means they are likely to raise their income beyond the limits permitted by the CHA. Then they are kicked out, and the apartments are filled with people with lower standards of industry and morality.”¹¹¹ The passage juxtaposed the stereotype of the Chinese American as industrial and docile, against the stereotype of African American as “people with lower standards of industry and morality.” Thus, the “model minority” stereotype was not only constructed from the perspective of White superiority, but also played a didactic role among the ethnic minorities through

stratification of the ethnic groups according to the levels of assimilation and accommodation to the norms of good manner, civilization, and morality.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed in depth the socio-economic transformation and ideological changes that undergirded the evolution of urban forms in the city of Chicago through the 1960s and 1970s. In the pre-war urban pattern, Black and White communities were separated by physical distance. Political and economic repression that tried to avoid violent confrontations between the two groups led to the consolidation of the south ghetto. After the war, the municipal government's increasing intervention in urban planning and the urbanization processes created a new form of segregation. Under the name of renewal and redevelopment, the old residential pattern was destroyed through socio-spatial strategies such as congregating public housing in undesirable areas and installing a divisive superhighway system. The transforming urban forms indicated the coalition of the different levels of government to "redescribe and renew accounts of the interdependencies and interrelations of the regional unit."¹¹² A rationalized and centralized government structure provided an effective network of service and resources for the entire metropolitan region.

The study of Chicago's Chinatown in the context of postwar urban restructuring advances a more thoroughgoing vision of landscape changes grounded on the socio-economic transformation of urban society through post-industrial processes. Focusing on issues of housing and territory constraints imposed by the city, Chinatown is conceived less as a cultural image or ethnic entity, and more as a complex social space containing dynamic interactions, relations, and set of beliefs formed by and informing a sense of identity. The particular urban history of Chicago that was featured as a long-standing racial apartheid and spatial battles between the White and the Black placed the Chinese Americans in an ambiguous racial dynamics. With the deeply entrenched White/Black racial binary and tensions, the Chinatown residents were not only geographically constrained within the divided racial enclaves, but also socially restrained by the city's deliberate construction of its racial borders. Furthermore, by actively contributing to the

construction of “model minority” imagery that placed them more in the mainstream, the Chinatown community groups actually rejected the representation of themselves as poor, instead, focused on attracting the middle- or upper-middle Chinese immigrants back into the community.

In sum, this chapter has sought to capture the series of distinctive agendas for spatial transformation in Chicago’s Chinatown. What we see within the landscape of Chinatown is a measure of evolution, and above all a continuing emphasis upon racial hierarchy and social controls of marginal groups. The chapter has showed how, through postwar urban renewal, new and distinctive forms of ethnic landscape were produced by the spatial agendas grounded on unequal power relations. At the same time, however, on the ethnic community had its own internal issues of authority, representation and claims to identity. Its identification as a “model minority” and the rhetoric of “self-help” were forms of “proper” display and performance of collective imageries of Chinatown community. They clearly functioned as vehicles for claiming upward social resources, through which the working-class majority of the community was rendered invisible as a new social structure came into shape.

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¹⁴ Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, *Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest: The Case of Public Housing in Chicago* (New York: Free Press, 1955), 145-7.

¹⁵ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 110.

¹⁶ Gregory D. Squires, Larry Bennett, Kathleen McCourt and Philip Nyden, *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 154-6.

¹⁷ Squires et al., *Chicago*, 152-7.

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²⁹ The Department of City Planning, City of Chicago, *A Review of Progress Under the Workable Program or Community Improvement*, 1964: 63.

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- ³⁶ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 15-16.
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- ⁴⁰ Susan Lee Moy, *The Chinese in Chicago: The First One Hundred Years, 1870 – 1970*, Master Thesis, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1978.
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- ⁴² For the history of Armour Square, see Will Hogan, "CA34 – Armour Square," in *Local Community Fact Book: Chicago Metropolitan Area–1990*. Chicago Fact Book Consortium (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, 1995); Michael P. Conzen, ed. *Geographical Excursions in the Chicago Region* (Washington D.C.: Association of American Geographers, 1990); Glen E. Holt and Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Historical Guide to the Neighborhoods: The Loop and South Side* (Chicago Historical Society, 1979).
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- ⁶⁹ Squires et al., *Chicago*, 254.
- ⁷⁰ Squires et al., *Chicago*, 168.
- ⁷¹ Squires et al., *Chicago*, 104-5.
- ⁷² "7 Major Roads, 300 Feet Wide, Asked for City," in *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov 19, 1943.
- ⁷³ "7 Major Roads."
- ⁷⁴ Dan Ryan Expressway was first known as South Expressway and renamed for Dan Ryan, president of the Cook County Board, after he died in 1961.
- ⁷⁵ "Residents Win; Exits Trimmed from Highway," in *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mar 20, 1958.
- ⁷⁶ "Residents Win."
- ⁷⁷ Hal Foust, "Open 3 Miles of Dan Ryan Expressway," in *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec 13, 1961.
- ⁷⁸ The proposal to build a tunnel under the river was denied because of the high cost of construction (about 50 million dollars). Shipping interest groups insisted a lift bridge would be the best choice for both the automobile traffic and vessels plying the river. Traffic and highway authorities otherwise argued a movable bridge might cause traffic congestions and the cost at approximately 10.6 million dollars would be much higher than constructing a fixed bridge for 2.6 million dollars.
- ⁷⁹ Dominic A. Pacygain, "The Busiest, the Most Dangerous, the Dan Ryan," in *Along the Divide: Photographs of the Dan Ryan Expressway*, Jay Wolke (Santa Fe: The Center for American Places, 2004).
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- ⁸¹ Pacygain, "The Busiest, the Most Dangerous, the Dan Ryan," 73.
- ⁸² Pacygain, "The Busiest, the Most Dangerous, the Dan Ryan," 75.
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- ¹⁰⁷ Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987).
- ¹⁰⁸ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 68.
- ¹⁰⁹ Shanshan Lan, *Learning Race and Class: Chinese Americans in Multiracial Bridgeport*, Ph.D Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007.
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Chapter 3: Restructuring the Space of Production in New York's Chinatown

The Chinese in New York City had since the 1870s traditionally settled along Mott Street and its surrounded areas on the Lower East Manhattan. The area was adjacent to the Bowery and the Five Point Area that was notorious for criminal activities, gang wars and severe pollution problems. As more than half of the Chinese population worked in laundries scattered throughout the metropolitan area before WWII, New York's Chinatown was the social and political center for the Chinese with a concentration of the family and district association headquarters and commercial facilities. Like the early Chinatowns in San Francisco and Chicago, New York's Chinatown was dominated by male laborers because of the exclusion acts that prohibited family reunion. In the bachelor society, vice industries such as prostitution, gambling, and opium dens prospered. But after the repeal of the Chinese exclusion act in 1943, these declined as the ethnic community gradually turned into a family-oriented society.¹ In 1950, the core area of New York's Chinatown that was bounded by Canal Street, Worth Street, Bowery and Baxter Street contained approximately 4,000 Chinese, while the surrounding area had between 1,000 and 2,000 Chinese residents (figure 24).² Mott Street between Canal Street and Chatham Square was known as the historic heart of Chinatown. The first Chinese general store had opened in 1872 around the intersection of Mott and Pell Streets, from which the Chinatown had grown into being. Since then, Mott Street has teemed with restaurants, herb stores, tea houses, and gift shops, mostly catering to the needs of tourists (figure 25).

Because of their relatively small population size, the Chinese were categorized as "Others"—as distinct from Whites, Blacks and Puerto Ricans—in the census of Lower Manhattan. Not until when the narrow quotas applied to Chinese were broadened in 1965, a large influx of Chinese immigrants flowed into New York's Chinatown, which not only resulted in social changes of the community, but also a significant physical expansion of territory. According to the census, there were 69,324 Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants living in New York City in 1970, comprising 0.9 percent of the city's total population.³ Of these, about 24,000 were settled in the Chinatown area, and they also gradually

began to extend into the surrounding areas including Little Italy, East Broadway, Bowery and Chatham Square. It was the first time in history that new Chinese immigrants in New York City outnumbered those who went to California. Since then, New York’s Chinatown has been the largest Chinatown in the nation.

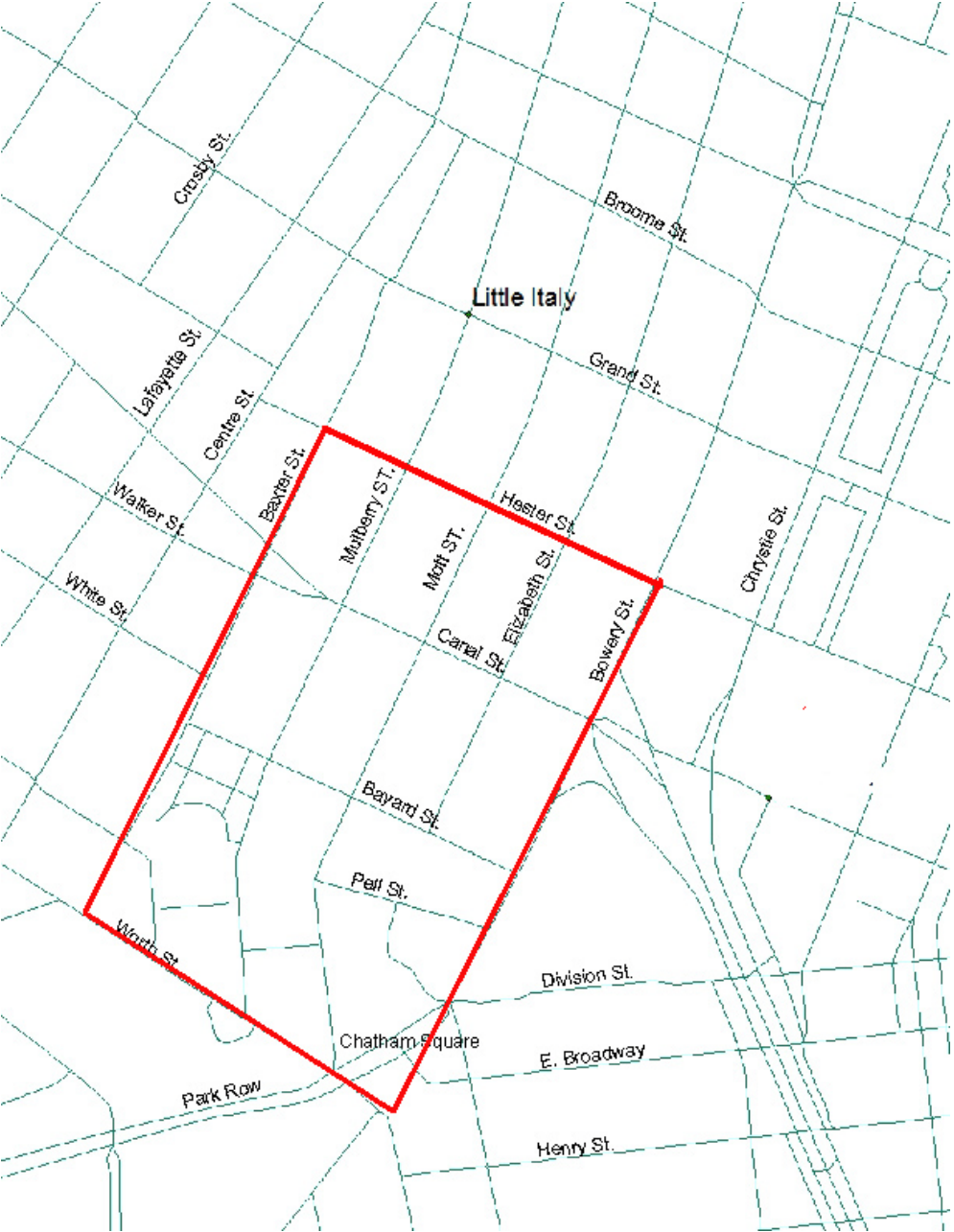


Figure 24: The core area of New York’s Chinatown (Graphic by author, based on GIS data provided by the New York City government at http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/eservices/eservices_gis_downloads.shtml)



Figure 25: Storefront of 38 Mott Street in historic Chinatown, ca. 1903 (Source: <http://www.nychinatown.org/storefronts/mott/38mott.html>, accessed on Dec. 1st, 2010)

Jan Lin observes that New York's Chinatown "displays signs of both the lower-circuit traditional sector and the advanced sector of transnational capitalism."⁴ The juxtaposition of international and national banks with the locally-oriented ethnic restaurants and sweatshops makes Chinatown a site of "heterotopia," in which incompatible spaces or temporalities are hierarchically distributed.⁵ The underlying dynamic interplay between the upper and lower circuits functions in a critical relation to the polarized spaces in the form of socio-political conflicts over land-use policy and community redevelopment. Though the schism between the two circuits is also manifested in other Chinatowns, New York's Chinatown is one of the most dramatic owing to the New York's central position in the world economy. Especially since the 1970s, the city officials have actively engaged in a campaign to encourage foreign investments in New York City. City planners have also used the mechanism of urban policy to facilitate such trends. In Chinatown, local real estate and finance interests have sought to redevelop the community through the stimulus of spatial restructuring. The influx of oversea capital has incited an

upward spiral of real estate values and gentrified Chinatown by the construction of luxury housing and office buildings.

This chapter takes a retrospective look at some of the major spatial controversies that occurred in New York's Chinatown within the context of urban redevelopment. The chapter starts with an introduction of the shifting socio-economic conditions of the Chinatown within the context of urban restructuring and the political changes of homelands. It then describes the territorial expansion of the Chinatown and the impact of the expansion on the community and the inter-ethnic anxiety that it provoked among the Chinatown residents and their neighbors. It then focuses on some of the key issues with respect to the city's zoning regulations and planning efforts, and the controversies surrounding the process of spatial restructuring. As a port-of-entry ethnic enclave, New York's Chinatown is a key place where urban authorities have forged a social order and racial hierarchy through planning apparatus. Thus the focus of the chapter is upon the ideology and social meanings underpinning landscape changes. It identifies the series of agendas producing and reproducing the space of Chinatown, and examines the multiple facets of the complex and contingent characters of spatial processes in the urban ethnic community.

Transnational Capital Investment and the Shifting Sociopolitical Patterns in Chinatown

By 1898, Greater New York City had come into shape with five boroughs – Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and Bronx – consolidated into the city. In 1916, in response to growing population and increased densities in both tenement zones and commercial districts of the city, New York instituted the first zoning law of the nation, which played a significant role in creating the now distinctive skyline of Manhattan.⁶ In the mid-1950s, lower Manhattan was declining as midtown gradually replaced it as the commercial center, and in response a partnership of public authorities and private investors was initiated to rejuvenate lower Manhattan by 1970. Cooperation between the businesses and government agencies was considered the most ideal mode of urban redevelopment for its speed and economic efficiency, according to Harry Schwartz. Schwartz proposed that the problem of relocation could be handled by

limiting the re-rental of vacant apartments before the start of relocation and by bundling the operating cost of vacant apartments into renewal budget.⁷ The specific goals of urban renewal had the following order of priority: slum clearance, renewal of blighted areas, upgrading substandard houses, downtown remodeling, new public buildings, solving traffic problems, and house preservation.⁸ Despite the seeming efficiency of the public-private partnership, it was criticized in some quarters for “finding justifications for investments [rather] than ...weighing the rationality of investments.”⁹ In a sense, the urban redevelopment program was mainly employed to attract capital resources to expedite development of the area, rather than for the public good of society.

When Lower Manhattan was successfully revived to attract global capital investment in the 1970s, New York’s Chinatown likewise attracted a large influx of oversea capital from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian countries. Given the uncertainty of the political environment in these regions or countries, many wealthy merchants transferred their capital to the western countries, among which the United States was one of the most favorable destinations. Furthermore, because of cultural familiarity and social affiliation, Chinatown was perceived by the oversea Chinese investors as the first experimental site for investment. Although San Francisco and Chicago were also among the destinations of Chinese investments, New York’s Chinatown ranked the most popular probably due to the city’s reputation as the most established international commercial and financial center and because the Chinatown was the largest in the United States. Since the early 1970s, a large amount of capital has flowed into the community, most of it in the form of real estate investment. As a result, the traditional streetscape of small-scale and low-rise buildings has been interrupted by newly constructed steel and glass skyscrapers. Furthermore, the concentration of oversea capital in real estate led to the inflation of property values. During the five years from 1970 to 1974, land values in Chinatown increased 34 percent, while the building values increased 24 percent (at \$62 to \$210 per square foot, comparable to properties in midtown).¹⁰ Local business also experienced major growth. The growing number of small enterprises led to a competition for commercial space and eventually a spiraling of rents. In addition to substantial amount of “key money” (money paid covertly, and usually illegally, by a prospective tenant to a landlord as inducement

to secure a rental), the monthly rents for commercial units dramatically increased. Thus many small businesses that were unable to compete with well-financed businesses were gradually forced out of Chinatown.¹¹

In addition to changes in real estate, change also occurred when foreign capital was invested in banks, restaurants, garment factories, media, and other enterprises. By 1980, eight commercial banks and three saving banks with a total of thirteen bank branches had been opened in the Chinatown. One of the largest transnational banks, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, opened its Chinatown branch in 1977, and in a few years over a million dollars had been deposited in the bank.¹² Many other banks, including the Manhattan Savings Bank, Citibank and local banks such as the United Orient and the Golden Pacific, all reported successful business in the Chinatown.¹³ 80% of the deposits of these banks came from the Chinese patrons, most of them refugees from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian countries.¹⁴

The influx of foreign capital, to an extent, accelerated the development of Chinatown business and provided employment opportunities for the community people. However, this had no discernible effect on the living standards of Chinatown residents because the cost of living rose at a faster rate than employment opportunities. From 1970 to 1974, Chinatown saw a 14% increase in family income, but the cost of living had increased 40%.¹⁵ Thus Chinatown residents did not benefit from outside investment; rather their real income decreased. As John Wang has noted, many community residents were justifiably concerned that the continuous influx of foreign capital would place more pressure on the already crowded space and force out small business and working class residents by pushing rents to outrageous heights.¹⁶ Profits from foreign investment rarely contributed to the improvement of the community infrastructure, and jobs created as a result of overseas investment were usually low-wage jobs with long hours and no job security. Such conditions could hardly provide upward mobility for the ordinary people in the community.¹⁷

In addition to transnational investment, the tides of immigrants who entered America through the liberation of immigration act in 1965 also imposed significant pressures on the community's services. Because the existing social services were not sufficient to accommodate the needs of new immigrants,

who faced significant stresses as a result of their translocation, problems such as juvenile delinquency, mental disease, health and welfare crisis, and family dysfunction started to threaten the everyday life of the neighborhood residents. The traditional mode of self-help inherited from the bachelor society appeared to be insufficient, incapable of solving the emerging social problems. At the time, the social scientist Stuart H. Cattell concluded, “The most pressing need in Chinatown is an effective community organization that would bridge the gaps between the numerous voluntary associations and thereby break the log-jam of conflicting interests and inaction which is holding up the solution of many problems.”¹⁸

However, along with increasing social problems, the community was further endangered by a divided leadership. The traditional family associations, tongs (secret societies),¹⁹ and merchant groups were connected under the leadership of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). The CCBA was historically perceived as the “City Hall” of Chinatown, representing most of the community organizations to make Chinatown a coherent social entity. Nevertheless, since the 1960s the emergence of new social agencies led by second-generation Chinese Americans became a powerful challenge to the old authorities. The friction between the CCBA and these younger organizations was stirred by the numerous community problems that threatened the safety and health of Chinatown residents but remained ignored or unsettled by the CCBA. Although it represented Chinatown’s fifty-nine family associations and trade groups, the CCBA was criticized for its ineffectiveness in dealing with problems such as housing shortages, teenage gangs, and unemployment. For instance, the CCBA officer responded to the problem of young street gangs in Chinatown by saying, “There are always a few bad ones. We are more interested in setting up a scholarship fund for the good ones.”²⁰ The CCBA typically viewed the community problems as “internal” issues and rarely sought governmental aid. The indifferent or maybe ignorant attitudes and insufficient understanding towards some of the most severe community problems caused people to question the leadership ability of the traditional organizations. In addition, the members of those associations tended to be older with the values of that generation, whereas the younger people no longer relied on the kinship network to pursue their American dream. Grounded on the social rules of the Old Chinatown, the traditional organizations seemed incapable of responding to the very real needs of young

Chinese-Americans and new immigrants, who in consequence then turned away from the CCBA to their own social organizations. Thus CCBA's role became uncertain. A survey conducted in 1976 found that the majority of the Chinatown residents did not know the services that the CCBA purported to provide for the community.²¹ Although the CCBA started to question the traditional strategy of self-reliance and cooperated with the city government to establish the Chinatown Advisory Council under the leadership of Manhattan Borough President, it was still considered too conservative to handle many of the community problems.

As the old power structure waned, new community groups consisting of professionals and new-generation Chinese Americans became involved in community activism. Sometimes there was competition and friction between the old and new social organizations, fueled by the limited governmental funds and resources that could be allocated to the Chinatown. For instance, the dispute between CCBA and Chinatown Planning Council (CPC), a city-sponsored community organization, over the building of P.S. 23 brought the internal rift of the community to the surface. The P.S. 23 building was a vacant, 87-year-old school building at Mulberry Street (figure 26). Both the CCBA and the CPC wished to procure the building for their own uses. The competition lasted for a few years and eventually ended with the triumph of the CCBA after its successful fundraising for former Mayor Abe Beame's election campaign. Since then, the Chinatown community became more divided with conflicting interests and gaps between the different generational organizations.

In addition to the CPC, which was an active advocate for the community with extensive services such as a manpower program, daycare center, employment and legal aid, school counseling, and translation, some other organizations also grew out of the 1970s with the vigorous support of young Chinese Americans and significantly influenced by the Civil Rights, Black power, and anti-Vietnam War movements.²² Of these, one of the most influential organizations was the Asian Americans for Equal Employment (AAFEE) which was formed in 1973 to fight the discriminatory hiring practices of the construction industry. It organized a series of demonstrations and protests against the construction of the Confucius Plaza housing project in Chinatown, where discriminatory hiring practices toward Asian

American workers were alleged. Through such efforts, the campaign eventually won more construction jobs for Asian Americans throughout the city.



Figure 26: The controversial P.S 23 building nowadays is the Museum of Chinese in America, ca.2006 (Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/70323761@N00/331531471/>, accessed Oct. 5, 2010)

The different types of social organizations representing distinct social and political interests pulled the Chinatown community in many directions. Although similar situation also happened in other Chinatowns, the antipathy in New York's Chinatown tended to be more open and intensive. While in San Francisco and Chicago traditional organizations such as CCBA still played a dominant role in the sociopolitical life of the Chinatowns, measured in ways such as property ownership and media control, the power struggles between the social organizations in New York's Chinatown remained active. Some influential professionals and businessmen, striving for greater unity, tried to bridge the gap between the old private organizations and young public agencies, but their efforts didn't succeed. The complicated

processes of the transforming social, economic, and political landscape of Chinatown challenged the established historical fabrics and social norms of the community. Of the multiple forces from both outside and inside, from above and grassroots, the existing categories of identity, power hierarchy, and ethnicity had to be renegotiated and reconstituted.

Chinatown in Expansion

In 1965, approximately 4,769 Chinese entered the U.S.; the following year the number increased to 17,608. A special exemption in 1967 brought another 25,000 Chinese immigrants. And from 1968 to 1974, more than 138,000 Chinese immigrated into the nation.²³ Because of the large numbers of new immigrants, the Chinese ethnic group began to be officially recognized as a “minority group” in lower Manhattan district. The dramatic influx into Chinatown led to severe crowdedness in the small section centered at Mott and Pell Streets and Chatham Square where the core area of the Chinatown was located. Under the combined pressures of rapid population growth and foreign capital investment, the territory of Chinatown quickly expanded. In contrast to San Francisco’s Chinatown that was constrained by wealthy neighborhoods and Financial District, and Chicago’s Chinatown hampered by the highways and railroads, New York’s Chinatown was able to grow to the north and the east, an area previously dominated by the Italian and Jewish immigrants (figure 27). In 1969, a journalist of *The New York Times* studied the Mulberry Street, the old center of lower Manhattan’s Little Italy, where several Italian restaurants were congregated. He observed that nearly all the Italian restaurants were gone, replaced by Chinese shops and restaurants. “There was a day when Chinese residents of the area were clustered together in a few blocks, not daring to venture north of Canal Street, even for a stroll,” he wrote, quoting an elderly Italian resident’s remarks. “Maybe it was the traffic, but many (the Chinese) also were afraid they would be beaten up. Now, they are not only across Canal, but they’re buying houses and flats as far north as 14th Street.” By 1980, the Chinese were estimated to own 70% of the buildings in Little Italy. Even along Mulberry Street, the major corridor of Little Italy, nearly half of the properties were owned by the Chinese.²⁴

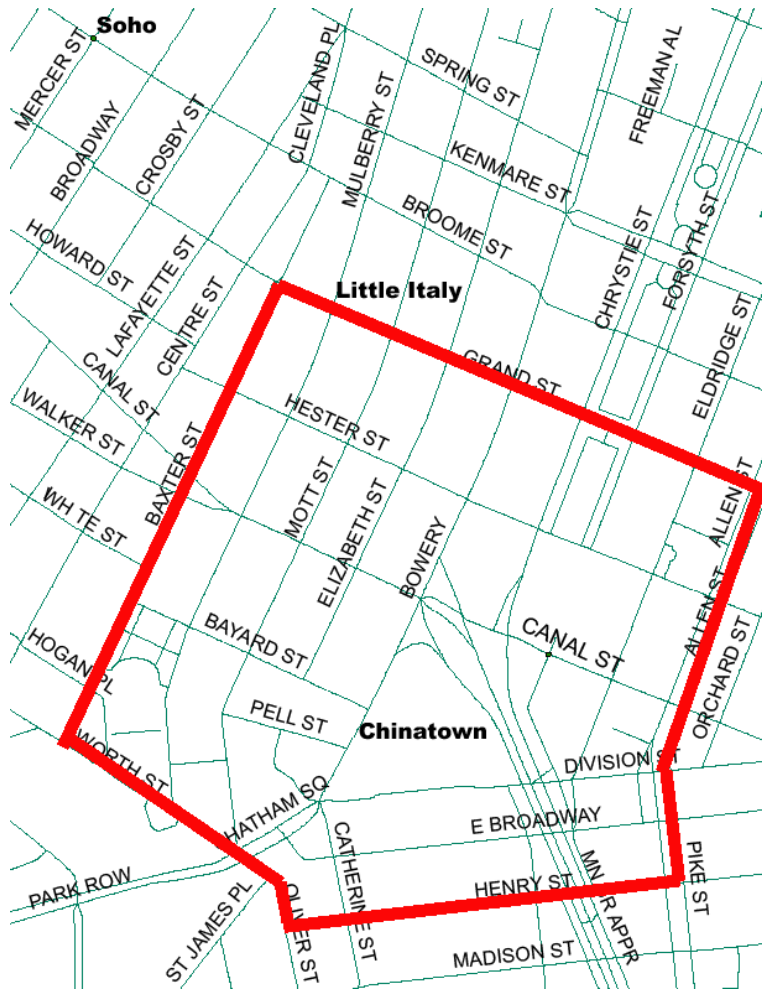


Figure 27: Chinatown centered on Mott and Pell Street, and Chatham Square expanded both northward and westward to Little Italy. (Graphic by author, based on GIS data provided by the New York City government at http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/eservices/eservices_gis_downloads.shtml)

The Chinatown’s expansion into the Little Italy was partly caused by the moving out of second-generation and upwardly mobile Italians who preferred to shift to Bensonhurst and the suburbs. The Italian businesses in Little Italy had experienced steadily decline during the 1970s, which provided opportunities for the new Chinese immigrants who preferred the familiar living environment and proximity to Chinatown that Little Italy offered. But the rapid expansion of Chinatown sparked some tensions between the Chinese and the Italian. The latter worried that “there may not be any more Little Italy”²⁵ –a fear that was well grounded. The Chinese merchants actively acquired old tenement buildings around Mulberry Street, renovated them, and raised the rents to about four times of original prices. Given

the shortage of housing in the Chinatown, many Chinese were willing to pay for the rental units, despite prices that exceeded typical market value.²⁶ In these tenements, Chinese tenants constituted a majority. Chinese merchants also acquired commercial units in Little Italy. Conflicts tended to occur more often when the stores were still run by Italian shopkeepers. Some of the Italians charged their Chinese landlord with overcharging on rents.²⁷

Confronted by the rapidly changing cultural landscape of Little Italy, the Little Italy Restoration Association, with the assistance of the City Planning Commission, initiated a plan in 1974 to revive the community. In 1976, the City Planning Commission successfully designated the Little Italy a Special District, in which special zoning district legislation was employed to “establish a framework in which the potentials of communities with distinct characteristics can be realized.”²⁸ Whereas the 1961 zoning ordinance of the Little Italy district had promoted high towers covering a limited portion of the site while leaving maximum open space at the ground level, the revised special legislation attempted to preserve the unique identity of the neighborhood “in a unified, coherent fashion” and also provide guidelines for the future development of the community.²⁹ The legislation placed a great emphasis on the vitality of street life and preserving the small scales of the neighborhood in order to strengthen the economic base of the community. By prohibiting vehicular traffic at Mulberry Street, the plan encouraged greater pedestrian use of the street and the growth of retail businesses.³⁰ Though the community leaders of the Little Italy reached an agreement with the Chinese property owners to maintain the Italian characteristics of the streetscape, the new zoning legislations received opposition from the Chinese merchants because it required all the stores located in Little Italy’s commercial zone to display Italian characteristics, with no exception for those owned by the Chinese (figure 28). Although the concept of preserving cultural neighborhoods, applied here to the Italians, could equally have served the interests of the Chinese under different circumstances, the Chinese merchants saw the legislation as an instrument impeding the operation of Chinese business in Little Italy and restraining the expansion of the Chinatown into that area.³¹ In a public hearing regarding the institution of a Little Italy Special District held in 1976, over 80

percent of the attendants were Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants. They asserted that although



Figure 28: A view of a typical Italian restaurant on Mulberry Street of Little Italy, ca.2008 (Photo by author)

the Chinese constituted over half of the residents in Little Italy, they were excluded from the decision-making process. The Chinese also questioned the boundaries of the Little Italy as defined by the Special District regulations. Because some blocks were all occupied by the Chinese, they insisted that these should be considered as part of the Chinatown. In addition, the restrictions on the percentage of the Chinese-occupied residential units and Chinese owned stores, and on the display of Chinese characters on store signboards were considered damaging to the interests of Chinese business owners and Chinese residents.³²

Despite the continuous expansion of Chinatown, the increasing numbers of new immigrants still appeared a big dilemma for the community's social coherence and housing provisions. As upwardly mobile Chinese Americans moved away to areas such as Jackson Heights, Corona and Flushing in Queens, those left behind were mostly people with lower incomes and less social mobility. The 1970 census revealed that the Chinese families in New York's Chinatown had a significantly lower median

income (\$7,344 a year) than the Chinese in the rest of the country (\$10,610 a year). Between 20 to 33 percent of Chinatown residents lived in poverty.³³ In 1975, the unemployment rate in Chinatown was 12 percent, compared to a nation-wide rate of 8.6 percent.³⁴ In 1979 the median household income in Chinatown was \$9,668, which was only 70% of the median household income in New York City. Oppressed by poverty, Chinatown residents also struggled with a severe housing crisis. Although nearly all apartments in Chinatown were covered by rent control or rent stabilization laws, the residents still had to pay an increase of 300% in rents from 1970 to 1980, in which the household income increased only 40%.

Most housing was in poor condition. Approximately 80% was old tenement buildings built before 1901, and one of every 12 apartment units lacked adequate heating and plumbing facilities. Many of the buildings violated the city's minimum housing standard and building codes. For example, it was common for the residential units to lack air ventilation or windows in the bathrooms, and some didn't have private bathrooms at all. Because of the dilapidated conditions and poor wiring systems, many of the tenement buildings were firetraps – accordingly, there were five to six major fires on average annually in Chinatown.³⁵ Despite the bad quality of the housing, there were few vacancies for residential units: the vacancy rate in tenement buildings was less than 2%, and there were no vacant units in subsidized housing projects.³⁶

Only a few subsidized projects had ever been built in Chinatown. The low turnover rates and long waiting lists made the likelihood of getting into subsidized housing very slim – only 19 percent of the Chinatown residents lived in public-aided dwelling units in 1980. The community had a level of overcrowding that was three times higher than the rest of Manhattan borough, which made it one of the most densely populated residential areas in New York City.³⁷ Although the median rents in Chinatown were lower than other parts of Manhattan, over half of the Chinatown households paid about 50 percent of their income for the rents. The great demand for housing led to corrupt practices. Landlords were able to avoid statutory restrictions on rent by asking illegally for “key money,” which usually would be paid “under the table” before signing the lease. In one case, displaced tenants paid \$400 per month for a two-

bedroom apartment, but the “key money” was \$4000.³⁸ With apartments in such short supply and with such huge up-front costs to moving in, it is little wonder that residents accepted substandard conditions.

Despite the over-crowdedness and generally unpleasant living conditions of Chinatown, the commercial units were in great demand and the rents almost quadrupled from the mid-1970s to 1980. Stores and offices began to replace residential units located at the upper floors of tenement buildings. As over half of the tenement apartments were converted to commercial units, the housing crisis worsened. Approximately 500 apartments had been eliminated, and 1,400 residents had been displaced from 1970 to 1980.³⁹ The CCBA reported that by 1982, there were around 350 to 400 restaurants and 500 garment factories in Chinatown, which employed more than half of the Chinatown residents.⁴⁰ However, these businesses, like the residents, were challenged by the rising real estate values. For example, the rent for a fish market on East Broadway increased from \$1500 to \$4500 per month following the expiration of the lease. Paralleling the increasing rents was the rapid growth of the real estate market in Chinatown. The exchange of real estate properties were three-and-one-half times more frequent in Chinatown than in the rest of Manhattan.⁴¹ The vigorous market was largely the result of the influx of overseas capital. Around 30% of the total assets of Chinatown were presumed to come from foreign capital.⁴² Unlike Japanese investment in U.S. which was concentrated in office buildings and hotel properties in midtown and the financial district, Hong Kong investors preferred to invest in loft buildings and garment factories in Chinatown and the surrounding area of the Lower East Side. Through renovating or converting the buildings into condos or office buildings, the owners could triple the value of their original investments. In this way, the Hong Kong capitalists boosted property values on the Lower East Side – the closer they were to the heart of Chinatown, the higher the property values. Little Italy and the old Jewish neighborhood at the southeast side of Chinatown were also affected by inflated prices and gentrification.

Thus, the expansion of Chinatown involved not only the displacement of the Chinese, but also the dislocation of other ethnic groups such as Hispanics and Blacks, who imputed their mistreatment not to the handful of wealthy investors but to all Chinese, especially those living in the Chinatown. Probably as a result of this, several cases of anti-Chinese violence were reported in the Lower East Side. As asserted

by a member of the Committee against Anti-Asian Violence, “Other ethnic groups in the area are confusing two different groups: the immigrant workers and the Hong Kong investors... There is a sense among non-Asians in the community that all Asians own land and are taking over.”⁴³ The antagonism provoked by the foreign investment and subsequent gentrification led to racial friction between the Chinese and other minorities. Unlike the Chinese in Chicago’s Chinatown who played as “victim” to the vices accumulated by the public housing project built at its neighborhoods, here the Chinese were identified as the aggressors breaking into the neighbors’ territory and take over their properties. The clash was perceived as one of ethnicity, when it was really provoked by class. This indicated the incompatibility of the upper circuit of transnational capital investment with the lower circuit economy dominating the everyday life of Chinatown and Lower East Manhattan. The conflicts of the two circuits were not only manifested in the controversies over land-use planning, economic development, and community redevelopment,⁴⁴ but also the inter-ethnic disputes over territory and spatial identity.

Special Zoning and the Controversies

With the institution of the Little Italy Special District, the New York City Planning Council also proposed a plan in 1977 to establish Chinatown as a Special Zone. Similar to Little Italy, the proposal for Chinatown emphasized commercial development by increasing the number of stores in the community. It planned to stimulate new building construction while simultaneously preserving the existing building scale in order to maintain the distinct cultural identity of Chinatown. With respect to the impact of the special zoning regulations on Chinatown development, the community members voiced their concerns. First, they believed the zoning plan would not relieve the severe housing shortage of Chinatown but would, with its emphasis on encouraging commercial land use, further inflate real estate values and thus present a bigger dilemma for affordable housing. The building height restriction proposed by the Special Zoning also would limit the opportunities of developing low-income housing in the community. Secondly, although commercial development in Chinatown would increase the tax revenue, the community members worried that the government would reduce funding for the community’s social

services. Nine public daycare centers in Chinatown were already closed because of state funding cuts, which posed a hardship in a community where most family members worked long hours at low-paying jobs. The Special Zoning for Chinatown was criticized for “planning shrinkage” by encouraging industrial and commercial development by gentrifying the neighborhoods. The physical boundaries of the Chinatown district defined by the Special Zoning were also criticized for restraining the future growth and territorial expansion of the Chinatown.⁴⁵

Despite the controversies, in 1979 the City Planning Commission and Department of City Planning conducted the Manhattan Bridge Area Study (MBAS), which included the Chinatown Study Area (CSA).⁴⁶ Grounded on the Street Revitalization Plan of 1976, the MBAS attempted to grasp a deeper and broader understanding of the dynamic of the study area, especially the Chinatown community that was experiencing explosive growth. The study described the CSA as “a point of entry for new Chinese/Asian immigrants, as a housing resource for low income people, as a production center for the Garment District, as a major tourist attraction, as a center of Chinese culture and services.”⁴⁷ It recognized the intense spatial competition within the community after 1965 and the increasing land-use for office buildings and luxury condominiums. By pointing out that the original zoning regulations had generally favored commercial development over residential use, the study emphasized “a wide range of housing opportunities within the area so as to encourage the retention of moderate and upper income residents.”⁴⁸ Given the continuous growth of the Chinatown population, it suggested that in addition to the rehabilitation of old housing stock, new housing should be constructed to meet the desperate needs of the community. New residential buildings could be financed by both private and public programs, but the plan had to be “infill in nature rather than redevelopment oriented.”⁴⁹

In 1981, the City Board of Estimates decided to institute a Special Manhattan Bridge District based on the suggestions of the MBAS. The special district consisted of twelve blocks bounded by East Broadway, Oliver, Monroe and Pike Street. The purpose of the rezoning was to encourage development that would enhance the neighborhood by providing more housing and community facilities. The regulations particularly encouraged new constructions on vacant lots by relaxing the floor area ratio of

these individual sites to accommodate bigger and higher buildings. The overall intention was to preserve the general character of the entire community, while facilitating development. The qualification for buildings constructed under the Special District regulations required developers to provide at least one amenity designated for the benefit of the community as a whole, which could entail rehabilitation of selective buildings (on or off the site), community space for non-profit organizations, or subsidized low and moderate-income apartments (either in new buildings or existing buildings in the area).

Despite the admirable intentions of the new zoning rules to develop Chinatown while preserving its overall flavor, the proposal was controversial because of the possible and unpredictable impact of new developments on the existing social and economic constituencies of the community. Chinatown was in a great demand for low and moderate-income housing and community infrastructures, but the kind of development that was promoted by the zoning regulations failed to address this need. For instance, the Special District provided more bonus space for constructing new buildings than for rehabilitating old ones. The introduction of luxury high-rises might also turn the Chinatown into an “oasis for the rich.”

Disregarding the concerns about displacement and gentrification, officials of the Special Manhattan Bridge District Committee insisted the Special District was an effective means to forge the private developers “to return something to the community.”⁵⁰ In 1982, the Chinatown residents and community groups sued the city for failing to provide enough information for the Chinatown residents and excluding the residents from the decision-making processes. The notice of public hearings for the Special District was published in two publications of *City Record* and *Comprehensive City Planning Calendar*, which were more likely to be read by lawyers and real estate developers than ordinary people. Recognizing this, the State Supreme Court ruled that, “The notice published in two obscure publications, unknown to most English-speaking New Yorkers, to say nothing of those who speak only Chinese, is not the adequate notice mandated by the City Charter.”⁵¹ Thus it declared the Special District constitution illegal, although the ruling was overturned on appeal. In its judgment on the appeal, the Court stated that it would make no difference of publishing the notice in a Chinese newspaper because,

As a matter of observation by members of this bench, the general rule (is) that legal notices published in foreign language newspapers are published in the English Language... Ours is basically an English speaking society and that is the national language. It is appropriate, therefore, that all notices required by law to be published in that language. It would place an unbearable burden upon government if, before publication, a census were required to determine which were the tongues spoken in the community for the purpose of determining the foreign language newspapers in which its required to be published.⁵²

The statement effectively allowed the marginalization of the Chinatown residents on the grounds that English was the national language (which although often stated, has never in fact been mandated by law). Mike Davis has observed that this case produced a “linguistic and cultural fortress” that institutionalized discrimination and legalized the deprivation of civil rights.⁵³ With language as the border of exclusion, the Chinese immigrants were deemed non-English speaking, inassimilable aliens. Ignoring the vigorous linguistic and cultural diversity of the society in actual practice (although presumably not in those neighborhoods where the presiding judge lived), the statement was constitutive to the mechanisms in sustaining and reinforcing the subordinated position of minority groups against which a white Anglo-“American” identity was produced and secured. Moreover, there was also an odd contradiction in the city’s actions. On one hand, the city attempted to preserve the traditional character of Chinatown, in which language was an important part of the cultural heritage of the community, but on the other, it identified that same linguistic difference as a liability. The irony was no accident, but relied upon the incongruence between a “borderless” economic development and political imperatives.

After the Court reinstated the Special Manhattan Bridge District, the debates regarding the zoning regulations continued. The proponents of the Special District argued that Chinatown should be “more open and aggressive,” and criticized those who opposed new developments as “nostalgic” and “romantics.”⁵⁴ The community defenders, otherwise, declared that they “just want people to have a place to live and not have to fear the bulldozer or skyhigh rents.”⁵⁵ In 1971, when the New York Telephone Company planned to build a new switching station and evict residents in the Two Bridge area, the tenants—primarily Italian Americans—established the We Won’t Move Committee. They together with the Two Bridge Neighborhood Council successfully obliged the telephone company to move the

switching facility to Pearl Street. Although only a few Chinese participated in the protest, the success profoundly influenced community activism in the area and was a great inspiration for Chinatown residents to stand together fighting for their interests.

The first developer to be granted a permit to build in the Special District was the Overseas Chinese Development Corporation, which had urged the City Planning Commission to grant “straight up-zoning” in Chinatown. The corporation bought a site at Madison Street in 1979 with the intention of building East-West Tower. The two towers would be eighteen and seven stories respectively and have 143 one-bedroom units. They would also include a senior citizen center and a day care center as community amenities in exchange for a higher floor area ratio. Granted a building permit, the corporation demolished two vacant tenement buildings on the site in 1981. However, it was soon revealed that in 1979 when the site had been purchased by the developer, the two tenement buildings were fully occupied. The developer was accused of engaging in several forms of harassment, including cutting essential provisions such as hot water and heat, in order to evict the residents before the date the Special Zoning ordinances came into effect, and its permit was revoked. In addition to East-West Tower, another major housing project, a 21-story, 142-unit luxury apartment building located on Henry Street, was also approved under the Special Zoning in 1982. The Henry Street site was owned by Henry Street Partners, who planned to accommodate a new community YMCA and a swimming pool on the ground floor of the project and also provide \$500,000 as a housing-improvement fund for the community. The developer justified the project by arguing that there was a significant deficit of housing for upper-middle income Chinese in Chinatown and the Henry Street project would suit their needs. The high-rise condominium prices ranged from \$120,000 to \$150,000. According to the standard rent to income ratio of 25%, less than 1 percent of Chinatown residents could afford to buy a unit in the condominium.⁵⁶ The developer chose to ignore the community’s urgent needs for low- and moderate-income housing because such projects promised little profit and no subsidies from the government would be forthcoming.⁵⁷ In response, the community activists declared that it was the proximity of Chinatown to the Financial District that

attracted the investors who sought high profit returns and the community would not “give away the future of the neighborhood for a swimming pool.”⁵⁸

The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) filed a lawsuit seeking to stop the construction of the Henry Street luxury condominium. Several community organizations together filed amicus curiae brief in the Court of Appeals in New York State to support the legal challenge to the Henry Street project. The brief asserted, “gentrification has had devastating impacts on low-income people and minorities in several New York City neighborhoods,” and the process of gentrification was linked with the “increased real estate speculation, rising property values, escalating rents, tenant harassment, and ultimately the displacement of residential and commercial tenants in low-income neighborhoods.”⁵⁹ In 1986, the construction of the Henry Street Tower was blocked by the court because of the insufficient study of its environmental impact. As suggested in the Judge’s statement, environment should be broadly defined to include not only natural elements such as “land, air, water, and noise,” but also “population concentration, distribution or growth” and “community.” The statement further asserted that “under the city environmental-quality review, the potential displacement of local residents and businesses is an effect on population patterns and neighborhood character which must be considered in determining whether the requirement for an environmental impact statement is triggered.”⁶⁰ The ruling was significant because it recognized the efficiency of social reproduction as a key element for evaluating urban transformations. Although the proposed Henry Street Tower site was a parking lot that would not involve direct displacement and eviction of the local residents, the court urged a thorough study of its impact on the surrounding area and possible consequence of “second displacement.”⁶¹ In 1989 the Henry Street Project was ultimately constructed by a group of Hong Kong investors, but the controversy revealed the contradictions between an urban form that prioritized access to capital accumulation and one elicited according to the efficiency of social reproduction.⁶²

The city-sponsored Special District rezoning in Chinatown encouraged private-market gentrification that sought a full-scale remaking of the Lower Manhattan District. Without considerable public subsidy, the private-market finance and in particular, the overseas Chinese investment, was used to

transform Chinatown into a landscape complex that could be capitalized. As Neil Smith observes, “real-estate development becomes a centerpiece of the city’s production economy, an end in itself, justified by appeals to jobs, taxes, and tourism.”⁶³ In the process, gentrification evolved into “a crucial urban strategy for city governments in consort with private capital” under the rhetoric of urban renewal or urban redevelopment.⁶⁴ In contrast with Chicago’s Chinatown where new housing development was built to attract middle- or upper-income Chinese families as shown in Chapter Two and Chapter Five, residents in San Francisco and New York’s Chinatowns strived for affordable housing. Realizing the threat of displacement, they organized anti-gentrification movements to challenge the hegemonic forms of neighborhood redevelopment that mobilizes real-estate markets as a tool of urban economic expansion.

Chinatown Garment Industry Zone

From 1969 to 1976, manufacturing of all kinds had gradually declined in New York City. The city as a whole lost about 600,000 jobs, or 16 percent of the total. From 1969 to 1980, midtown garment sector jobs had dropped from 40,000 to 25,000, primarily due to competition in the developing countries and other parts of the nation.⁶⁵ Despite these shifts occurring elsewhere, the garment industry in Chinatown experienced significant growth with the influx of cheap labor and foreign capital investment, and it became secondary only to the restaurant business in terms of importance to the community’s economy. The number of employees in the Chinatown’s garment industry had doubled from 8,000 to 16,000 from 1970 to 1980. According to the report of International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Chinatown had only five garment factories in 1954. But in 1968, the factories increased to 125, and by 1979 there were about 500 garment factories, hiring about 12,000 to 14,000 workers.⁶⁶ The rapid growth of the industry during the 1960s and 70s was partly due to the extremely low rents for industrial space that resulted from the exodus of many other Manhattan manufacturing factories. Thus, the loss of jobs in one sector, paradoxically, provided new jobs in another. In addition, a large number of immigrant women came to U.S. to join their families under the 1965 Immigrant Acts, and they constituted the dominant labor force for garment factories. The easy operation, minimal requirements for little language skills, and

relatively small investments also made the Chinese, like the early Jewish immigrants, enter the garment industry quickly to develop Chinatown into the biggest manufacturing center of clothing in the city. The proliferation of Chinatown garment factories significantly changed the social patterns of the community. While the restaurants usually preferred male laborers, the garment factories tended to hire women. The gendered labor division allowed two forms of industry to coexist perfectly, and that remain the two pillar industries of Chinatown economy. It also increased employment opportunities for the Chinese families in which both male and female members would be able to work.

But Chinatown was soon to experience another shift. Driven by the city-sponsored projects of urban revival and the real estate boom in the late 1970s, the demand for loft space for residential and office use was growing. Proximate to the SoHo and Walker Street area, Chinatown was perceived as one of the most promising areas for loft space conversion (figure 29). By 1980, around 6% of the loft space that had been used for manufacturing in Chinatown had been converted as residential units.⁶⁷ With the growing number of property owners applying for permits to convert their buildings for commercial or residential purpose, the garment factories confronted enormous pressures of decreased industrial space and consequently increasing rents. In 1982, Chinese merchants lobbied the city to urge prohibition of the conversion of industrial space in Chinatown. Given these conditions, the City Planning Commission proposed to relocate the garment factories that were centered in midtown and Chinatown to a new site in Manhattan or elsewhere. They argued that the relocation would not only provide sufficient space for developing the garment industry, but also would relieve the shortage of commercial space and housing in these central areas. The proposal would supposedly facilitate “a major business venture” that “could free up land in areas of Manhattan where increased building (was) taking place.”⁶⁸ For the Chinese merchants, however, the removal of garment factories from Chinatown would damage the economic stability of the community and threaten the very survival of the garment industry itself. Being a labor-intensive industry, the success of Chinatown garment factories relied heavily on cheap labor in the form of new Chinese immigrants who spoke little English and had great attachment to their community. In relocating the garment factories would destabilize the community fabric: workers would have to move outside of

Chinatown to a location near the working place, which might necessitate the reemployment of family members, the breakdown of social networks, and the deprivation of social services catering specifically to the Chinese immigrant families. Thus, relocating the garment factories seemed an unlikely plan for the Chinese merchants to survive in the industrial competition.



Figure 29: The loft building at 372 Broome St. was converted from a garment factory building, ca. 2009 (photo by Robert K. Chin, <http://www.nychinatown.org/storefronts/mott/372broome.html>, accessed on Oct.5, 2010)

In addition to loft space conversion, the garment industry was also threatened by booming property values in Chinatown. The rents for factory spaces had rapidly increased during the 1970s and 80s. A workshop that had rented for \$830 in the 1970s, for instance, had increased to \$2,500 in the 1980s, with an extra \$20,000 as “key money.”⁶⁹ Despite the increased rents, the property owners still sought to evict tenants in order to realize a faster profit by putting the land up for sale. One such case was a ten-story mansion on East Broadway that was occupied by a garment factory. The Jewish landlord sold the

property to an overseas Chinese investor who offered \$2,500,000 for the property that had been priced around \$200,000 in 1970.⁷⁰ There were also reports of the landlords using poor managements and refusing to provide services as a strategy to get the garment factories to vacate. In such a circumstance, the Chinatown garment factories had few choices – they had to either close the business or move to a cheaper place. By 1986, the number of Chinatown garment factories had decreased from 600 to around 500.⁷¹

In 1981, the New York City Board of Estimates adopted a new program to place restrictions on the conversion of manufacturing space so as to protect manufacturing jobs. It extensively rezoned the midtown and lower Manhattan and designated four districts – the Midtown garment center, northeast Chelsea, the meat-market area, and the graphic-arts center – as exclusively dedicated to manufacturing. Four other “mixed-used” districts, including the Midtown garment center east, southeast Chelsea, SoHo/NoHo, and Tribeca, were allowed to provide only seven million square feet of loft space for residential conversion. Advocates of the program declared the zoning change would save more than 100,000 jobs and preserve one of the city’s vital industries. But for the real estate owners, it was simply a political deal between Mayor Ed Koch and the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) in exchange for the support for urban redevelopment project at the 42nd Street.⁷² In 1987, on the advice of the City Planning Commission and ILGWU, the Board of Estimates also approved the rezoning request of a seven-block Walker Street area that was bounded by Broadway, Canal, White and Lafayette Streets, for the purpose of preserving the area’s garment factories.⁷³ The zoning change indicated the area would transform from a mixed-used area to a strictly manufacturing zone. It would protect 4,000 jobs, among which were 3,000 jobs provided by Chinatown garment factories.⁷⁴

Lisa Lowe considers the liberation of immigration policy in the post-war era as an expression of the need for economic restructuring in the United States. She argues that with the development of global capitalism, the capital imperative demanded immigrants to renew the domestic labor supplies.⁷⁵ Chinatown was a space repeatedly reproduced to accommodate the nation’s desire for promoting production and restructuring the domestic relations of that production.⁷⁶ It is logical in a capitalist system

to create space that would make manufacturing cheaper and more efficient. Thus, the city's efforts to preserve the garment industry in Chinatown through rezoning regulations demonstrated the ways that space was internal to capitalist logics, in which the urban ethnic ghetto was articulated by the forces of production and a common economic framework of the local and the global.

The Imposition of White Street Jail in Chinatown

When the Special Manhattan Bridge District (SMBD) was initiated in 1981, a partnership led by a Chinese shipping magnate and an American developer, proposed to build a 52-story commercial and residential tower on a vacant lot bounded by Walker Street on the north, Baxter and Centre Streets on the east and west, and White Street on the south. Because of the opposition from community members and the long-lasting law suit against the SMBD projects, the plan was given up and the city bought the land in order to build a prison there. The need for the jail stemmed from the closure of the obsolete Men's House of Detention at Rikers Island in 1978. In looking for an appropriate site for a new detention center, the city outlined several selection criteria: the site should be adjacent to the Courts to minimize transportation cost; it should be distant from residential areas; the need for demolition and site preparation should be minimal; it should be convenient to public transportation; it should be close to the existing civic institution and central support services; and the site should be able to provide at least 250,000 square feet of construction area.⁷⁷ The selection criteria narrowed down the prospective locations whereupon the White Street site was immediately selected for its ideal location and convenient transportation to the Courts and public facilities. However, the selection committee deliberately ignored the fact that Chinatown was a residential neighborhood with one of the highest population densities in Manhattan.

When the construction plan for a 500-bed adult facility was revealed the Chinatown community reacted strongly and urged the City to stop the plan and cede the site to the local development corporation. They argued that locating the jail in the middle of the Chinatown would threaten the safety of those who lived and worked in Chinatown. Especially for the female workers who worked in the garment

factories and had to commute from and to Chinatown on a daily basis, their safety was particularly concerned. In addition to the safety issue, one of the major commercial streets of Chinatown, Baxter Street, was running across the proposed site. Thus the community members worried that the imposition of a jail on the site would also affect the economic vitality of the street and the neighborhood in general by arguing that undesirable visitors to the detention center would loiter in Chinatown, and in consequence affect the commercial, real estate, and tourism development of the community.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Chinatown community was experiencing an explosive demographic growth in the 1970s and 80s. The community needed low-income housing, parking space, and public facilities, not a prison. The White Street Site was considered a prime location for new residential and commercial development, but it was clear that the construction of the detention center would take away one of the few large undeveloped parcels of the neighborhood.⁷⁹

With respect to these concerns, the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) of the jail construction pointed out that “the detention facilities have been a traditional land use” of the proposed site because the Metropolitan Correctional Center was located nearby at 150 Park Row (figure 30). It asserted that “direct negative impacts on the nearby neighborhood are expected to be less than would otherwise be the case.”⁸⁰ In other words, since there was already a prison in the area, it would not hurt to have another one. In rebuttal, one reviewer of the report argued that another detention facility might bring in “cumulative impacts,” which could also be damaging to the social and economic fabric of the neighborhood.⁸¹ Concerning the safety issues, the DEIR referred to the “modular unit” approach that would be adopted in the prison design as an effective way of preventing prison riots. The threat of violence was a grave concern, with the recent memory of major prison riots in Attica (1971), Oklahoma (1973), and New Mexico (1980). The modular approach was claimed to improve “classification and security management, and provide for a more constructive social environment within the facility” by disaggregating the prisoners to smaller and more manageable numbers.⁸² Meanwhile, scheduled visiting hours and two waiting areas would also help to eliminate the problem of visitors loitering in the neighborhood.⁸³ But given the proximity of Columbus Park to the detention facility, the risk of overflow

into the neighborhood would still exist.⁸⁴ Given the potential disruption of the physical landscape of the Chinese neighborhood, the DEIR claimed architectural innovation would be adopted to neutralize the appearance of the prison to create “a secure, safe, and humane environment for those in custody.”⁸⁵ The architectural design would blend with the existing building styles to make the prison’s bulk and visual impact “much less than that of the existing detention facility.”⁸⁶ In other words, it would mitigate the visual impact of the “prison look” and make the prison “invisible” while standing harmoniously within the surrounding built landscape.⁸⁷



Figure 30: The Metropolitan Correctional Center at 150 Park Row is very close to the central area of Chinatown, ca.2009 (photo by Robert K. Chin, <http://www.nychinatown.org/storefronts/chatham/150parkrow.html>, accessed on Oct.5, 2010)

In spite of the efforts made by the DEIR to justify the prison project, in 1982 about 12,000 protesters marched to City Hall before the city would vote for final decision, chanting “No More Jails in Chinatown.” The leader of CCBA proposed six alternate usages of the White Street Site including

affordable housing, commercial building, parking lot, youth entertainment facility, community social service building, and hotel.⁸⁸ However, Mayor Koch insisted that the city had a “critical need” for a new jail, especially one in the particular area for its proximity to the existing Manhattan House of Detention (also known as the Tombs) and the criminal courts. He asserted that the prison population in NYC had increased 25 percent in less than two years (probably due to the nationwide “War on Drugs”), which led to a decreased crime rate “because when criminals are behind bars they can’t commit crimes.” He openly reproached the protest against the construction of the new jail. Moreover, his reproach was directed not only at the Chinese, but also the Blacks’ objection to building a homeless shelter in Harlem and the Jews’ demonstration against the resource recovery plant in Brooklyn. Although these ethnic groups were simply trying to protect themselves from undesirable facilities that would never have been imposed on elite districts, he condemned the resistance as “selfishness” for putting “local interests above city interests.”⁸⁹

With this kind of support from above, the City Hall voted to pass the White Street Jail proposal in 1983. In order to minimize the “un-neighborly” impact of the jail, Charles Lauster, a private consultant hired by Community Board One, urged the city to build a mixed-used development of retail establishments, community facilities, and low and moderate income housing next to the detention center. The cost for the mixed-use project was estimated to be approximately \$12,100,000, and it would be financed by private developers. Lauster suggested that “beyond the need for these additional facilities in Chinatown, it is even more important that the entire complex serve as an ‘anchor’ to protect the community from being washed away by what many residents fear is an overwhelming tide of criminal justice facilities.”⁹⁰ The forbidding presence of the detention center would disrupt the urban fabric around it, but the new development adjacent to the jail could help to reestablish the broken urban fabric and mitigate the disruption imposed on the “retail potential” of Chinatown.⁹¹ The project was designed to be able to self-support in the long run while the rents of the three lower floors of retail space could subsidize the operation of community facilities and low-income housing on the upper floors. However, Lauster also pointed out that opening the new development to market forces might “drive up real estate costs to a point ensuring major disruption of local land use patterns,” which would be “especially disastrous for the

garment industry and for housing for community residents.”⁹² He further asserted that the commercial complex would have a mixed impact on surrounding land uses. While new commercial space might, in the short run, lessen the tendency of converting garment shops and residences to commercial use because of the increasing supply, in the long run, a successful commercial zone could lead to rising rents. It would attract new businesses into the area, especially from those firms in midtown or the financial district which would seek lower rents in the surrounding areas, and firms, not linked to local communities, could easily bid up rents beyond the reach of local business and residents, which could result in the loss of jobs and homes.⁹³ Thus, even though the mixed-use project might provide some relief for the imposed pressures of the detention center on the social consistency of Chinatown, it also presented the threat of gentrification.

In the midst of these debates, in 1984, a compromise plan was finally reached between the city and the Chinatown community groups. The plan proposed an 11-story, 88-unit senior apartment tower on the northern part of the White Street site, in which commercial space would constitute the lower three floors of the housing tower (figure 31).⁹⁴ Under the agreement, the city leased the site for the senior housing project to a local development corporation. Without the support of federal funding, the project had to rely on market-generated funds, for which the commercial space at the lower floors were rented for retail business, office, and community facilities. Regardless, the eventual erection of the White Street Jail made the Chinese believe that their insufficient voting power resulted in failure. As asserted by a member of the Chinese Progressive Association, the battle left “the community with the feeling that the Chinese have no political power in New York City. We get 10,000 people to march around City Hall to protest the jail, and yet the city still goes ahead with the plan. There’s a lot of frustration that has built up over the last year over the way the city deals with Chinatown.”⁹⁵

In addition, the public discourse that constructed Chinatown as a liminal space associated with social marginality, poverty, and foreignness also enabled the practices and process of spatial production. Fanned by media publicity, Chinatown was associated with delinquency, illegal immigrants, disorder, violence, and crime which somehow made it permissible to locate the city’s defense against crime—a

major jail—in that neighborhood. The juxtaposition of the “slum” imagery and the notion of “model



Figure 31: The White Street Jail with its lower levels facing Baxter Street used for commercial and community space, ca. 2008 (Photo by author)

minority” convey contradictory passages of the Asian American experiences, but both have constituted the basis for discriminatory backlash as the image of “slum” was perceived as threat to the urban modernization and Asian American success became a potential threat to the White hegemony. Within such a context, urban planning was employed as a tool of social control. The imposition of White Street

jail manifested the consistency of the spatialized approach to manage racial, social, and class difference. Thus in New York City, the jail development in Chinatown was a predictable outcome of the play of power politics and competitive strength of territorially based polity. Similar to what happened in Chicago's Chinatown where public housing projects and highways were constructed, the city and the dominant social powers gained access through spatial strategies to marginalize and control the subordinated groups.

Cleaning Street Trade in Chinatown

In the 1970s and 80s, New York City conducted a series of efforts to revitalize the streets of Lower East Manhattan. The Canal Street Flea Market, started in 1973, operated outdoors on a parking lot located at the corner of Greene and Canal Street in the SoHo (South of Houston) district every weekend. In the 1980s, the Greene Street Block Association had formed with the aim of closing down the market because it introduced garbage and “undesirable element(s) into the neighborhood.”⁹⁶ By this they referred to some of the vendors who camped out on the street overnight, which increased crime and generated sanitary problem for the area. In addition, some 3,000 to 4,000 cars coming into the neighborhood each weekend aggravated street congestion. In 1984, the association successfully brought the city's Building Department to investigate the market. According to the lease signed by the market operator, the market site was prohibited any use of the land but a parking lot, and it lacked a valid certificate of occupancy. According to the city's zoning resolution, a permanent market with an ongoing retail function had to be operated in an enclosed facility. Despite these accusations, the market was widely perceived as a “browsers' paradise” that provided an array of low-priced merchandise and attracted hordes of tourists.⁹⁷ Shoppers, vendors, and supporters pleaded with the city to keep the market open and asserted that the market contributed to the city's economy both as a source of employment and as a tourist attraction for shoppers coming from all over the world.⁹⁸ In addition, most of the vendors were immigrants and elderly who relied on the market to make a living. Nonetheless, the city closed the market in 1986.⁹⁹

Accompanying the closure of the Canal Street Flea Market, in June 1984 a new law banning stands and stalls on more than 250 streets in NYC was instituted. The law became controversial because street trades on some of the banned streets were deemed to be “economically essential or historically intrinsic.”¹⁰⁰ The city formed the Inter Agency Task Force to execute the new regulation. They claimed that, although street trade was an essential part of New York life for the past century, illegal vendors ruined the tradition and negatively impacted on the city’s street scenes.¹⁰¹ Two major streets in the Chinatown, Canal and Mott Streets, were listed as banned streets, which was deleterious to the area’s economy. As an important economic constituency to Chinatown, street trade was prosperous at Canal Street, Chatham Square, and East Broadway Street, selling fresh foods and dry goods. 90% of the Chinatown vendors were new immigrants from Hong Kong, mainland China, and Vietnam, who didn’t have English language and professional skills.¹⁰² Thus street trade was an important way for them to enter the economy, providing them alternative ways of living with greater autonomy and possibility for economic advancement. Nevertheless, street vendors in Chinatown, especially on Canal Street, were perceived to cause street congestion and sanitation problem (figure 32). They also competed directly with store owners without sharing the burden of rent, property taxes, and street cleaning. Traffic congestion was one of the problems that most concerned. The unregulated “take over” of sidewalks by vendor’s carts, together with their large delivery trucks, worsened the already crowded conditions of Chinatown and presented threat to the pedestrian safety.



Figure 32: Street vendors on Canal Street that brought sanitary and traffic issues to the sidewalk, ca. 2008 (Photo by author)

In response to the new zoning regulation, multiple opinions were formed in the Chinatown community. One interest group constituted by the street vendors who were directly affected by the new law saw the enactment of the new regulations as a tactic to deprive them of their licenses and rights to the street. The city only gave the vendors two weeks to leave the streets and no settlement was arranged, which would leave many vendors unemployed. For the storeowners, however, the new regulation was very much applauded. They complained that the vendors stole their commercial traffic and competed unfairly. The eviction of street vendors would mediate the pressures on the established property-owning business community. The Chinatown residents also supported the institution of the new laws. They believed that the vendors had caused inconvenience for pedestrians and brought trash to the streets.¹⁰³ Regardless of the different responses to the street trader clearance campaign, there was a general concern for the newly unemployed vendors and the increasing unemployment rate within the Chinatown community. After the institution of the ban, the Chinatown vendors demonstrated at Canal Street, urging

the city: “Don’t Ignore Livelihood of Chinatown Vendors.” In a public hearing, the Chinese vendors demanded that the city government to show some sympathy to the Chinatown vendors and postpone the execution of the new regulation. The CCBA also supported the street vendors by arguing the licensed vendors’ right to street trading should be protected, albeit on altered terms. They suggested the city government should build a market center at the northern part of White Street Jail for the evicted vendors. Otherwise, the evicted vendors might simply move to East Broadway, which was not a banned street, and disturb the existing order of the street.¹⁰⁴

Only in 1993, the Community Board 3 passed a resolution to build a vendor market in a derelict section of Sara D. Roosevelt Park, located on Grand Street between Chrystie and Forsyth (figure 33). The plan was both a business venture and a community development project. Yet once again, a development project stirred controversy. As one of the few open spaces in the area, the conversion of the Roosevelt Park aroused concerns of the surrounding neighborhoods. Furthermore – and this was probably what worried them most – the vendor market was far from the central area of the Chinatown and might not attract tourists. Their concerns were justified, for the market soon turned out to be a great disappointment. Especially with the closure of the Grand Street subway station, there were only a few visitors to the market. The vendors who rented the space also complained about the poor facilities within the park – there was no running water and adequate drainage and the storage space and display carts were inadequate. Considering the poor management of the market, in 1996 Century 21 New Golden Age Realty took over the market and changed its name to “Dragon’s Gate” in order to appeal to tourists. The vendors built semi-permanent structures with metal frame and walls, and tapped into water and sewer lines. These acts aroused discontent of the neighboring communities. The Parks Department claimed the interventions were illegal by violating the rules of the park. After litigation, in March 1999, the Parks Department forcefully demolished the illegal structures with three bulldozers and a group of policemen. The vendors, who had invested thousands of dollars to build the so called “stores” in the park, became ultimate victims in this battle. Language deficiency, ignorance of the legal systems of America, and ingenuous trust of the management company contributed to their misfortune.

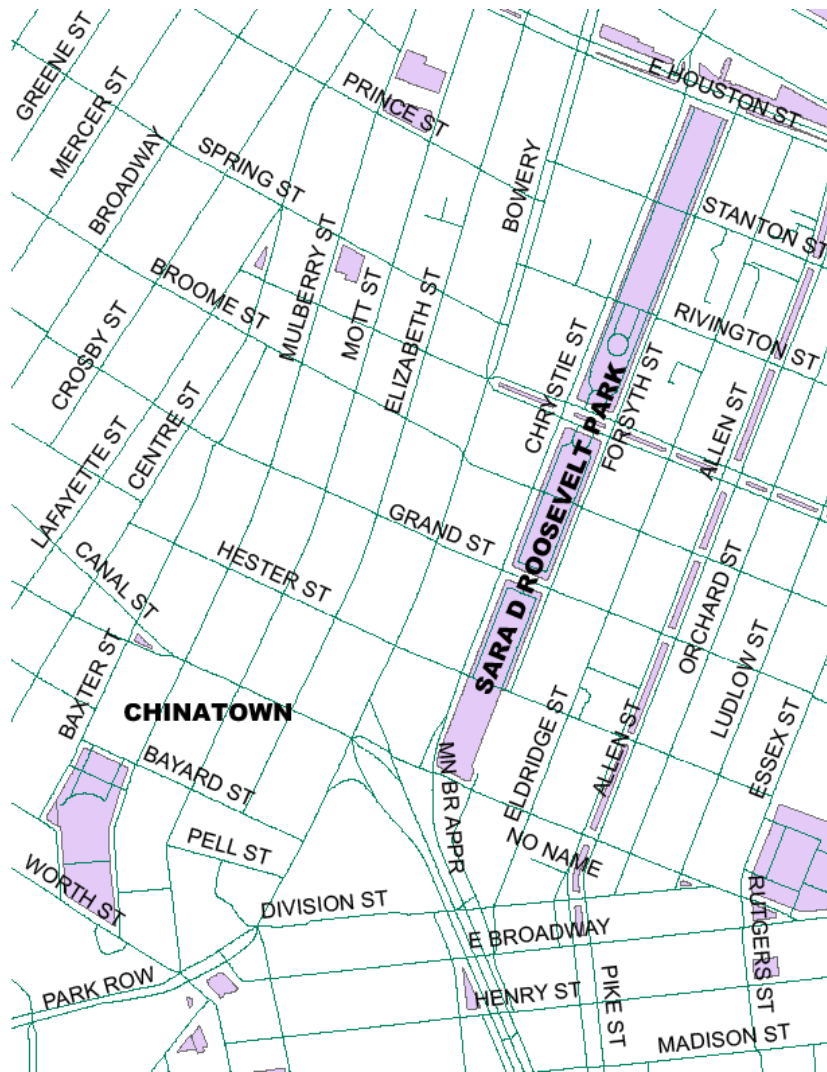


Figure 33: Sara D. Roosevelt Park on Grand Street is away from the center of Chinatown. As a location for a vendor’s market, it did not attract visitors from Chinatown. (Graphic by author, based on GIS data provided by New York City government at http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/eservices/eservices_gis_downloads.shtml)

In addition to the management of street trades and outdoor market place, the city also attempted to improve its streetscapes. In 1976, the New York City Department of Urban Planning had conducted the “Chinatown Street Revitalization” study in order to improve the street life in the area. The final report emphasized “pedestrian movement, safety and over-all cleanliness” as important qualities for a pleasant street environment.¹⁰⁵ It observed that nearly all sidewalks in Chinatown were narrower than the standard streets in urban residential areas, which should be at least 15-foot wide. In Chinatown, the average sidewalk width was only about 13.3 feet while the roadbeds also fell far short of the city’s standard of 24-

feet width. Throngs of pedestrians and heavy vehicle traffic presented another obstacle to the street life. Pedestrian volumes at the busiest intersection of Mott and Bayard Street reached 7,500 persons per hours on weekdays and on the weekends the number was even higher. Vehicle traffic on the major roads such as Canal and Bowery Streets was also exceedingly heavy. Chinatown residents identified “narrow, crowded roads and sidewalks,” “piles of waste and litter,” “too many tourists,” and “dangerous crossings” as the major problems of the streets, among which street vendors were also perceived as impediments to a pleasant street environment.¹⁰⁶ With respect to such conditions, the Chinatown Street Revitalization report suggested the city remove the street vendors from the sidewalk and open a “vendor market” in a triangular site bounded by Canal and Baxter Streets as a replacement (Figure 34). But the proposal appeared to be infeasible considering the insufficient area in the site to accommodate the replaced vendors.

Urban space management is at the centre of the issue of urban development. Through the regulatory processes, the city government deprived the street vendors of opportunities, so that they stayed on the bottom rung of the economic ladder while hoping to improve their socioeconomic status. The urban renewal machine was empowered by the government regulations and controls, which privileged the development of the upper-circuit economy while it restrained the “backward” lower-circuit economy. James Holston has argued that by eliminating the historic street system that was considered “too congested and unhealthy for the modern machine age,” the modern mechanism of urban planning also “eliminates the urban crowds and the outdoor political domain of social life that the street traditionally supports.”¹⁰⁷ In a sense, the utopic paradigm imposed by city planners and government

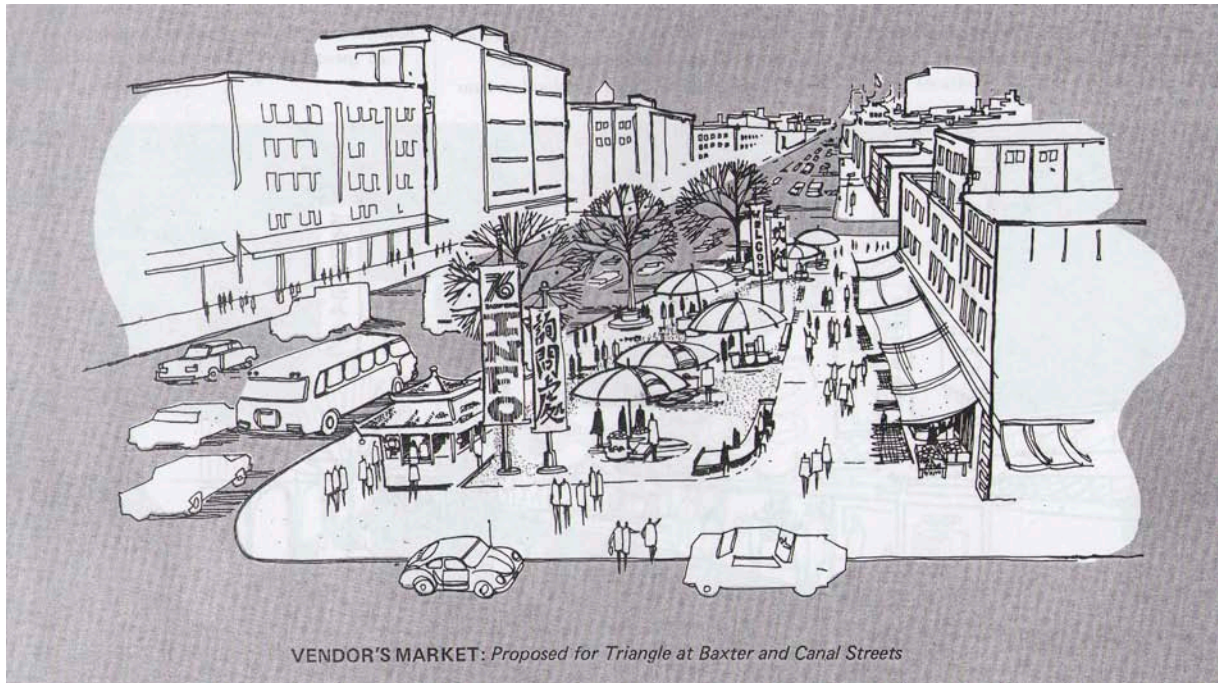


Figure 34: A proposed vendor market at a triangle site at Baxter and Canal Streets (Source: *Chinatown Street Revitalization*, 1976, p.39).

authorities tended to generate a dystopic version of the urban social life that they had wanted to avoid in the first place. Thus Holston calls for a mode of planning that would incorporate the ethnographic present and its contingent and unexpected social conditions. He highlights the importance of acknowledging the heterogeneous ethnographic practices and the insurgent citizenship of the new members of the city.¹⁰⁸ For the Chinatown community, street trades have constituted an essential—albeit controversial—sector of the community’s economy. The city’s campaign to forcefully remove the street vendors solved one set of problems but it created another set in which the normative and institutional definition of the public space became a new category of exclusion. The development of informal economy in Chinatown is closely linked to the processes of globalization and urban redevelopment, the exclusion of the low-skilled immigrants from the benefits of these processes, and the increasing urban polarization. Street trading, in particular, as a controversial component of the informal economy, is complicated by the complete lack of effective local legislation or regulation to establish market and create space for the street vendors. The Chinese immigrants who seek their fortunes on the street become victims in the process by being

castigated as illegal. Such evidence indicates the contested meanings and uses of street and urban public space, and the control of public space as an essential tool in urban redevelopment.¹⁰⁹ It also reveals the play of class even within the Chinatown community, where the interests of propertied merchants clashed against the interests of more economically vulnerable street vendors.

Conclusions

During the 1960s, Chinatown political engagement had been suppressed because at that time community activists were labeled as Communist under the constant surveillance of the FBI and anti-Communism groups. It was only after 1972 when Nixon visited China and normalized the diplomatic relations between the two nations that the Chinatown community could agitate for their civil rights and equal treatment in the social and political domains. A central concern of this chapter is to look Chinatown as a site of production, in which urban strategies such as zoning regulations, street trader clearance campaign, and imposition of public projects were used to reproduce the relations of production and capitalize the land of Chinatown.¹¹⁰ In the 1960s and 70s, the force of urban renewal tended to encourage the ascendance of finance and service industries, and attract transnational capitalist investment. As Saskia Sassen argues, “At the global level, a key dynamic explaining the place of major cities in the world economy is that they concentrate the infrastructure and the servicing that produce a capability for global control.”¹¹¹ New York City’s reconfiguration of the space of Chinatown through a series of special zoning regulations manifested the city’s embeddedness in the globalization of economic activities. As a strategic site for the city to draw oversea Asian capital, Chinatown also sustained and reproduced its transnational and global connections through the local mechanism of space.

Landscape transformations in Chinatown cannot be understood in isolation from the primary changes in the larger context of urban socio-economic developments. The combined forces of production, politics, and globalization that led to the transformation of urban forms contributed to a spatial and social reproduction in the Chinatown. In addition, racial hierarchy and class differentiations continued to play a central role in the processes of urban reformation. Power struggle was essential in this process. The

presence of disadvantaged groups demanding new membership and democracy generated contradictory spaces, contestation, and internal differentiation within the cities.¹¹² Lisa Lowe has argued that U.S. capital was maximized not through “abstract labor” that claimed to have no divisions marked by race, nation of origin, class, or gender, but precisely through the social production of differences.¹¹³ For her, the “abstract” citizen is an illusionary category, in which material differences cannot be dissolved into political representation.¹¹⁴ Thus, the accessibility to substantive rights of citizenship was associated with the material particularities of citizens. Similarly, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey argues that the logics of capitalism use the production of difference both in the real and symbolic forms as a means of profit making.¹¹⁵ In a sense, the persistence of racial and ethnic differences amidst the urban economic system continued to produce the space of Chinatown as marginal and deviant.

The cases in this chapter also illuminate the paradoxical conditions for the Chinatown in the processes of urban regeneration and globalization. On the one hand the influx of oversea capital brought prosperity to the community by revitalizing its commercial and real estate market; but on the other hand, the upper circuit of transnational capitalist development appeared to be incompatible with the lower circuit economy that traditionally dominated Chinatown as an urban ethnic enclave. The series of acts adopted by the city to encourage community redevelopment through the framework of gentrification entailed the appropriation and penetration of the geographical terrain and properties that previously belonged to the working-class Chinese immigrants in exchange for urban accumulation. Local interests were consistently subordinated to the interests of urban authorities and the non-local investors (both White and Chinese), which showed their unequal access to the benefits accrued from the urban redevelopment processes. The local initiatives to resisting the overridden representation from “above” and the wealthy outsiders revealed the local residents’ concrete responses to urban renewal and its adjunctive displacement and misrepresentation.

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Part II: Reinventing Neighborhood: Cultural Identity and Landscape Changes

Chapter 4: Historic Preservation and the Politics of Identity in San Francisco's Chinatown

From the 1960s to 1970s, the downtown of San Francisco underwent the kind of extensive urban renewal that had been conducted in many American cities. Chapter One explained that San Francisco's Chinatown experienced the encroachment of Financial District and a severe housing crisis because of the rapid development of the city's core area. Acknowledging that the uncontrolled urban expansion might destroy the city's historic characteristics, in the 1980s, the city planning department decided to preserve the old neighborhoods of the city and proposed San Francisco's Chinatown as a historic district. This chapter examines the social processes of investing the constructed space of Chinatown with cultural meaning and ethnic identity, and explores how the dominant discourse of heritage and ethnicity has been continuously reproduced and appropriated with the changing needs of representation and issues of urban growth and development. Specifically, it focuses on divergent ideologies guiding the use of heritage and space in San Francisco's Chinatown, which have been articulated by different social groups and stakeholders. While existing scholarship focuses on Chinatown's spatial formations as associated with racial practices and shared ethnicity, this chapter highlights the internal dynamics of the ethnic community. It is particularly attentive to the intra-ethnic tensions regarding social, class, and generational differentiations, for it is not only the very formation of the identity of a place that must be understood by locating it within a context of outside forces, but also the internal diversity and variation of the area.¹

From the early efforts to rebuild Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake through its evolution into a historic district and one of the most visited tourism destinations in the city, architecture and spatial configurations have played seminal roles by visually identifying the community as a preeminent symbol of ethnic culture. The prosperity of the tourism industry and mass cultural production in the modern era propelled the cultural consumption of enclaves of "ethnicity." Yet the emphasis on an essentialized cultural identity tended to obscure the complex process of spatial reorganization through social relations of those both "inside" and "outside" of the community. The various efforts to recollect, and indeed regulate, the past of Chinatown revealed the ambiguous and contradictory ways that the past has been

represented and reimagined in contemporary space. In the process of spatializing historical resources, historic preservation was feared, resisted, and celebrated in San Francisco's Chinatown, and the role of historic preservation was also questioned. In a sense, preservation can be a real challenge; at stake were the preservation of the city neighborhood as a heritage site and an inscription of memory, or maintaining it as a vital place evolving to incorporate the everyday activities pursued by its inhabitants.

The very "ethnic enclave" that modern western society used to exclude undesirable others, in many ways, enabled the ethnic minorities to coalesce in order to renegotiate power relations in the urban landscape. The hegemonic discourse of tradition and heritage that accorded priority to the changing socio-economy and dominant social values generated a "counter-discourse" that was solidly grounded on the ethnic empowerment and "insurgent citizenship" of the minority group.² Considering space as a key resource for identity construction, it is essential to understand how the ethnic enclave was bounded by frontiers that distinguish the inside from outside. Boundary consciousness is a mutual process that could also be internalized by the minority community, whose insecurity of its political economic territories accentuates its own boundary perception, where autonomy and independence were at stake. Thus the efforts of articulating "Chinese identity" in the built environment have proved to be an organizing tool that enabled the formation of a political unity of the Chinese groups. But meanwhile, it also masks a particular constellation of social relations that are produced by the histories of unequal and uneven power relations.

Rebuilding Chinatown as an "Oriental City"

Before the 1906 earthquake, the residents of San Francisco's Chinatown made little attempt to express their cultural identity through architecture. The majority of Chinatown buildings were Italianate Victorian buildings that could not be distinguished from buildings in the surrounding areas. At that time, Chinatown was described as "neither picturesque nor Oriental" and "the pagoda as a building is wholly absent...the majority of the buildings are of brick, two or three stories high and with the cellars or basements... the architecture is thoroughly American..."³ Accordingly, of the four district association

headquarters that had been built in Chinatown, only the architecture of the Yeong Wo District Association seemed ostensibly Chinese because it had carved wooden lions standing by the entryway and a distinctive courtyard and portico.⁴ A Chinese theater known as Hook Took Tong, built in 1852, had a pagoda-like façade. These were among the very few buildings in San Francisco's Chinatown that evinced a Chinese architectural style in the nineteenth century.

But Chinatown suffered badly during the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, and the city proposed moving Chinatown to Hunter's Point, a sparsely populated region at the edge of the city. The city officials optimistically envisioned the new Chinatown as an "oriental city, properly sewerred, with paved streets, schools, and all the essentials of modern life, but also with features outwardly characteristic of a Chinese city, with its pagodas, its temples and its lantern-hung porticoes"(figure 35).⁵ Although the relocation plan ultimately failed because of the resistance of the Chinatown residents, the exotic imagery created for the Chinatown perpetuated the essential ideas of the Orient and revealed the city's desire to rebuild Chinatown as a stereotypical Oriental city. As Edward Said has argued, this kind of creation was "almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."⁶ It was also a material result of a system of knowledge and a cultural history that had given the Orient a cognitive reality in and for the West.⁷



Figure 35: The perspective of Hunter's Point's Chinatown (Source: *The Unshakable—Rebirth of S.F. Chinatown in 1906*, special issue of *Sing Tao Daily*, April 15, 2006, p.32)

Once it was clear that the Chinese would be allowed to rebuild Chinatown in its original location, many temporary wooden structures were erected there to house Chinese business, family and district associations. Accordingly, by June of 1906, two months after the earthquake, twelve Chinese stores opened in Chinatown on Dupont (Grant Avenue of today), Sansome, Sacramento, Washington, and Clay Streets. Even though commercial activities prospered soon after the earthquake, the merchants were hesitant to put up permanent structures because no official permits had been released by the city. The Chinese press acted aggressively to urge the Chinese merchants to hasten the pace of reconstruction, and they convinced the merchants that permits would soon be granted. The Chinese merchants, however, wanted to wait until the Six Company, the leading association of the community, started the construction of its headquarters, before the rest would go ahead with reconstruction. But because of the shortage of funding, the Six Company and other associations delayed construction until city permits were granted to forty-three Chinese businesses in Chinatown.⁸

Considering the vices and crimes present in the old Chinatown, the city insisted the new Chinatown should show a different physical and social appearance by eliminating the notoriously filthy alleys and brothels, opium dens, and gambling halls. They decided to widen the narrow streets of Chinatown and add 30 feet to Dupont Street, which was connected with Grant Avenue through a newly constructed 100-foot wide avenue. The project was completed in 1908, by which point Dupont Street had become part of Grant Avenue. With Dupont's connection to one of the city's major streets, Chinatown became more physically integrated with the city and less of an isolated enclave. The Chinese community leaders, who were keenly aware of racial prejudice, believed the first priority after the earthquake should be to rebuild Chinatown so as to reverse its reputation as a slum. To hinder the city's plan of removing Chinatown from its central location and also recognizing the importance of tourism in securing the area's survival, Look Tin Eli, a wealthy Chinese merchant and founder of the Bank of Canton, proposed to construct the new Chinatown as a place of "veritable fairy palaces."⁹ The purpose was clear – they wanted to create a neighborhood "so appealing and idiosyncratic that no one would want to dismantle it."¹⁰ The proposal corresponded perfectly to the idea of an "Oriental City" that had been drafted by the

city planners. Thus it received strong support from the San Francisco Real Estate Board, who passed a resolution recommending “all property owners... of Chinatown to have their buildings rebuilt with fronts of Oriental and artistic appearance...”¹¹

The “oriental” style that had been used to great effect at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair was a great inspiration to the architectural design of the new actual Chinatown. Pagoda rooflines and other Chinese motifs were used to accessorize buildings possessing standard western facades. At the corner of California and Dupont Street, two of the great bazaars, the Sing Fat and the Sing Chong, were designed by architect T. Patterson Ross and engineer A.W. Burgren, who successfully managed to create an “oriental” style of architecture within the city’s building code. The two buildings not only constituted the gateway to the Chinatown, but also became iconic landmarks (figure 36). Surrounding the two buildings, five other great bazaars – the Shanghai Bazaar, Canton Bazaar, Wah Sing Lung, Wing Sing, and Yan Wo – had been gradually erected and formed an early core area of the community.



Figure 36: The Sing Fat and the Sing Chong Buildings at Grant Avenue, San Francisco, ca. 2007 (Photo by the author)

The design approaches adopted in these structures to ostensibly sinicize architecture also influenced the landscape constructions of Chinatown in the following decades. For instance, the South Grant Avenue, two blocks of Grant Avenue between Bush and California Street, was identified as a commercial street where the retailing of oriental goods and antiques constituted the major business. The appearance of the buildings on the street showed intensive “Oriental” styles: Chinese motifs, upturned eaves, and pagoda towers accessorized the exterior of the architectures. In 1925, during the Diamond Jubilee, lights were installed on Grant Avenue between Bush and Broadway Street in the form of Chinese lanterns resting atop dragon-entwined lamp posts. The community press proudly claimed the lanterns as the “most distinctive landmarks” in the Chinatown area that “pin point [our] Chinatown in the four corners of the earth.” Grant Avenue was also referred to as the “Street of Dragon Lantern.”¹²

In 1932, architect Julia Morgan also contributed to the interpretation of “Chineseness” in the design of the Chinese YWCA building on Clay Street of Chinatown (figure 37). Inspired by the Chinese things exhibited in Paris Exposition of 1900, Morgan designed a few buildings adopting Chinese-style motifs and decorations, which included the Ming Kwong Chinese Girls’ School in 1924 and the former Methodist Chinese Mission School at 940 Washington Street in 1910. The Chinatown YWCA was a community-based recreation and education center serving young Chinese women. The red-brick clad building accommodated a gymnasium, library, and other educational and recreational facilities. It still stands today: two octagonal towers project above the central entrance, one square tower rises above the west wing of the building, and the roof is covered by handmade clay tiles, reportedly imported from China.¹³ The arched entryway is decorated with glazed geometric patterns, above which is a circular window with Chinese stone lattice work. Within the building, a narrow rectangular courtyard with a Chinese-style garden also reflects Morgan’s conception of Chinese traditional architecture. In the Chinese concept of space, there is no distinct boundary between the garden and the building – the garden is an integral part of the interior space through the framing of various windows and wall openings. Adopting the traditional approach of garden design, Morgan created a spatial sequence giving the visitor a

contemplative experience. Nothing is straightforward; instead, a meandering and teasing succession was unfolded in the organization of spaces. Although the building's interior was subsequently remodeled by Chinese American architect Philip Choy to accommodate a space for the Chinese Historical Society of America Museum and Learning Center in the 1990s, the original aesthetic quality and Chinese characteristics have been carefully retained until today.



Figure 37: The Chinese YWCA building, now is used as the Chinese Historical Society of America Museum and Learning Center, ca.2007 (Photo by author).

H.A Crosby Forbes has suggested that the export of Chinese decorative arts greatly influenced the early American vision of China. The stateside construction of cultural icons such as Chinese-style garden pavilions and architecture, and what were known in the nineteenth century as “Museums of Chinese Curiosities” such as returning China trader Nathan Dunn’s Chinese Museum in Philadelphia, had also played an instrumental role in the formation of the imaginary China.¹⁴ Motifs like pagodas were adopted in American architecture when Americans were attempting to “create a romantic vision of Cathay by

erecting villas, gardens, amusement parks, and other public displays that were at least partially Chinese in their appearance or contents.”¹⁵ Regarding the Western fantasies toward the Orient, John Kuo Wei Tchen has identified three forms of Orientalism that took shape from the socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions of American society in different historical periods. The first is “patrician Orientalism” that was driven by the passionate taste for Chinese luxuries to establish a culture of distinction among American elites in the early nineteenth century. Second, with the expansion of the commercial marketplace in New York and the decline of the Chinese empire by the end of nineteenth century, “commercial Orientalism” emerged as a form in which Chinese things, ideas, and people were commodified to gratify the American desire for exoticism. Both patrician Orientalism and commercial Orientalism facilitated a stereotypic representation of the Chinese and reinforced a construction of the culture of “otherness.” As Tchen has argued, “Neither the elite culture of distinction nor the market culture of commercial stereotypes allowed enough breathing room for real, cross-cultural Chinese individuals to thrive.”¹⁶ The racialized perception and representation of the Chinese immigrants as barbaric, alien, and unassimilated Others created a solid ideological ground in which the anti-Chinese agitation was cultivated. Tchen also explores the form of “political Orientalism” that was rooted in the national political debates about Chinese contracted laborers. The fear of job competition and degraded working conditions drove the leaders of White labor unions and politicians to categorize the Chinese as an “inferior” race and exclude them from the national polity. The practices of exclusion and segregation foregrounded racial and cultural differences, invented new hierarchies, and led to unequal power and domination. In these processes, space is a mechanism that reinforces the exercise of control and subjugation. Thus, as Tchen concludes, Chinatown “was shaped not so much by the actual presence of Chinese in the metropolis as by their systemic erasure and omnipresent ‘otherness’ in New York before Chinatown.”¹⁷ Visual signs such as pagoda rooflines and ornamental street lanterns helped to produce this rigidly confined Oriental “otherness” that became both a social and racial construction. It is hard to define which specific form of Tchen’s Orientalism contributed to the reconstruction of San Francisco’s Chinatown as an “Oriental City” after the 1906 earthquake, because the three forms of Orientalism are closely connected and operate interdependently. Patrician Orientalism and

commercial Orientalism had prompted the popular interest in searching for an essentialized, romantic visual image of the Chinatown. To overturn the long-held perception of Chinatown as a filthy and immoral slum, the Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants regarded the rebuilding of Chinatown as a strategy that would lead Chinatown to a brighter future. For them, exoticism was understood as a means to enhance the public image and viability of the Chinese community. The romantic vision provided favorable new ways for the mainstream society to view Chinatown, but it also obscured the actual being and socio-cultural composition of the community. The political Orientalism that was featured as exclusion, oppression, and exploitation was concealed in the romantic images of Chinatown to legitimate the institutions of inequality, marginalization, and segregation that imposed socio-economic control on the Others. But whether the new construction of ethnicity was a way of domination or merely a commercial decision, it is worth noting that the rebuilding of Chinatown was the product of a set of dynamics that had continued to shape the relations of power, race, and spatiality.

While the built environment of the new Chinatown was intensively “Orientalized” in the post-earthquake construction, the community’s social institutions continued to emphasize Americanization. Influenced by the American reform movement’s activities at Hull House, Tuskegee and elsewhere, the Chinatown elites promoted American virtues such as public hygiene, nuclear family and middle-class respectability. They established social organizations such as hospitals with western medical treatment, YMCAs and YWCAs, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the Chinese American Citizens Alliance.¹⁸ As the journalist and photographer Louis Stellman argued, the destructive 1906 fire was “(p)erhaps the most powerful westernizing agency ever applied to the Chinese.”¹⁹ The year of 1906 was a turning point from which Chinatown became a kind of theme park designed to fulfill the westerner’s imagination of the Orient and also make the community an attractive tourist spot to make sure its survival. In addition, the disaster also opened up the once closed door of the Chinatown and transformed its relation to mainstream society through the force of confrontation. Art historian Anthony W. Lee has acknowledged two major transformations of Chinatown after the earthquake. One was the development of the quarter into a “full-blown tourist destination” for which otherness and exotica had been marketed as a

major attraction. The other was the anxiety caused by the replacement of existing social and cultural orders with revolutionary republican values, which reflected profound changes in China. Lee believes that the two forces of transformation were fundamentally at odds since the power of the tourism industry always tended to “freeze or preserve cultural and social practices,” especially when difference was being commodified, whereas the revolutionary force of republic, on the other hand, sought to advance society by abandoning its old values and traditions.²⁰ Although the two forces of change seem incompatible due to their attachment to different values, they were both driven by the post-earthquake processes of contact, interaction, negotiation, and compromise between the Chinese community and the dominant society. Rather than freezing or preserving the traditional cultural and social practices, the production of ethnic tourism in Chinatown was actually grounded on the construction or invention of ethnicity and tradition, for which a particular “way of seeing” alleged power over the material world through the device of perspective.²¹ Dean MacCannell suggests that modernity consist of literally turning the “real life” of others into “a production and a fetish,” and says that the “emergence of a fascination for the ‘real life’ of others” becomes “the outward signs of an important social redefinition of the categories ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ now taking place.”²² To sustain a firm sense of authenticity and reality, as argued by MacCannell, requires the trope of mystification. The social structure itself is automatically involved in the process of constructing the mode of mystification that supports social reality.²³ Towards this end, tourism development in Chinatown has mobilized architectural arrangements, social and cultural resources to stage a scene accommodating the desire of the sightseers. Lee correctly suggests that it would be difficult to “measure a process of ‘Westernizing’ defined against ‘East’ whose meaning was itself in flux.”²⁴ For the Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants, in post-earthquake Chinatown ethnicity and exoticism had been adopted as tactics essential for the survival of the community.

Chinatown as a Historic District

Concerned that the rapid Manhattanization was reducing the diversity and historic values of the built environment of the city, the San Francisco Planning Department proposed a Downtown Plan in 1985

that highlighted the importance of historic preservation in the downtown area and proposed shifting new development to the South-of-Market districts.²⁵ With increasing opposition to the uncontrolled proliferation of high-rise office buildings, a Proposition M was approved by local voters to moderate the expansion of office spaces and limit the construction of new office buildings to an annual city total of 950,000 square feet.²⁶ At the same time, the renewed appreciation of the cultural and economic diversity of the urban neighborhoods led the city to recognize officially the historical significance of San Francisco's Chinatown. Shortly after the Downtown Plan was published, the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board initiated a proposal to designate Chinatown as a historic district. According to the proposed codes, any alterations to the exterior of structures within the historic district would require city permits as well as the review by the Landmarks Board. New constructions on vacant sites would also require review and approval of the Landmarks Board and City Planning Commission.

The San Francisco Planning Commission proposed interim controls on Chinatown development, seeking to preserve the historic character of the community by restraining new urban development and preventing the spread of high-rise building projects into the neighborhood. These controls not only set height restrictions on new non-residential and residential buildings, but also reduced the floor area ratio in core Chinatown from 10:1 to 6:1 and noncore area from 6:1 to 4.8:1.²⁷ Some Chinatown groups supported the interim controls in hopes that they would overturn "overly liberal zoning rules that encourage owners to develop properties at the expense of housing."²⁸ The designation of a historic district provided tax incentives for rehabilitation costs, and the enactment of State Historic Building Code in 1985 also allowed a range of alternatives for evaluating the structures in historic districts in meeting the building codes. Nevertheless, those Chinatown residents who owned property protested the ordinances and legislations for demarcating a protected historic district because they feared that the restrictions of building heights and area ratio would reduce the future developmental opportunities of their properties. Headed by the Chinese Six Company, the Chinatown property owners objected to the proposed restrictions, declaring their desire for the right "to build to what the property here is worth."²⁹ In addition to this opposition, the particular forms of land ownership in Chinatown also made it extremely difficult to

process the preservation policies of the historic district. After WWII, with the relaxation of restrictions on immigrant land ownership, the clan associations and district associations bought many of the properties in Chinatown from the White owners. Accordingly the Chinatown associations owned about 35 percent of the properties in Chinatown in the 1970s and 80s.³⁰ These associations now allied to protest the historic designation and interim controls. The political pressures from Chinatown organizations and their unwillingness to cooperate eventually obliged the Landmarks Boards and the Planning Commission to delay the designation plan and shortened the effective period of the interim controls.

In New York's Chinatown, as indicated in Chapter Three, the Special Zoning stressed commercial development and new development on vacant lots that would preserve the community's existing character. It required the developers to provide community amenities in exchange for higher floor area ratio. The community's resistance to the Special Zoning was largely grounded on concerns that the development of luxurious condominium complex would gentrify the area beyond the affordability of most of the community people. It was also partly a reaction to the influx of overseas capital from Asia that tended to treat Chinatown purely as a commodity without personal attachment. In contrast, in San Francisco's Chinatown, the protest against the Historic District designation mainly came from the property owners who worried about imposed restriction on the development opportunities of their properties. As the traditional community organization had a high percentage share of the property ownership, the opponents to the Historic District regulation were able to launch a political campaign against it. However, without the status of historic district, San Francisco's Chinatown slowly began to lose its historical flavors, a loss accelerated by fast economic development and the influx of new Asian capital from overseas. Some Chinatown activists and preservationists expressed their concerns over the ever-changing façade of Chinatown storefronts. For instance, Enid Lim, a previous Landmark Board member, claimed that San Francisco's Chinatown was suffering the Hong Kong "mall-ization," which destroyed the historical character of the old Chinatown. Especially on Grant Avenue, the major commercial street of the neighborhood, the glossy appearance of aluminum and plate glass was gradually replacing the wood frame windows and doors that had fronted Chinatown stores since 1906. The so-called

modernization of the 1970s and 80s homogenized the facade of the commercial units, erasing the historic character that had made Chinatown a distinctive neighborhood at the start of the century.³¹ With the development of tourism, shops selling Chinese products such as fine jade and cheap curios gave way to camera and video equipment stores, all-purpose tourist bazaars, hamburger outlets, chain stores, and shops selling Wild West gear, all intended for non-resident consumers. The national president of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance was concerned for the future of Chinatown, asking “Is Chinatown going to remain a unique area with a special history, food and other attractions said or just another place full of camera and T-shirt shops?”³²

The debates over the changing façade of Chinatown street fronts and historic preservation lasted for several decades. The idea of preserving Chinatown as a historic district was first inspired by a letter written by the New Orleans mayor in the 1940s to an architectural magazine, explaining how the city’s Vieux Carre Commission planned to preserve New Orleans’ French Quarter. San Francisco quickly decided to do something similar. Concerning the “westernization” of Chinatown, William T. Hogan, a realtor, and others formed a committee aiming to save the historic look of the community. They asserted that Chinatown was “slowly, but surely, disappear(ing) from our midst as a result of remodeling store fronts and buildings that will do away with the charm that is its greatest attraction.”³³ They observed that shops and restaurants on Grant Avenue looked the same as commercial enterprises found in any small shopping areas, with a full glass front, black marble, and cream brick façade. With regard to the process of modernizing Chinatown’s main commercial street, the committee advocated adopting the preservation laws used in New Orleans and redefined the local ordinances. The proposed legislation would not mandate remodeling but would encourage new designs seeking “to preserve the Oriental flavor.”³⁴ Hogan’s proposal received support from a group of Chinatown businessmen, who themselves also formed the Committee for the Preservation of Architecture in Chinatown in order to preserve the historic façade of the Grant Avenue. The Chinatown group emphasized that the modern buildings were stripping the street of character, with “disastrous” results for commerce.³⁵ Francis Lai Chinn, a Chinatown businessman, believed the Chinese themselves would wholeheartedly endorse the committee plan if they

realized it would help business. He candidly said, “Let’s admit we’re putting on a Hollywood façade to attract tourists, and admit we’re trying to preserve atmosphere because we think it will pay off.”³⁶ The Chinese merchants clearly knew what they were selling and to whom. The Chinese things, buildings, and images, were thus commodified to gratify the Western fascination with exoticism, so as to facilitate the economic development of Chinatown.

In 1947, the Board of Supervisors proposed a city statute prohibiting any architectural changes in the modernization plan for San Francisco’s Chinatown. About one month later, a voluntary program was initiated by the Committee for Preservation of Architecture in Chinatown, seeking legal means of controlling construction and alterations in Chinatown. The program advocated that a local commission, similar to the Vieux Carre Commission of New Orleans, would ensure the retention of the Chinatown’s flavor by judging building and alteration plans and rejecting those practices that did not conform to “traditional” design. Although the proposal met with support from some business owners in Chinatown, the two most powerful Chinese organizations, Chinese Six Company and Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, withheld support, and so, despite the clear goals and agendas, unfortunately it didn’t succeed. The preservationists failed to penetrate the political autonomy of the Chinatown community and then failed to secure the support of the dominant Chinatown organizations.

The effort to maintain the spatial orders of Chinatown in the 1940s was also opposed by local architects and Chinese businessmen who saw “progress” as essential for the community’s future development. For instance, the president of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce said “Like everything else, Chinatown must keep up with the times. It is past time that many of our stores were modernized.”³⁷ An architect said, “New Orleans’ French Quarter is an architectural gem. There are no architectural gems in Chinatown. Most of the buildings are so rotten they should be torn down instead of being preserved.”³⁸ Architects Worley Wong and John Campbell, who had designed some of the modern buildings in Chinatown, were also among the first to rally to oppose the preservation statements. They commented that the “fake sheet metal pagodas aren’t going to help anybody... If Chinatown citizens want modern store fronts on their buildings, that’s their business.”³⁹ Unlike the preservation proponents who viewed

the exotic Chinatown architecture as something with value for its unique Oriental character and a tourist attraction, the arguments of the pro-development groups were grounded on the ideology that constructed Chinatown as an impoverished slum that required “progress” and “modernization.”

Although the conundrum of whether the old structures should be preserved or modernized is a universal concern in heritage management, in the case of San Francisco’s Chinatown the issues are complicated by the community’s particular history of immigration and racial discrimination, and the politics of ethnic identity. The exotica of Chinatown was appreciated in society as a whole not only as an important attraction for tourists, but also because it signified the ideology of multiculturalism that has been celebrated by Western liberal society. The city thus used ethnic iconization to construct itself as a tolerant, international, and diverse cosmopolitan city.⁴⁰ However, critics of multiculturalism have pointed out its inherent structure of racism.⁴¹ For example, Slavoj Žižek has argued, that “multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a ‘racism with a distance’ – it ‘respects’ the Other’s identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed ‘authentic’ community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position.”⁴² In other words, the drive to preserve the Oriental and exotic architectural environment of Chinatown was a ramification of modern society’s mass cultural consumption of ethnicity and difference. The emphasis on the essential or essentialized elements of ethnicity reflected the superficial attempts of multicultural policies and rhetoric to interpret and control cultural difference.⁴³ The success of the tourism industry and the advancement of mass media technology further encouraged the enduring official discourse that defined the ethnic minorities as essentialized Others in which a truly engagement with the real life of the people inhabiting in Chinatown was unfortunately ignored.

In addition to the debates on the best future of Chinatown, the substandard living environments and scarcity of affordable housing and outdoor recreational spaces also greatly influenced the community’s perspectives on preservation and development. The terrible conditions of the old structures, with outdated layouts originally designed for bachelor laborers, later became obstacles to renovation. The large influx of Chinese after WWII produced great pressure on housing in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

According to a 1976 national survey, Chinatown residents were far less satisfied with their neighborhood than U.S. citizens overall. Only 2% of Chinatown residents indicated “very satisfied” with their neighborhood while the national distribution was 46%.⁴⁴ Most expressed “neutral” feelings towards their living environments, among which qualities such as “filth,” “crowding,” “noise,” “traffic jams,” and “parking problems” were considered undesirable attributes of the neighborhood.⁴⁵ The attempts to preserve the historic structures of Chinatown have occurred amidst these perceptions of degraded living standards. For instance, a member of the Chinese Six Company complained that the old buildings in Chinatown were always overcrowded and lacked necessary sanitary facilities. The leaders of many Chinatown community groups were also concerned that the historic district designation “would block progress” by preserving buildings that were unfit for modern habitation.⁴⁶ Thus preservation and modernization were set in opposition to each other. Gordon Chin, a prominent leader in Chinatown’s low-income housing movements, stated that “it would be a mistake to consider the losses to historical design without also seeing projects intended to make Chinatown a more pleasant place.” To Chin, priority should be placed on improving substandard living conditions such as constructing desperately needed outdoor recreational spaces and low-income housing in Chinatown.⁴⁷

In some cities and towns, the adaptive use of the historic structures has sometimes ignored public needs, and therefore is criticized for its role in gentrification and the displacement of low-income residents.⁴⁸ Chinatown was a living community with a large population of poor immigrants and vulnerable tenants, and the residents worried about preservation’s impact on their everyday life. Even though preservationists suggested that historic preservation was not necessarily contradictory to development, and that tax credits and subsidies rewarded to historic designation could provide enough funding for rehabilitating historic buildings, community members were still concerned the preservation would not address the current pragmatic needs of the residents and would pose a barrier to future progress.

The ideological construction of Chinatown as an impoverished slum that has been historically associated with poverty, crime, prostitution, and opium trade, has been profoundly transferred into the spatial language of the community and affected the residents’ perceptions towards the historic remnants

of Chinatown. The anxiety over preservation's potential to hinder growth and modernization shows that space is far more than a neutral physical container, but is encoded with rich social connotations and unfolding social relations. Dominant society saw a link between place and race, morality, social behavior, and cultural difference. Within such a system of knowledge, the space of Chinatown was naturalized as a living repository of uncivilized and inassimilable Oriental others.⁴⁹ For instance, in 1885 the city created a map for San Francisco's Chinatown, specifically indicating the locations of brothels, opium dens, and gambling halls (Figure 38). The map not only was the material *result* of the constant

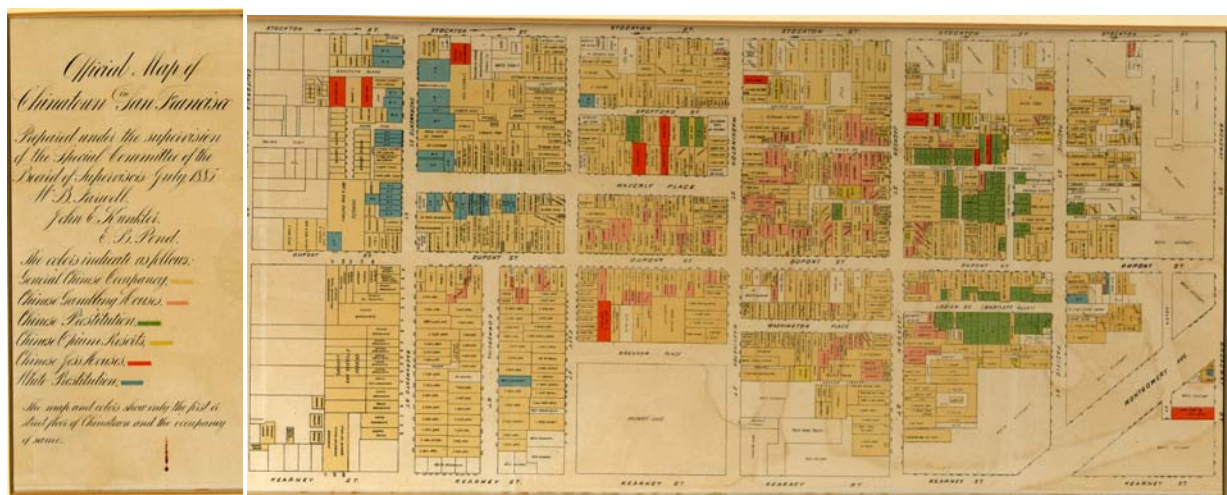


Figure 38: An official map indicating the locations of brothels, gambling halls, and opium dens in San Francisco's Chinatown, ca. 1885 (Source: Historical Society of California Pioneers)

effort to monopolize and define minority space as deviant, imperfect and marginal; it also *produced* the hegemonic narrative that defined the place of Chinatown as other. The bachelor society of Chinatown was considered immoral and dangerous to the respectable domesticity of White society, which further justified the racial hierarchy and discriminatory practices toward the Chinese immigrants. Through such practices as mapping, zoning, knowledge production, identity construction, and meaning regulation, the idea of Chinatown was produced and reproduced within the rigid confines of inferior "otherness."⁵⁰ This unpleasant aspect of Chinatown's history confirmed to community members that the place was unworthy of preservation. They saw the buildings as reminders of a shameful history that ought to be condemned. Defined thus, the past became something to escape, and the prospect of upgrading and modernizing the

physical environment of the community was eagerly embraced. The depreciation of the past was deeply rooted in the racial hierarchy and the ideological ground of “otherness” constructed in the dominant society but accepted in the Chinese community.

The disparity between the ideology of the Chinese community members and the city institutions over the interpretation and management of Chinatown’s heritage reveals the continuing need for negotiation and compromise with respect to the politics of ethnicity. The social cleavages between the enthusiastic guardians of mainstream values and the excluded others are accentuated by connecting social memories with place memories. The awareness of social time – “a time defined by both formal relationships and daily interaction” – combined with historic preservation efforts focusing on the monumentalization of history are entangled in the complex processes of engagement with heritage and identity discourse.⁵¹ Michael Herzfeld argues that social and monumental time separates the popular from the official understanding of history. While social time addresses everyday experiences of ordinary people, monumental time tends to focus on the categorized and stereotyped past.⁵² In a similar vein, Dolores Hayden observes “place trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present.”⁵³ The disparity between insiders’ social memories and outsiders’ needs often leads to conflicting views towards history and preservation. To the larger society, Chinatown is significant not only for its unique history of immigration, but also for the exotic built environment that stimulates the Western fantasy of the Oriental Other. However, for the community members, the impoverished past and the awkward present complicate their feelings toward the place. Chinatown, to them, is not simply a historical repository, but the community where they live. Thus, the argument over the future of the Chinatown is ultimately a contest over social identity and belonging. It raises fundamental questions: Whose Chinatown is it, and who is authorized to speak for the community and interpret its heritage? David Lowenthal has argued that we have treated the past as a “foreign country” and a “marketable commodity” that is nearly irrelevant to modern concerns and our own presence.⁵⁴ For the Chinatown residents, the past never fades away; rather it is entrenched in their everyday bits and pieces of landscapes.

Thus the future of the past might lie in how the heritage and inhabited landscape is embraced as an evolving historical and social process.

Staging Ethnicity

While historic preservation met controversies in San Francisco's Chinatown in the twentieth century, ethnicity and constructed cultural tradition continued to play a key role of promoting the community as a unique urban attraction. Ethnicity, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin has argued, is "an aesthetic category" that shapes an urban public culture that produces difference and stimulates inclusion.⁵⁵ The use of cultural icons and signs to develop an ethnic cityscape provides contemporary Chinatown a competitive advantage in its efforts to rebuild and market the community. For Christopher Mele, successful urban redevelopment requires the reinvention of place identity in order to appeal to middle-class consumers.⁵⁶ From the efforts of rebuilding Chinatown as an Oriental city in the early twentieth century to the practices of erecting the Chinatown gateway in the 1970s, there was a clear desire to highlight the area's exoticism.

In a historical survey conducted in the 1970s, Philip P. Choy and Christopher Yip studied a 36-block area of the core area of Chinatown, an area roughly bounded by California Street on the South, Pacific Avenue on the North, Mason Street on the West, and Kearny Street on the East, to understand the architectural, historical, and environmental merits of the community.⁵⁷ Focusing on buildings and structures "of exceptional merit and deserve(s) serious consideration for inclusion," Choy and Yip defined five zones of the area where historical architectures with certain values concentrated (figure 39). The five zones included South Grant Avenue (zone 1), Portsmouth Square (zone 2), Commercial Street (zone 3), Waverly Place, Spofford and Ross alleys (zone 4), and North Grant Avenue (zone 5). Dean MacCannell's concept of *staged authenticity* is relevant to their study. MacCannell defined staged authenticity in

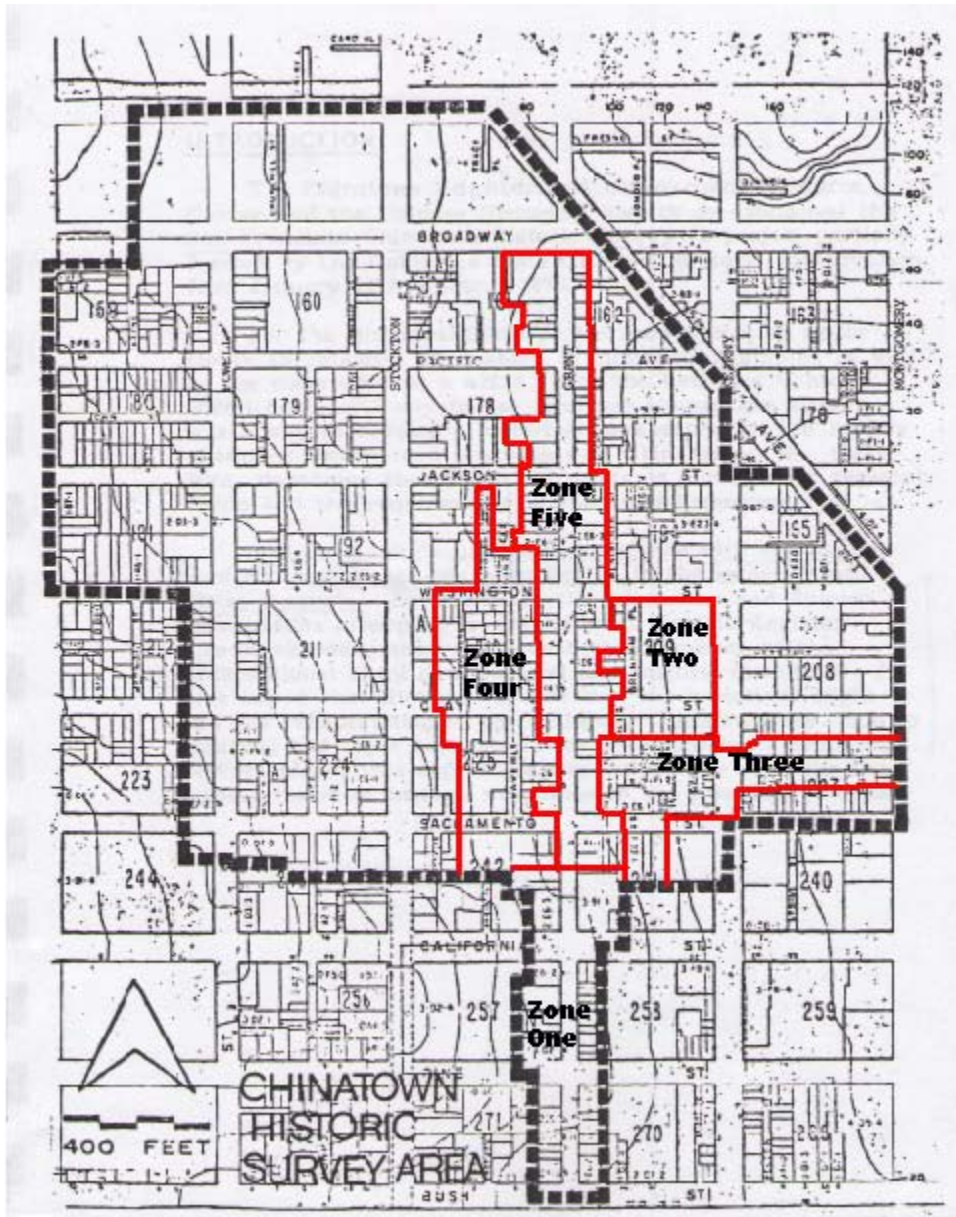


Figure 39: Map shows five zones of the Chinatown historic survey area (Source: *San Francisco Chinatown Historic Survey*, 1979)

reference to Erving Goffman's analytical model of *front and back regions*. The structural division of front and back regions is not only mobilized through architectural arrangements, but the types of social performance and the social roles that are staged in a place. He argues that tourist settings can be arranged in a continuum starting from the front and ending at the back, each stage of this process offering different degrees of accessibility to the tourists. The front region, most accessible to the tourists and outsiders, is designed to generate a firm sense of reality and authenticity, while the back region that supports the

performances conducted in the front region is usually concealed from the visitors, so as not to impede their quest for authenticity.⁵⁸

The division of the front and back regions is manifested in the physical setting of Chinatown. Choy and Yip's five zones with a concentration of historic buildings can be identified as the *front regions* in which the authentic Chinese experience is manufactured as an attraction for tourist consumption. These zones are centered at Grant Avenue, which constituted the commercial core of Chinatown. The Chinese-style architectures, curio stores, restaurants, and ethnic ornaments on Grant Avenue are legacies of the post-earthquake plan to build an Oriental City in Chinatown. Buildings in the area are characterized by curving eaves, pagoda towers, recessed balconies, and other Chinese motifs and decorations. Before the 1906 earthquake, North Grant Avenue mainly served community-oriented businesses and service activities. Afterwards, it was integrated with South Grant Avenue and became major arterial for the community. Commercial Street was also one of the earliest settlements for the Chinese immigrants. The buildings were rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake and adopted a typical downtown building style at the early twentieth century (figure 40). Though as a corridor connecting Grant Avenue with the Financial District at the east side, Commercial Street is no longer as active as in the past, the original mixed-use character and store-fronts still reflect the historical architectural fabric of the Chinatown. While Grant Avenue and Commercial Street are historically know as the major commercial area of the Chinatown, Waverly Place and its surrounding alleys are well recognized by local residents for the famous Tim How Temple and numerous other temples. Many headquarters of traditional social organizations such as district and clan associations are also located in the area (figure 41). According to MacCannell's model, this zone was historically one of the *back regions* that worked as the institutional core of the community. But nowadays, it has become the major attraction for tourists. Of the five zones of historic districts, Portsmouth Square is unique, for it is mostly used by local residents as recreational and gathering space. As the first public square established in the city, Portsmouth Square is a historically significant site where the first American flag was raised during the Mexican-American War in the 1840s. The plaza was



Figure 40: Mix-use buildings on Commercial Street. The original brick paving on the street was replaced by concrete in the late 1990s, ca.2008 (Photo by author).

completely cleared in 1963 to accommodate a four-story underground parking garage because of the general lack of parking in the area. In the 1970s, the square was redesigned as a community park during a redevelopment project that included the building of the Holiday Inn and the Chinese Cultural Center. As the only park in the Chinatown area, Portsmouth Square is an important social space for the Chinese residents, especially the Chinese elderly who congregate to chat and play chess (figure 42).

While the five zones of historic district that are centered on Grant Avenue and located to the east of Stockton Street can be classified as *front regions*, the areas to the west of Stockton Street have different characters that can be identified as *back regions*. Stockton Street is dominated with neighborhood-related activities including ethnic food, grocery stores, and Chinese banks.⁵⁹ The concentration of Chinese grocery stores, food markets, goods shops, post offices, Chinese book stores, and the headquarters of traditional clan associations suggested the area as the living hub for the Chinese community.



Figure 41: View of Waverly Place that has a large concentration of association headquarters with flags standing on the rooftop showing the political affiliation of these organizations, ca.2007 (Photo by author)

Apartment buildings line the street, with a variety of building styles including newly-built high-rises, four to five-storied modern buildings, and renovated historic structures (figure 43). Many of the Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans who live outside of Chinatown visit Stockton Street regularly on weekends for grocery shopping, authentic Chinese food, Chinese newspapers, and meeting with friends. Especially for the Chinese elderly, the Hong Kong-style tea houses and bakery stores are the social clubs where they go frequently to meet up with old friends. They also come for the Chinese-speaking services in post-offices, banks, insurance companies, and hospitals. In spite of the increasing tendency of the

Stockton Street to be visited by the tourists, the front-back division in Chinatown remains valid in sustaining the community both as a tourist destination and a real living community. The existence of the back region also has helped to increase the sense of authenticity for the front region.



Figure 42: Portsmouth Square is primarily a sitting and gathering area that is connected to the Chinese Cultural Center with a pedestrian bridge, ca.2007 (Photo by author).

Given that the desire for traditional environments and tourist practices are always congruent with cultural production and reproduction, the homogenizing development of ethnic landscapes through the manipulation of images and experiences becomes an essential way for policy-makers to generate income and stimulate markets.⁶⁰ According to the 1961-1964 Land Use Survey conducted by the San Francisco Department of City Planning, the core area of Chinatown was categorized as a commercial area. To maintain the character and scale of the area, the survey suggested establishing a Special Height Districts by imposing a height limit of 88 feet, twice the width of the street, along Grant Avenue; a limit of 160 feet in the area bounded by Bush, Powell, Washington, and Kearny Street; and 105 feet for the area north

of Washington Street. The height constraints effectively limited the development of high-rise commercial buildings in Chinatown and subsequently preserved the historical scale of the streetscape. But they also placed great pressure on residential land use because the height limitation made residential development



Figure 43: Stockton Street has a wide variety of architectures that could be dated to different historical periods from the early 1900s to contemporaneity, ca.2007 (Photo by author).

even less profitable than before. The real estate developers thus often preferred to build commercial buildings, rather than residences, in order to maximize profits. The development of commercial activities and tourism in Chinatown also discouraged the maintenance and construction of residential units by greatly enhancing the real estate value of the area. Compared to the Chinatowns in Chicago and New York, San Francisco's Chinatown has the least proportion of land devoted to residential use and largest proportion of land used for commercial activities. According to Chinatown USA Survey 1992, half of San Francisco's Chinatown's land was used for residential purpose and 25% for commercial activities, whereas the Chinatowns in Chicago and New York had 70% of land allocated to residential area and 20%

for commercial.⁶¹ Moreover, the overcrowding and lack of parking and open space due to dense commercial development made the Chinatown an undesirable place for living. The census reports of 1950, 1960, and 1970 all indicated a tendency of the Chinese residents to move from the core Chinatown into the surrounding areas such as Nob Hill, Russian Hill, North Beach, and the neighborhoods at the west side of the city.⁶² The continuous conversion of housing units to offices and stores thus not only significantly changed the demographic and socioeconomic patterns of Chinatown, but also transformed the dynamic and heterogeneous “lived” landscape.

In 1977, the Nob Hill Neighbors requested the city to conduct a drastic downzoning in the Nob Hill area that is located at the west side of Chinatown. More specifically, they proposed reducing the height limit to about 40 feet in an area bounded by Powell, Larkin, and Bush Streets and Pacific Avenue in order to protect the environment and the existing views. In a public hearing held for the downzoning application, 75% of the 500 participants were Chinese who owned many of the properties in and around the Nob Hill area. The Chinatown Coalition for Better Housing declared its strong opposition to the proposal because the height limit would prohibit construction of new low-income housing in the area. They criticized the Nob Hill Neighbors’ disregard for the well-being of the Chinese American residents. Other community groups also contended that existing zoning and height limitation had already effectively discouraged high-rise developments. In addition, the area of east of Taylor Street and north of Clay Street that was included in the downzoning request was perceived as part of Chinatown. Thus they insisted the area should not be included in the Nob Hill Neighbors’ application. Considering the strong opposition from the Chinese community, the City Planning Commission decided to reject the downzoning application.

In 1978, the City Planning Department proposed a Preliminary Plan for the Chinatown Redevelopment Project. The plan was dedicated to improve the housing conditions in the core area of Chinatown and called for the rehabilitation of 13 buildings and new construction on three sites including 935-945 Stockton Street, 814-848 Stockton Street, and two parking lots on Joice Street. The new construction on 814-848 Stockton Street, accordingly, would provide more than 60 housing units for

elderly persons, commercial and community space, and a covered public plaza. The proposal also called for the demolition of a private Chinese school, 14 households, six commercial units, and two club houses including the local Chinese Nationalist Party headquarter and the Ning Yang Family Association building. Rather than obtaining federal grants for community development, the plan attempted to induce property owners to improve their buildings at their own initiative by providing low-interest federal loans. It adopted a new strategy that “require(d) less public outlay and reduce(d) development costs to a minimum.”⁶³ However, obtaining community support for the project became highly politicized. The Chinese Six Companies attacked the plan as a “communist plot” because it was prepared to use “brute force” to remove unwilling landlords from their properties.⁶⁴ Landlords of the affected properties such as the Chinese Nationalist Party vowed to fight the plan. Meanwhile, the tenants also worried that landlords would take advantage of rehabilitation loans by increasing rents or converting their buildings for commercial use. This worry was well grounded because rents did increase significantly after renovation, from \$14 per month for the average unimproved unit to \$25 per month for the average rehabilitated unit.⁶⁵ Concerning a potential loss of housing units, displacement of residents, increasing rents, and the uncooperative property owners, the Planning Department decided to withdraw the redevelopment plan.

In addition to the decrease of residential land use, certain industries were forced out of Chinatown to preserve the integrity of Chinatown as a commercial area. In the 1960s, Chinatown was designated as a Special Garment Shop District in order to confine the development of garment industry in the area.⁶⁶ Chinatown’s garment factories had already become a major economic component by 1875.⁶⁷ In 1958, there were about 125 garment factories with over 2,000 Chinese workers, most of whom were women. The garment shops in Chinatown flourished by demanding long working hours and paying low wages. But this was somewhat offset by the short walking distance between the garment shops and the living units which allowed flexibility of working hours, during which the workers could take care of their families. Meanwhile, the sociability of the working environment also generated an intimate relationship between individual social life and work. These conditions were critical for the survival of the garment shops and for those immigrants depending on the garment shops to make a living. A similar situation was

also found in New York's Chinatown. While the city government of New York wanted to move the garment shops from Chinatown into an independent industrial area, the proposal was contested by both the industry owners and the immigrant workers. However, in San Francisco, the presence of garment shops in a commercial and residential district was a violation of the General Zoning Regulations of the City Planning Code. In commercial districts, only manufacturing "clearly incidental to a retail business conducted on the premises or light manufacturing conducted on any floor above the ground floor of a building" was allowed.⁶⁸ Thus, in the 1960s, about 93 garment shops in Chinatown acquired legal status as to zoning, while 28 factories had to be removed from the Chinatown. Unlike New York City which instituted Chinatown Garment Industry Zone to protect the garment shops in Chinatown from displacement, the zoning ordinance in San Francisco effectively constrained the development of light industry that relied heavily on the cheap labor resources of the Chinatown.

To "cleanse" the spatial environment, the city policy-makers had demanded Chinatown remain a commercial area according to the regulations of the Code, at the cost of eliminating an important dynamic of its social environment. San Francisco Chinese community citizens' survey and fact finding committee asserted that the purpose of the community planning was to "enhance the values of the community, which include the desire and right of Chinatown to preserve its character, its commercial activities, its landmarks, its inherent value to the community and the City as a tourist attraction."⁶⁹ The emphasis on commerce and tourism in Chinatown planning revealed the intentions underlying the reorganization of the space: consumption was maximized, with limited thought to the consequences for social life. Given the sustained interest in promoting Chinatown as a place of consumption, architects, planners, and community stakeholders developed the built environment not only as an explicit reproduction of what they took to be traditional symbol and images, but also in response to a changing market economy relying on the commodification and consumption of ethnic culture.

The entire nation was affected by the trauma of Sept. 11, 2001, but the impact on San Francisco's Chinatown was especially hard because tourism and economic development stagnated. To revitalize the area, the Chinatown activists proposed to build four gates in the four entryways leading to Chinatown.

The idea was inspired by the traditional ways of Chinese town planning with two axes running from the north to south and from the east to west, and having four doors located at each end of the axes. Realizing that four gates would be very costly, the activists decided to push for only one gate at the intersection of Grant Avenue and Broadway Avenue, near North Beach area, to complete the north-south axis of Chinatown, and complement the existing gateway at the south end of the axis. A gateway already existed (figure 44) at the intersection of Bush Street and Grant Avenue, having been built in 1970 and funded by the Taiwan government. It is not only a symbolic structure standing for San Francisco's Chinatown, but also a national landmark signifying the presence of Chinese communities in the United States. However, it was to be replaced by a new gateway designed with "light (and) cheery colors."⁷⁰ Further improvements such as "widening of sidewalks in the area, restoration and relighting of vintage streetlights shaped like dragons, planting of new trees and the construction of a brick walkway" would also be incorporated to bring more pedestrian traffic to the northern blocks of Grant Avenue and stimulating businesses in the area.⁷¹ As indicated by a community-based organization, A Better Chinatown for Tomorrow, the project was dedicated to "promoting the historical roots, architectural beauty, cultural vitality and economic vibrancy that expresses the unique character" of San Francisco's Chinatown.⁷² Nevertheless, for financial reasons, the project hasn't been built.

Gateways were one of the most widely promoted and most often used architectural types in nearly all of the American Chinatowns. In addition to the permanent gateway, a temporary Oriental-style wooden gateway was constructed every year in San Francisco's Chinatown on Commercial Alley leading to an "Old Shanghai" exhibition for the annual Moon Festival. The iconization of the gate embodied the process in which the immigrant group strived to create and reinforce a notion of place identity, and it marked a real or imagined enclave border that linked to the past. It also appealed to tourists in search of the exotic. Jennifer Craik has argued that "...the cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies generated in the tourist's original culture rather than by the cultural offerings of the destination."⁷³ Thus, for the Chinese immigrants, although they have been recognized as multicultural Americans and have free will to express their

identity, they are restrained by prescribed ways in which formal stereotypes have been deeply entrenched. They are also situated within a complicated web of identity politics and hierarchically entrenched power relations, wherein social memory of the Chinatown and their own cultural roots have been displaced by a particular or invented version of the cultural past that they are no longer familiar with.



Figure 44: The existing Gateway of San Francisco's Chinatown is a landmark structure of the Chinatown, ca.2007 (Photo by author).

It should be noted that the staging of ethnicity is not limited to the construction of ethnic monuments, but includes the reinvention of ethnic events, rituals, and ceremonies. The operations such as the annual parades for Chinese New Year and Chinese Moon Festival organized by Chinatown Chamber of Commerce or other community-based organizations signaled the staged ethnicity by using essentialist notions of ethnicity to facilitate an oblique sense of belonging. Identity is a subjective representation or construction of reality bounded in time and space.⁷⁴ As asserted by Jonathan Friedman, “consumption within the bounds of the world system is always a consumption of identity, canalized by a negotiation between self-definition and the array of possibilities offered by the capitalist market.”⁷⁵ In promoting

products, images drawing upon dominant cultural values of a society and ethnocentric stereotypes reflect and reinforce the existing power structures and the relations between the White and the other. In Chinatown, celebrations of ethnic festivals are anchored with the desire of Chinese Americans to incorporate their culture into mainstream ideologies of democratic and multicultural America. But at the same time, the festival celebrations are continually staged in an Orientalized and ahistorical setting in order to appeal to the dominant market that requests novelty and exotic performances.⁷⁶ Such events also suppress the hybridity of Chinese American culture and downplay the political representations of Chinese American group.⁷⁷ With the Chinese New Year Parades in San Francisco telecasted on national channels since the 1980s, the local ethnic celebration has been further commodified to cater to the taste of a national audience instead of local street spectators. Through the camera lens, Chinatown ironically lost its central position as the backdrop of the parades which now is set amidst the high-rises and upscale shopping district in downtown San Francisco (figure 45).⁷⁸ Corporate sponsorship also tended to privatize the ethnic celebration events by conflating Chinese and Chinese American, aiming to penetrate the global ethnic-Chinese market.⁷⁹ Susan G. Davis has observed that with the increasing privatization of parades, “parades are no longer performed where people live and work, but, for reasons of traffic flow, in special, denuded spaces designated by the city.”⁸⁰

By a variety of measures, San Francisco is one of the most popular urban tourist destinations in the United States. Tourism, together with finance, investment, communications, and media, constitute the leading service clusters in San Francisco.⁸¹ In a survey of “101 Reasons to Love San Francisco,” the diversity of the city as a “melting pot” was listed as one of the favorable attributes of the city.⁸² As the multicultural and multiethnic landscape became a major attraction, San Francisco’s Chinatown was ranked as the second most popular spots in the city (after Fisherman’s Wharf). According to the San Francisco Convention and Tourist Bureau reports, there were about 2.5 million tourists in San Francisco from 1980 to 1982, and three out of four of them visited Chinatown.⁸³ Not only Chinatown itself is a tourist attraction, but numerous tourist agencies providing transnational tourist information and services constituted a crucial component of the community economy. Especially with the increase of Asian

tourists from mainland China and Taiwan, Chinatown has played an increasingly important role in transnational tourism industry. Within such a context, San Francisco's Chinatown has launched an aggressive campaign to stage ethnicity in the built environment.



Figure 45: The Chinese New Year Parade in San Francisco downtown, ca.2009 (Source: San Francisco Social Diary, see <http://www.newyorksocialdiary.com/node/299832>, accessed Nov. 30, 2010)

In Chinatown, the national media coverage and the officially designated performance space have made the ethnic celebration parade much more than a neighborhood event, but a carefully monitored experience to maximize consumption by giving a prefabricated appearance of a genuine community life.⁸⁴ Ling-chi Wang correctly points out that the cultural identity of Chinese Americans is not based on “an uncritical, wholesale transplant of Chinese culture” nor is it rooted in “the wholesale denial of the Chinese American past.” Instead it is grounded in “the concrete collective experiences of Chinese in the United States, in a newly conceived community with shared interests and a common destiny in America.”⁸⁵ Thus,

the tendency of the ethnic leaders and the Western institutions to superficially promote ethnic imagery of Chinese American community has severely limited the scope and context of the cultural and political representations of Chinese American identity.

Conclusion

Instead of being a fixed and homogeneous ethnic community, Chinatown is a complex social space containing diverse groups of people and dynamic interactions and relations. Many Asian American writers emphasize the disruption and transmission of traditional culture as part of immigrant life in America. For instance, the narrative of generational conflicts between first generation parents and the American-born second generation conveys the loss of their cultural root and the permeation of American culture.⁸⁶ In a sense, Chinatown has experienced a constant transformation of its socio-cultural composition, demographics, and cultural landscape. Not only the early “bachelor society” has evolved to embrace immigrants varied in class, gender, and national origin, but also the shifting relations of power, culture, and economy of the cities also shaped Chinatown as a different place. The historical processes of staging San Francisco’s Chinatown as a fixed, homogenous, and essentialized symbol of exotic enclave reveal some of the ways that changing discourse and ideology have continuously reproduced and reconfigured the space of Chinatown.

Far from being a stable culture with one shared identity, Chinatown is a terrain of contested meanings, subject to pressures from both inside and outside of the community. We have seen in this chapter that in the course of fighting against the historic designation of Chinatown, the Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants demonstrated their ability and determination to reclaim their lives, insisting on their own terms for doing so. By emphasizing ethnic identity and territory identification, the Chinese resisted the spatial orders of an urban form that prioritized the dominant values. Through reasserting the right of ownership and the need to improve their living environment, the Chinatown residents disrupted the official attempts to impose a structured order on their spatial activities. Yet, another kind of structured order was imposed: tourism facilitated the cultural consumption of enclaves of

ethnicity – a consumption that tourist shops and other Chinese business encouraged – promoting a superficial or even staged interpretation of the neighborhood without true engagement with the social life of the inhabitants.⁸⁷ Yet the Chinatown residents have challenged the established meanings and official discourse that structures and manages them as an essentialized Other, and have instead managed to convert their marginalization into political power.⁸⁸ Roxane Caftanzoglou has observed that the internally oriented and symbolically produced spaces that are assigned distinct values, meanings and functions, and the creation of internal boundaries that demarcate and uphold the differences do not necessarily comply with hegemonic construction of space and the meanings that assigned them. She believes that it is central to recognize the dynamic whereby immigrant settlements were seen as “a disorderly and polluting irruption of social time in the midst of the isolated and well guarded ‘buffer zone’ designed to surround and isolate” the immigrants from the dominant society.⁸⁹ There is a disparity between the dominant discourses about what Chinatown should be, on the one hand, and on the other a collective self-identification of the community. It reveals the often-conflicted discourses of hierarchically allocated spaces formulated by unequally empowered social groups.

In response to the imposition of a top-down spatial order, Chinese immigrants have constructed a counter-discourse of heritage, space, and race that is grounded on a distinct political economic system and collective memories that gave the community its sense of social and cultural identity. The history of racial exclusion and various forms of dispossession have generated strong feelings of belonging and self-identification for the Chinese immigrants. The series of massacres that took place on the west coast in the 1870s, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Acts, and other ongoing threats of dispossession and displacement made their attachment to the place of Chinatown particularly intense. They worked hard to maintain the livelihood of the community. In this, the symbolic construction of boundaries protected them from racial oppression and job discrimination in the larger spaces of the modern metropolis.⁹⁰ It then became a mechanism of political empowerment for the enclave. The sense of inequality that endured in the 20th century and the unevenly distributed spatial powers encouraged the erection of boundaries. These historical boundaries – emblemized by the gates – were then adapted in response to the present politics

of heritage and race. The Chinese community's rejections of either the forceful power of urban renewal (as discussed in Chapter One) or the official imposition of historic preservation are statements of their distinct socio-cultural values that greatly differ from the widely held values of mainstream society. In this sense, space became an important mechanism for the dominated to address their insurgent citizenship.

The series of practices to stage ethnicity are actually involved in the "imaging" of the socio-cultural continuity and stability of Chinatown that was grounded on the socially constructed process of identity formation. The creation of ethnic structures and spaces in Chinatown is driven by an aggressive market force to commodify ethnic traditions that were strategically (and artificially) reinvented as an expression of a pure, fixed, and consistent culture in a new spatio-temporal context. Such packaging of ethnic themes is partly grounded on the logic of the dominant culture that fixes Chinese American identity and denies the social complexities of Chinatown as a living community. The spatial reproduction of the area has entailed the essentialization and idealization of the scenes and experiences by excluding those elements that do not conform to the existing categories of ethnicity. Specifically, the city institutions and Chinatown stakeholders stipulated an Oriental theme for the public audience and thus transformed the physical and social environment of Chinatown into a stereotypical prospect, regardless of the area's heterogeneous reality. Such reductions have contributed to aesthetizing the market-based reproduction of Chinese culture, while obscuring the particularity and precise recollections of the diverse people who live in Chinatown. But at the same time, the vibrant community life has been successfully sustained in the Chinatown through the special food, grocery shops, and services that particularly catered to the needs of the Chinese. With its *front region* dedicate to the tourists and visitors, the *back region* of the Chinatown is preserved for the Chinatown residents and the Chinese living elsewhere of the city. Thus despite a popular tourist destination that has been manipulated to show an invented and essentialized ethnic identity, San Francisco's Chinatown has continued to play an important role in the Chinese American community as a cultural, social, and political center.

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Chapter 5: Landscape Imagery and Community Building in Chicago's Chinatown

Before the 1950s, the everyday environment of Chicago's Chinatown was marked in ways that signified the unique cultural tradition of the Chinese community, but the signs were subtle. The city did not yet have the exotic architectures, curio stores, and ethnic restaurants that later provided Chicago's Chinatown with a unique identity. Prior to World War II, the association buildings owned by the powerful tongs and family and district associations were the only structures that reflected their functions through symbolic trappings characterizing ethnicity. But in the 1960s, with the emerging trend of symbolic differentiation in the American cities and as built form was increasingly becoming a product packaged for the purpose of tourism, Chinatown began to deploy essentialized representations of Chinese traditions. In a sense, the ethnic structures that have been erected since then in Chinatown such as Chinatown gateway and Chinese pavilions epitomize a cultural production that seeks to boost local distinctiveness and attract both visitors and capital by laying claim to the history and architectural traditions of the immigrant community. Kay Anderson has argued that "Chinatown" is "a social construction with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West."¹ In a sense, Chinatown is used as a category to interpret the racial ideology and manipulate consciousness of the society. With the development of urban economy, the image construction of Chinatown is also tied to the capital accumulation and identity making in the city's production systems. In this period, the City of Chicago made efforts to maintain its reputation as the nation's supreme trade show and convention center. In face of the challenges by the rival cities that lost industry payrolls and sought to reboot local economy through developing their own convention facilities, Chicago strove to project a positive place image by means of place advertising and cultural manipulation. Especially as more and more criticisms were made of the increasingly homogenized urban environment, ethnic neighborhoods were recognized as one of the key features on making a city unique. Alongside with the city's traditional visitor sites such as the Sears Tower, Navy Pier, the Museum campus and McCormick Place, the ethnic neighborhoods were promoted as tourist attractions that would give the city a lively and diverse character.

The local development organizations actively engaged in the advertising campaigns to attract tourists to the neighborhoods' restaurants, cafes, bakeries, art galleries, and other cultural institutions. Accordingly, restaurant business occupied 54% of Chicago Chinatown's business types in 1992, compared to 26% in San Francisco's Chinatown and 30% in New York's Chinatown. Thus Chicago's Chinatown tended to rely more on the tourism and restaurants for the economy, while San Francisco's Chinatown had diverse businesses including professional services (21% of community business types) and New York's Chinatown had a large manufacturing foundation (40% of community business types).² In 2005, more than 3200 tourists participated in the Chicago Neighborhood Tours series, which included tours of 12 ethnic neighborhoods in the city, including Chinatown, Greek Town, Pilsen and Little Village (Mexican neighborhoods), Bridgeport (Irish neighborhood), Little Italy, Devon Avenue (Indian neighborhood), and others.

Within such a context, the invention and consumption of ethnic culture in the ethnic enclave was facilitated for the sake of tourism and commercial development. However, it also produced a mode of symbolic architecture that served community needs by creating an "imaged community" for the Chinese immigrants.³ *Diaspora* was increasingly used in the transnational context to articulate an inclusive ethnicity through claiming a common racial and cultural ancestry.⁴ As Chinese Diasporas, Chinatown was affected by, incorporated, and participated in the construction and global marketing of Chinese culture. Through the myth of common descent and a shared history and culture associated with a specific territory, the ethnic community transcended the bond of kinship to embrace a broader sense of ethnicity that was fundamental to the modern construction of a deterritorialized nation-state. In addition, Chinatown was (and is) produced by the interrelation of spaces, in which the relation of production and the networks of capital and labor market have been hierarchically and unevenly distributed.⁵ The history of socioeconomic oppression and exclusion of the Chinese immigrants from the national polity led to the growth of "informal political structures" in Chinatown, and aggravated the unequal labor/management relations within the community.⁶ The construction of a cultural representation of "Chineseness" and the reconstitution of patriotism, Confucianism, and ethnic solidarity in Chicago's Chinatown showed that the

Chinatown elites tried to fix the meaning of the place and interpret it as bounded enclosed space that was defined against the “outside” society. In this sense, the landscape imagery of Chinatown served not only the dominant society’s desire for an Other, but also as an active agent of reinforcing and reproducing the power relations of the Chinese community itself. Ethnic solidarity and nostalgia, in a way, became the essential means to consolidate the hegemony of the Chinatown elites.

On Leong Merchant Association Building

The first Chinatown in Chicago was built at Clark and Madison Streets in the late 1880s. By 1912, due to the conflicts between On Leong Tong and Hip Sing Tong,⁷ as well as the urban revival of the downtown area, Chinatown was forced to move to Wentworth Avenue and Cermak Road. The On Leong Tong (later known as On Leong Merchants’ Association) contracted a series of ten-year building leases and had built this area as the hub of Chicago’s Chinatown. The majority of the buildings standing in the area were standard Western structures, the legacy of German, Irish, and Italian immigrants who had successively occupied the district before the Chinese arrived.⁸ Because of the restriction of the Alien Land Laws of 1913, 1920, and 1923, the Chinese made very few cultural imprints on the built environment of Chinatown. With a few exceptions of notable association buildings and commercial structures, most of the buildings in Chinatown remained unaltered from the period of the early settlement of the European immigrants. When the new Chinatown in Armour Square was established, the On Leong Tong became the dominant social group, thoroughly controlling the economic, political, and civil life of the ethnic community. Meanwhile, the Hip Sing Tong, who stayed in the older Chinatown, began to decline along with the general dwindling of the neighborhood. To celebrate its prosperity and growth of power, the On Leong Tong built the On Loeng Merchants Association Building on South Wentworth Avenue as the association headquarters.

The On Leong Association Building was designed by Chicago architects Christian S. Michaelsen and Sigurd A. Rognstad in 1926 and completed in 1928. It is a three-story building constructed on a steel and concrete frame and clad with brick (figure 46). The symmetrical form of the building with two

pagoda towers reveals the influence of the Chinese Theater located on the Midway during the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, which was initiated by the local Chinese and designed by an architectural firm known as Wilson and Marble (figure 47).⁹ The structure was demolished after the fair, but it influenced many Chinatown architectural designs. For instance, similar layout and pagoda framework of the Chinese theatre can also be found in the Sing Fat and the Sing Chong building in San Francisco's Chinatown and the On Leong Tong headquarters in New York's Chinatown (see Chapter Six). For the On Leong Association Building, the main portal at the center of the first floor is decorated with an elaborate terra-cotta canopy with upturned corners. The portal opens to a small lobby and a staircase that leads to the upper floors. The first floor was occupied by stores and the façade is entirely covered by terra cotta. Green and cream colored glazed terra cotta is also used to frame the windows and doorways, as well as decorating the towers. The decoration of terra cotta imitates the traditional form of glazed terra cotta, known in Chinese as *Liu Li*, a popular material often used in high-style



Figure46: The Symmetrical form of On Leong Association Building, ca.2004 (Photo by author)



Figure 47: The Chinese Theater and Temple was erected for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. The building was one of the earliest structures built in American showing the peculiar idea of Chinese architecture, ca.1893 (Source: The Chinese-American Museum of Chicago)

architecture. The design of the terra cotta on the On Leong building also followed the forms of Chinese prototypes of “animals, figures, foliage, and geometric patterns” that would protect the building from bad spirits and signify longevity and fortune.¹⁰ However, at the same time, some of the materials and ornamental elements echo neo-mudejar (Spanish Islamic) style--also popular in this period--suggesting that in the minds of Michaelson and Rognstad, the exotic may not have been firmly located.

Residential rooms on the second floor were designed to accommodate single male immigrants, while a lounge, offices, and classrooms were used as an after-hours Chinese language school. The third floor of the On Leong building was equipped with a kitchen, a dining room, and three meeting halls to accommodate the activities of the On Leong Association; one of the meeting halls was specially decorated as an ancestor shrine.¹¹ The building adopted the vivid color scheme of Mandarin red, the traditional color of joy and fortune, and jade green symbolizing affluence and peace. The color scheme prevailed in the royal and institutional structures in ancient China, where its purpose was to demonstrate the authority of the imperial powers over the ordinary people.

With the completion of the On Leong building, Michaelsen and Rognstad and their successor firm became the most popular architecture firm in Chicago's Chinatown for the next several decades. Besides the commissions of the new commercial structures built in the style similar to the On Leong building, the architecture firm was also responsible for renovating existing buildings' storefronts and interiors.¹² Architecturally, the On Leong building has been considered significant for possessing typical "Chinese" traditional characteristics in North America, and it was nominated as a Chicago Landmark in 1988. Socially, the building not only served as headquarters of the On Leong Tong, but also functioned as the "City Hall" of the enclave. During the heydays of the On Leong Tong, the building was a symbol of wealth, power and authority for its commanding presence. However, despite its historical significance, the On Leong building has a checkered social history. In the 1980s, the government forced the building to close down because of illegal gambling. In 1992, the Chinese Christian Union Church purchased the building and renovated and converted it to a space of worship, a renamed as *Pui Tak Center*.¹³ The first floor of the building nowadays still houses commercial units, while the second floor has been renovated as offices, classrooms, and a library serving the needs of the church. On the third floor, the former ancestor shrine and meeting halls were transformed into a Christian hall of worship. With its original storefronts, essential architectural elements, and the exterior facades remaining mostly intact, the historical integrity of the building has been well preserved.¹⁴ In 2007, the *Pui Tak Center* was awarded a

\$100,000 grant from the Partners in Preservation Program to renovate the terra cotta exterior and clay tiles on the roof.

Although highly regarded as the “oldest and most prominent physical symbol of Chicago’s Chinese heritage,”¹⁵ the On Leong Association Building is subject to the debates regarding “authenticity.” Dell Upton, for example, questioned the authenticity of these kinds of architectures built in Chinatown, arguing that they are not vernacular since their styles were derived from high-style Chinese architectures that had little connection to the old-country life ways of the Chinese immigrants. He defined this form of Chinese heritage as an “invented tradition” (borrowing the term from Hobsbawm and Ranger) that has been “mythicized” and “commodified” to fulfill the Westerners’ fantasy about the Orient.¹⁶ The arguments illustrate that the production of Chinese American culture is not simply a process of transmission, but a practice of recreation and rearticulation. As Lisa Lowe has suggested, the making of Asian American culture includes practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented; Asian American culture emerges in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian and Asian American cultures as Other.¹⁷ In the case of the On Leong Building, the strategy of ethnic iconization defined the identity of Chinatown by emphasizing essentialized characteristics of Chinese architecture. Architects Michaelsen and Rognstad were both trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition and excelled in large-scale public projects.¹⁸ For the design of the On Leong Association building, they researched the classical masterpieces of Chinese “high-style” architecture, including Chinese temples, palaces, gardens, and other institutional structures. Since the architects had never visited China and were unfamiliar with Chinese culture, their understanding of Chinese architectural style and its embedded philosophy was limited to the literary and graphic materials to which they had access. These then were the primary sources of inspiration for the design of the On Leong building and its ornamentations. Additionally, the Chinese Theater of the World’s Columbian Exposition was also an important inspiration for the design of the On Leong building, even though the theater was kitsch architecture built for the enjoyment of the Exposition visitors and based on stereotypical representations. By choosing a few highly recognizable visual signs of “Chinese,” the architects

combined with the On Leong Association’s formal needs to create a so-called “novel architectural solution,” in which tradition, as the architects understood it, was evoked to create a unique cultural identity for Chicago’s Chinatown.¹⁹

Although Orientalized to appeal to popular non-Chinese taste, the On Leong building also expressed the cultural and political ideology of the Chinese community. For instance, a 1943 postcard by a Chinese tourist company portrayed an image of the On Leong Association building (figure 48). The façade facing South Wentworth Avenue was covered with colorful flags, while the name plate of the building was exposed. The application of various bright colors in the picture – jade green roof with mandarin red edge and light blue sky – imparted a joyful and celebrating atmosphere to the environment. The flags of the United States and the Republic of China stood on the roof of the building to indicate the dual nationalities of Chinese Americans, while the colorful American flags decorating the front façade conveyed patriotism. They also expressed a concept of transnational citizenship – in the sense of “dual citizenship” and “dual loyalty” – which was experienced by the immigrant communities.²⁰

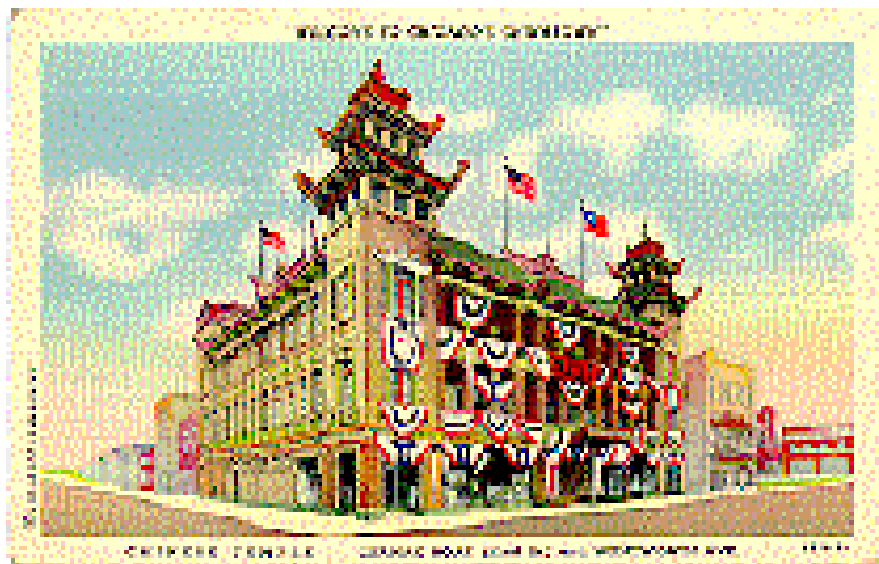


Figure 48: A postcard from 1943 shows a colorful and ostentatious image of the On Leong Association Building, ca. 1943 (Source: Curt Teich Postcard Archives, Lake County Discovery Museum)

The postcard highlighted the On Leong building as a cultural symbol of the Chinese community by emphasizing its grand commanding appearance, elaborate decoration, and vivid colors. The expression

of local pride is also evident in the construction of the open loggia dominating the upper stories of the On Leong building. Open loggias were functional architectural elements that prevailed in the multi-story commercial and residential buildings in Hong Kong and the Guangdong province of Southern China. For the hot and humid climate of those areas, the open loggia was essential to keep interiors cool. As a semi-open social space, it also gave people the opportunity to interact with each other or to watch parades and events on the streets below. Because most of the early Chinese immigrants came from the villages of Guangdong Province where the open loggia was popular, the adoption of the element in the On Leong Association Building reflected the link between the Chinese immigrants and the living traditions of their home country. Although the loggia in the On Leong building in Chicago was far from the natural and social context of the past, such a strategy of self-presentation reinforced a collective identity of the community in which internal diversity was suppressed for the sake of a new need for solidarity.

Postwar Construction of Landscape Imagery in Chinatown

If Chinatown of the time period from 1850 to World War II can be characterized by racial segregations, political disenfranchisement, and legal exclusions, the repeal of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and the institution of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 began a new era for the Chinese immigrants, in which the structural transformation of the U.S. economy required reconfiguration of the nation's racial policy and immigration legislation. To renew the domestic labor supply, the state had lifted some of the legal and political bars restricting Asian immigration, which produced more diverse and stratified immigrant groups among the Asian community. With shifting demographics and American democratic ideals, the social and political composition of Chinatown was significantly transformed. The kinship relations that were fundamental to community building in the early ages of Chinese immigration history had been gradually dissolved and replaced by political unity based on ethnicity and cultural identity. Meanwhile, there arose a new generation of grass-root social organizations, comprised of well-educated young Chinese Americans. These began to compete with the traditional Chinatown associations by seeking to build a democratic political structure in Chinatown and fight for inclusion and equality in

the national polity. The articulation of a Chinese identity – although emerging through internal dissension rather than consensus – became an important organizing tool to advance the political and socioeconomic rights of the Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. With the goal of constructing Chinatown as a political unity, the Chinatown elites reproduced the traditional forms of the built environment and thus contributed to the construction of an essentialized ethnic imagery.

After the war, the increasing domination of marketing interests and the fast growth of the tourism industry also contributed to the proliferation of ethnic consumption. The marketing of ethnic culture and exoticism was promoted by mass media advertising and the reigning ideology of difference and diversity. In contrast to the prewar Chinatown in which the constructing of ethnicity was concentrated on a few individual works of architecture, the postwar Chinatown self-consciously created an array of symbolic images and a themed built environment to appeal to the mass market. From the 1970s to the present, many structures adhering to Chinese prototypes have been constructed in Chicago's Chinatown with the goal of endowing it with historical cohesion and continuity. The ornamentations applied to architecture, open spaces, and public art works give Chinatown a unique ethnic stamp. Although it is difficult to define a cohesive uniform style for the architectural landscape, the structures possessing Chinese characteristics usually contain display features such as sloping glazed roofs with upturned corners, cantilevered clusters of beams (called *Dougong* in Chinese), carved columns, and various decorative patterns adopting the forms of animals or plants.²¹ The traditional building forms of Chinese pavilion, gateway, and the temple also framed Chinatown at a visual level that distinguished it markedly from the rest of the city. In terms of color, red is prominent.

Tradition was a key semiotic instrument in recreating the space and defining the place identity of Chicago's Chinatown. It is evident in the construction of the Chinatown gateway in 1975, which marked an entryway into Chinatown and provided a dramatic visual experience for visitors. The gateway idea was conceived by George Cheung, a former civil leader of the Chinatown, who suggested that a gateway as “a symbol of Chinese culture, good will, and friendship” would attract more visitors to learn about Chinese culture and Chinatown.²² Thus, designed by Peter Fung, a Chinese American architect, the gateway was

built by the community developers to promote a pure, exotic, and authentic image for the ethnic enclave (Figure 49). The steel-framed, red-painted gateway structure is 60 feet wide and 35 feet tall, spanning South Wentworth Avenue and facing Cermak Road. Three gabled roofs are covered with glazed green tiles, of which the main central roof is placed higher than the other two smaller side roofs to create a symmetrical tiered structure. A Greek mason was in charge of the tricky job of setting the tiles because it was impossible to bring in a native craftsman from China at that time. The roofs are placed on top of a row of cubes, which is an architectural element derived from *Dou Gong*, a wooden assembly deployed in traditional Chinese architectures to transfer the weight of the roof to the supporting columns. Beneath the *Dou Gong* is a panel decorated with auspicious patterns, underneath which a nameplate is inscribed with four Chinese characters, *Tian Xia Wei Gong* (“The World is for All”). This proclamation of unselfish love for the world was made by Sun Yat-Sen (1866 -1925), a founder of the Nationalist Party who initiated the revolution overthrowing Qing Empire to establish the Republic of China. A similar statement can also be found on the “dragon gate” in San Francisco’s Chinatown that was designed by Clayton Lee in 1970. This reveals the connection between these different Chinatowns in terms of political representations when the Nationalist Party in Taiwan was a dominant power in most major Chinatowns in America and funded the construction of these gateways. On the side of the nameplate facing Wentworth Avenue, there is an inscription quoting Chiang Kai-Shek, another former leader of the Nationalist Party. His words -- “Propriety, Justice, Integrity and Conscientiousness”--represent Chinese traditional values and also indicate the political affiliation of the communities.



Figure 49: Chinatown Gateway on South Wentworth Avenue, ca.2008 (Photo by author)

The gateway's form was derived from a freestanding *Paifang* (or gateway). In ancient China, such gates were built as symbolic entrances to tombs, temples, palaces, or cemeteries. In some cases, they were also constructed to memorialize and venerate persons of great virtue or of vital contribution to the country or local community. Usually there would be four columns to support the entire structure. But in the case of the Chicago gateway, there were only two columns, a design that might reflect accommodation of vehicular traffic on South Wentworth Avenue. The gateway was supposed to be flanked by two stone figures of lions, symbols of the Guardian of the Law, but due to a lack of funds, this part has never been completed. Even though the gateway is relatively simple compared to the original form of *Paifang* in China or the gateways that have been built in San Francisco's Chinatown and Vancouver's Chinatown, it has been regarded as "original" and "an authentic derivative of old Chinese structures."²³ This begs the question of what makes it authentic. Here tradition has been repackaged to represent a community identity

that sees itself as stemming from a pure and discrete culture. In this sense, the Chinese Americans were as active as any of the external forces in casting themselves as a homogenous group.

The creation of ethnic monuments tends to transform Chinatown into a “themed park,” a place of staged cultural production and consumption.²⁴ This process of theming the landscape is not unique to the Chinatown. It has happened in other cities and other ethnic neighborhoods. Greektown in Chicago, for instance, built a symbolic entryway in the form of the peristyle temple in 1998. Designed by a local artist, the temple represents Greek heritage. The Puerto Rican community at Humboldt Park, in a similar way, has been marked by two Puerto Rican flags that are cast in steel and stand 59 feet tall. In 2002, the city resumed the trolley cars running on Cermak Road that were retired from service in 1958, in order to link the tour line of Chinatown with the Mexican American neighborhood, Pilsen. The new loop is the first route in Chicago’s Free Trolley System that travels into the city’s South Side neighborhoods away from the lakeshore. The project, as a combined effort of the neighborhoods of Chinatown and Pilsen, was an unusual collaboration in a major urban area.²⁵ The city’s efforts to raise the visual identity and tourist interests of these ethnic neighborhoods are linked to the rhetoric of “the spectacle of multiculturalism,” which promotes ethnic culture and tradition as spectacles for the city’s residents and tourists.²⁶ This strategy has proved a great success to the city’s economic development because tourism has boomed and the city downtown reemerged as a popular residential settlement in the 1990s.

The promotion of ethnic iconization in Chicago’s Chinatown has been complicated by the community’s transnational political networks and the need to institutionalize the various political communities of the Chinese Diasporas. In 1977, a community park dedicated to the Chinese political figure, Sun Yat-Sen, was built at the southern part of the Chinatown on a strip of land donated by Chinatown Redevelopment Assistance. Funded by the City of Chicago and the Community Improvement & Development Program, the project featured a stone arch entrance with a crossbeam supported by two columns (Figure 50). A statue of Dr. Sun was placed atop a stone cylinder, on which a brief biography was inscribed. Underneath the statue is a rectangular pool dotted with small fountains. The small memorial park also includes a pavilion in Chinese traditional style and a children’s playground

accommodating the community's need for open spaces. Benches and the settings of one stone table with four stools are particularly arranged for seniors to play chess and have small gatherings. As a leading figure in the national republic revolution of China, Sun was widely admired and highly regarded by the overseas Chinese communities. His political success in China had been facilitated by his close ties with the Guangdong villages where the early Chinese immigration originated and by generous financial support from overseas. Thus the park dedicated to Sun not only displayed the signs of ethnicity, but also expressed enduring socio-political ties to the homeland country by reinforcing national memories.

Deploying the nationalist discourse of patriotism, the Chinatown elites have tailored and institutionalized the ideology of the nation in order to forge an "imagined community" that would inspire a sense of local attachment and identity. Because political and legal disenfranchisement excluded Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans from national representation, they were defined as "alien." In response to a political system of racial exclusion and labor exploitation, the Chinese immigrants have organized themselves under a collective cultural identity that rests on transnational experiences that exceeded the rigid confines of national boundaries.²⁷ With the Communist Party dominating mainland China since 1949, the political uncertainty, social movements of the country, and the shifting international geopolitics challenged the relations between the Chinese immigrants and the Old World. Another statue of Sun Yat-sen can also be found in St. Mary Square of San Francisco's Chinatown, which was designed by sculptor Beniamino Bufano in 1960. These designs of monument and public space helped to bridge the gap, reasserting the emotional ties of the Chinese community in America to a homeland that was, in actuality, not the same as the place they had left behind. More importantly, the creation of ethnic monuments memorizing selected political figures based on an invocation of a nationalistic regime of the past was a strategy whereby the political groups used architectural representations to materialize the cultural and political imaginary and reinforce certain political ideology for the community.



Figure 50: The entrance to the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Park, ca.2003 (Photo by author)

In 1958, the headquarters of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), also known as the Chinese Community Center, was constructed in Chicago's Chinatown with financial aid

from the Nationalist Party of Taiwan (figure 51). By then, CCBA had the dominant position once held by



Figure 51: The CCBA building is decorated with two stone lions at the entrance and the statue of Confucius on the side. The national flag of America and the Republic China of Taiwan indicate the political connection of the agency to the Nationalist Party in Taiwan. ca. 2003 (photo by author)

the On Leong Tong and had become the official authority and representative of the Chinatown community. The two-story building adopted a symmetrical form to emphasize its institutional nature, while two stone lions--symbols of power and prestige--flanked the main entrance. A green pitched roof with a couple of upturned fish-shaped decorations at each end of the roof ridge was intended to inspire a nostalgic sense of ethnic identity. A large expanse of glass on the first floor defines the main entrance of the building. The portal opens into a large foyer and a staircase that leads to the large meeting room at the ground floor. Offices and classrooms for Chinese language school are located on the second floor. In 2002, a statue of Confucius was erected at the east side of the building, a strategy promoting the traditional cultural values of loyalty, modesty, and obedience. Aihwa Ong explains how the rationality of

Confucianism and reconstitution of patriotism have been employed by the Chinese state to incorporate overseas Chinese into the national project of constructing Chinese modernity. She suggests “cultural solidarity, filial piety, and everlasting loyalty” to the home country has become the essential language of “overseas capitalism” and “investment-scouting meetings.”²⁸ In the case of North America, such a strategy was also used to facilitate a notion of ethnic solidarity and unification, which contributed to the political and cultural hegemony of the elites in those communities.²⁹

Some of the conceptions of “cultural nationalism” are discussed pointedly by Lowe in her book about Asian American cultural politics.³⁰ Lowe observes that within Asian American discourse there are two genres of discussion about the concepts of identity and culture with respect to race. One places cultural nationalism in an opposite position to assimilation by essentializing cultural identity as the “cornerstone of a cultural nationalist politics,” while the other trend emphasizes the material hybridity and multiplicity of Asian American culture by criticizing the static and pure notions of culture.³¹ As a form of cultural representation, architectural style often engages in the first discourse to assert a cultural nationalism in Chinatown. The Chinese sense of racial identity had been shaped by their designation by Western colonizers as the “Sick Man of East Asia,” referring to the plague on the Chinese body incurred when opium was imported into China at the end of the 19th century. For a century, that negative stereotype loomed above the Chinese and Chinese immigrants. Such construction of race is also linked to nation building in modern China. The official rhetoric has asserted that Chinese people were finally able to get rid of the label of “Sick Man of East Asia,” and that China was rising as a great power in the world.³² In this way, national identity was forged upon a colonized past in relation to Western constructions of race. The elements of “revolution” and “anti-Western sentiment” play a big part in Chinese national identity.³³ The recovering racial pride contained in the national building of the deterritorialized nation-state of China accentuates notions of ethnic unity and common cultural roots.

In addition, the process of essentializing also helped to aestheticize the material inequality and differentiation among the social groups. Perceived by outsiders as an urban ethnic enclave, there had not been much direct governmental involvement in managing the social and economic order inside the

community. Instead the Tongs and clan associations had played a vital role in organizing Chinatown's space. The form of autonomous governance, on the one hand, protected Chinese immigrants from oppression and discrimination by external forces. But on the other hand, it also produced an informal political structure that maintained the privileges of a small group of elites and the subjugation of the majority of laborers. On these grounds, Peter Kwong criticizes the stereotypical construction of Chinese Americans as a "model minority" with respect to the class and labor. He suggests that the Chinese merchants and business owners were able to exploit laborers with low wages, long working hours, and harsh working conditions because the sociopolitical patterns of Chinatown discouraged access to the outside world. Labor/management disputes were often perceived as internal issues, for which the disadvantaged and oppressed rarely sought outside support.³⁴ The political hegemony of the traditional organizations, the resistance of grass-root social organizations, labor/management disputes, and the emergent issues of illegal immigrants determined the complicated character of the social life in Chinatown. There were differences and asymmetrical power relations embedded in these relations, but they were hidden behind a benign face of cultural homogeneity. Chinatown was often described as being an emblem of homogeneous culture and population. The myth of cultural homogeneity implies an essentialized construction of community that denies the differences and diversity among the community groups. It thus can be experienced as a political strategy to depoliticize the intra-ethnic relations. This phenomenon is not unique in Chicago. As we can also see in New York's Chinatown, a statue of Confucius was erected in the community's entry way – the busy intersection of Chatham Square and Bowery Street. The creation of such landscape imageries relied on producing the narrative of "cultural nationalism" and promoting harmonious and unproblematic aspect of ethnic identity. It reduced cultural politics to the representation of a static culture that denied the uneven power relations that existed *within* the ethnic community.

Indeed, the strategy of essentialized ethnicity in the built environment was only one aspect of a larger scheme of community building pursued by the Chinatown elites. The restructuring of economic models, the democratization of institutional structures, and the functional reorganization of planning

policies were intended to package the community as an ethnic tourist destination and a commercial center. As portrayed in a popular postcard, a bilingual signboard with a dragon head as decoration above the prominent word “CHINA” highlighted at the foreground of the picture, along with the two pagodas of the On Leong building and the green tiled roof of Chinatown Gateway provides an exotic image that sharply contrasts with the Sears Tower at the background (figure 52). The multiple layers of representation reveal both the harmony and the tension between two distinctive cultural systems – Western civilization and Oriental tradition, or modernity and China. As multiculturalism has become a central trope to mobilize the local cultural and social resources for place consumption, ethnic diversity and the cultural presence of others contribute to build attractive and distinctive place images. To promote harmonious relations between the ethnic groups and mainstream society, the multicultural agenda has emphasized cultural differences that are separated from political conflicts and struggles of the ethnic groups. However, the sharp contrast with the ethnic structures and modern high-rises conveys a sense of tension that serves to flatten Chinatown into a stereotype. Such a stereotype was not only an outcome of the western imagery of the Orient imposed from the outside, but also resulted from a process of self-Orientalization. Employers and those who controlled the tourism industry and commercial development in Chinatown labeled the workers with the same stereotypes as the outsiders imposed on them. They were asked to behave according to “what Americans want.”³⁵ These schemes of operation were also manifested in architectural representation. The community organizations and business owners actively promoted a staged performance of Chinese tradition, the purpose of which was to serve not the community but rather the needs of tourism.

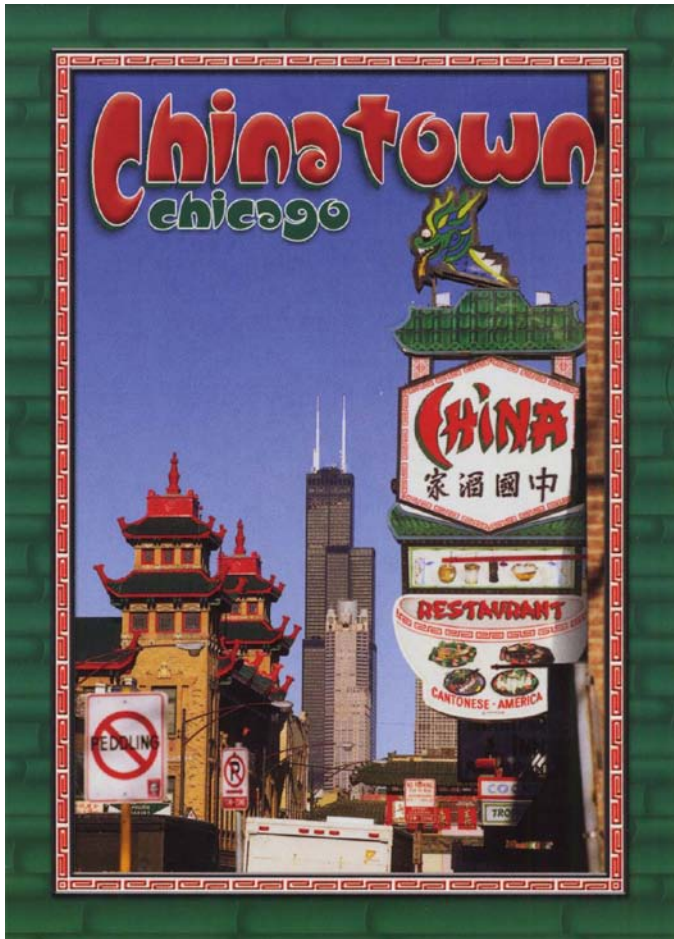


Figure 52: A Postcard of Chicago's Chinatown with Sears Tower at the background, ca.2002 (Distributed by Smith-Southwestern, Inc., author's collection)

“Go More Orient”

The different waves of Chinese immigrants coming from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China after World War II dramatically reconfigured the Chinese settlement and complicated its cohesion with homeland politics, economic ability, and various levels of cultural affiliation to the native culture. The differences among these immigrant groups were reflected in the built environment where the Chinese themselves constituted a major force of consumption in addition to the Westerners. For example, since the 1980s, while growing numbers of the typical curio stores and ethnic restaurants served the western tourists, Chinese grocery stores, book stores, and banks also mushroomed in Chicago's Chinatown to serve the Chinese customers. The burgeoning community sought a way to grow when it was walled in by

expressways and railroad tracks on three sides and the only viable option for expansion was to the north. By 1984, there were about 8,000 people living in the Chinatown with about 500 more arriving annually.³⁶ The influx of new immigrants placed pressure on the limited space of Chinatown and generated economic and social issues in relation to housing, traffic, and community services. Most Chinatown residents lived in the neighborhood's original buildings, some of them dating to 1907. But to accommodate the growing number of immigrants, these original housing units were divided into smaller units, in which multiple families shared kitchens and bathrooms. Although income levels were low, the scarcity of land and housing led to higher property values in Chinatown compared to those of surrounding neighborhoods. Because housing and outdoor recreational facilities were inadequate and usually in poor condition, those who could afford to move outside of the enclave always preferred to do so. Some of them moved southward and westward into Bridgeport and other nearby neighborhoods. For young Chinese professionals with adequate financial sources, the suburbs and wealthier neighborhoods in the city were favorable choices. With the flight of the wealthy to the suburbs, who were in turn replaced by new waves of much poorer recent immigrants, Chinatown has become a vulnerable and unstable neighborhood.

Aiming to revitalize Chicago's Chinatown, a study for Commercial Revitalization of Chinatown was conducted in 1980, funded by the Department of Human Services under the City of Chicago's Community Development Block Grant Program. The study advocated revitalization through enhancement of ethnic character: "Oriental-looking shopping street with equally Oriental-looking stores should please the patrons and increase sales."³⁷ To make the commercial areas more appealing to tourists, the study proposed a construction plan that incorporated "a giant pagoda, an Oriental-looking parking garage, Chinese 'friendship gardens' and ethnic decorations on everything from little news shacks, telephone booths to flower planters and restaurant directories."³⁸ It also suggested building a pagoda at the intersection of Wentworth Avenue and Cermak Road as a cultural symbol of Chicago's Chinatown. The busy intersection was hazardous to pedestrians, and thus the pagoda with an approximately 15 foot island around it was expected to provide a midway refuge for the crossing pedestrians. In order to mediate traffic congestion in the Chinatown area, the plan also recommended building a parking garage at the northeast

corner of Wentworth and Cermak, a site that had been originally vacated for the construction of the Franklin extension of the Dan Ryan Expressway. The multi-story parking structure would accommodate about 400 cars and commercial space on the first floor, and it would feature a roof of curved Chinese-style overhangs (figure 53). Another major project proposed by the study was to convert the several vacant spaces in Chinatown into “mini friendship gardens” that would provide space for social gatherings.

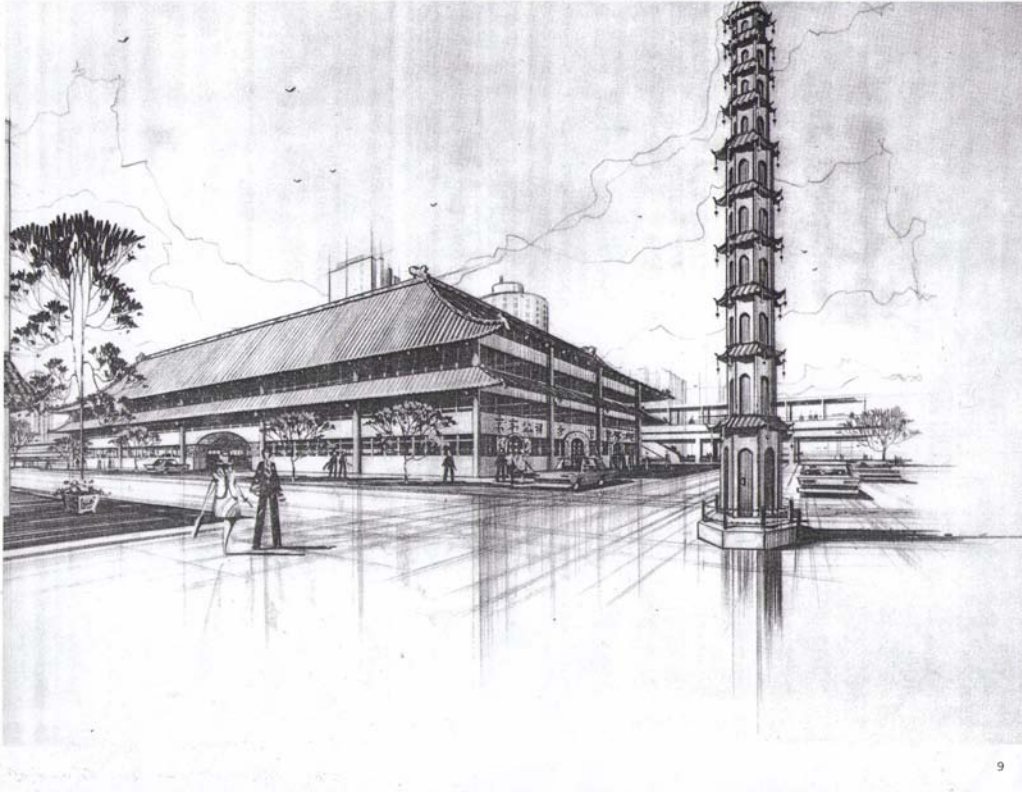


Figure 53: Drawing shows the Oriental design of a parking structure and a pagoda at the intersection of Cermak and S. Wentworth Avenue (Source: *An Agenda for Commercial Revitalization of Chinatown*, 9).

The revitalization plan gained support from private Chinese developers, who actively sought governmental funds and the participation of local business owners. Even though it was not unusual for a partnership between the government and the local ethnic groups to play a vital role in neighborhood improvement, it did not succeed in this case. The plan went nowhere. Yet, despite this unsuccessful attempt, the commercial revitalization plan fostered a sense of public expectation and approval for a development direction that would depict Chinatown as an ethnic icon. Compared to the community plans for San Francisco’s Chinatown and New York’s Chinatown, the revitalization plan for Chicago’s

Chinatown tended to place more emphasis on the creation of an exotic environment. This reflected the singularity of its economic structure, which relied heavily on tourism and services, while the Chinatowns in San Francisco and New York both had strong components of professional industries and light manufacturing. The proposal was designed as to an aggressive marketing campaign aimed at attracting tourists and drawing business opportunities. However, it didn't help to promote the community economy in a more sustainable and diversified way.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the growth of Chicago's Chinatown was hampered by railway trails and expressways on its three sides. Thus when a 32-acre rail-yard site owned by the Santa Fe Railway at the north side of the Chinatown went up for sale, the community was eager to incorporate the site in its future development. The site consisted largely of abandoned railroad yard and tracks, extending from Cermak Road and Archer Avenue on the south to 18th Street on the north. Although there was competition for the site from the U.S. Postal Service and the Chicago World's Fair 1992 authority, the Chinatown neighborhood redevelopment groups eventually purchased the site for a housing and commercial development in 1988. The site was economically stagnant, with dilapidated structures that could not easily be readapted to contemporary use due to their inflexible configurations that had been originally designed for industrial use. But this condition made the site an ideal location for Chinatown's expansion, especially when the city's McCormick Place convention and exhibition center was constructed at the east side of the site. With support from city officials, the City Planning Commission and the City Council soon approved a special zoning for the area. Meanwhile, the City planning department proposed to designate it as Chinatown Basin Tax Increment Redevelopment Area, in order to forge its redevelopment by using new tax revenues generated by the redevelopment itself.³⁹

The project adopted a model of public-private partnership, in which the City of Chicago, the Chinese American Development Corporation (CADC), the Chinese American Development Foundation (CADF), and a group of concerned Chinese businessmen cooperated to acquire the Santa Fe railroad land to construct commercial, residential, and parking facilities. The original proposal for the site development was to build 150 town houses, a 130-unit apartment building for elderly people, and 60,000 square feet of

space for retail stores and restaurants. However, hoping to lure well-to-do immigrants from Hong Kong due to the reversion of Hong Kong to China, and also to accommodate the need for professional and business space, the plan was later revised to accommodate larger spaces for commercial activities and market-priced housing, by reducing the senior housing to a 120 – unit apartment building (Figure 54).⁴⁰

The construction on the Santa Fe railroad site was started with a 200,000-square feet retail and commercial center known as Chinatown Square in 1990. To attract tourists, the architecture of the retail center was given an Oriental theme. In the middle of the complex, the designer placed a plaza surrounded by twelve marble statues of the zodiac animals, imported from China, and decorated with two three-story pavilions. Each pavilion had red roofs and seven green columns with a revolving stair leading to the top. Facing to Archer Avenue, an 8-feet high wall covered by a mosaic painting is flanked by two archways. The mural portrays two chapters of Chinese immigration history. One depicts the early Chinese sojourners who arrived in the United States and worked as mining workers and railroad constructors; the other is about the new generation of Chinese immigrants who united with their families and gradually integrated into the mainstream society. The two archways are embellished with four panels, showing the Four Great Inventions of ancient Chinatown – the compass, printing, gunpowder, and papermaking. Both the mural and the gateways convey a strong sense of pride of the Chinese community towards their culture and history. Unlike the old Chinatown gateway that advocates values of two political leaders of the Nationalist Party, the symbolic structures in Chinatown Square embrace a broader notion of “Chineseness” that transcends political and national boundaries and assumes an integration of ethnic Chinese beyond a specific territory. Beside the central plaza are the outdoor shopping malls with boutiques and restaurants on the first floor and office spaces on the second floor. The shopping street running across the site adopts a courtyard style with bridges leaping across the second floor and two archways located at each end. The sidewalks are covered by overhanging balconies on the second floor that are supported by columns (figure 55). Diamond-shaped windows and geometrically patterned metal screens along the stairs and balconies add Oriental touches to the shopping structures.

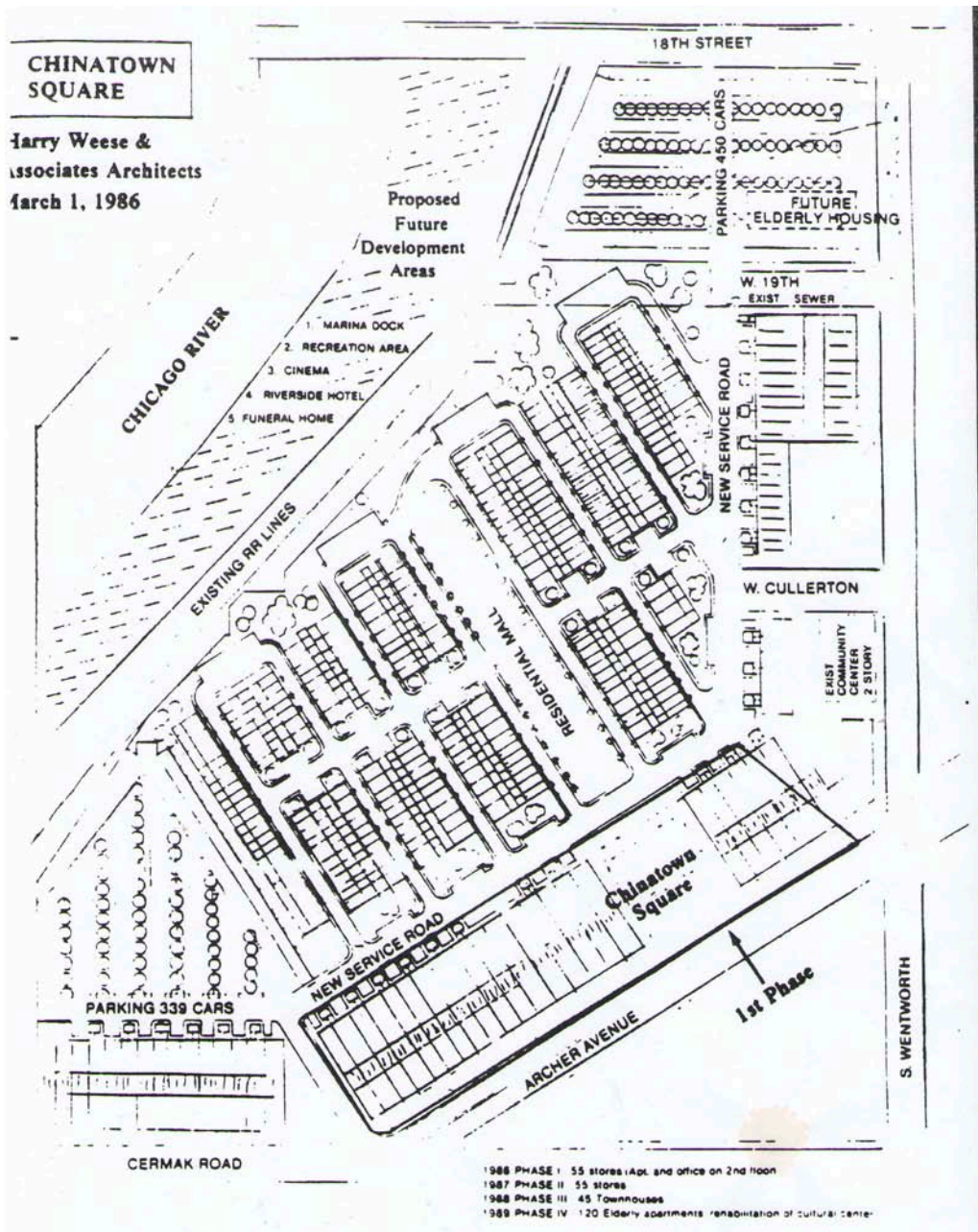


Figure 54: Development plan for Santa Fe Railroad site. The commercial units of Chinatown Square constituted the first phase of the development and 45 townhouses were included in Phase III construction. (Source: *Chinatown Basin Tax Increment Redevelopment Area: Redevelopment plan and Project*, 1986).

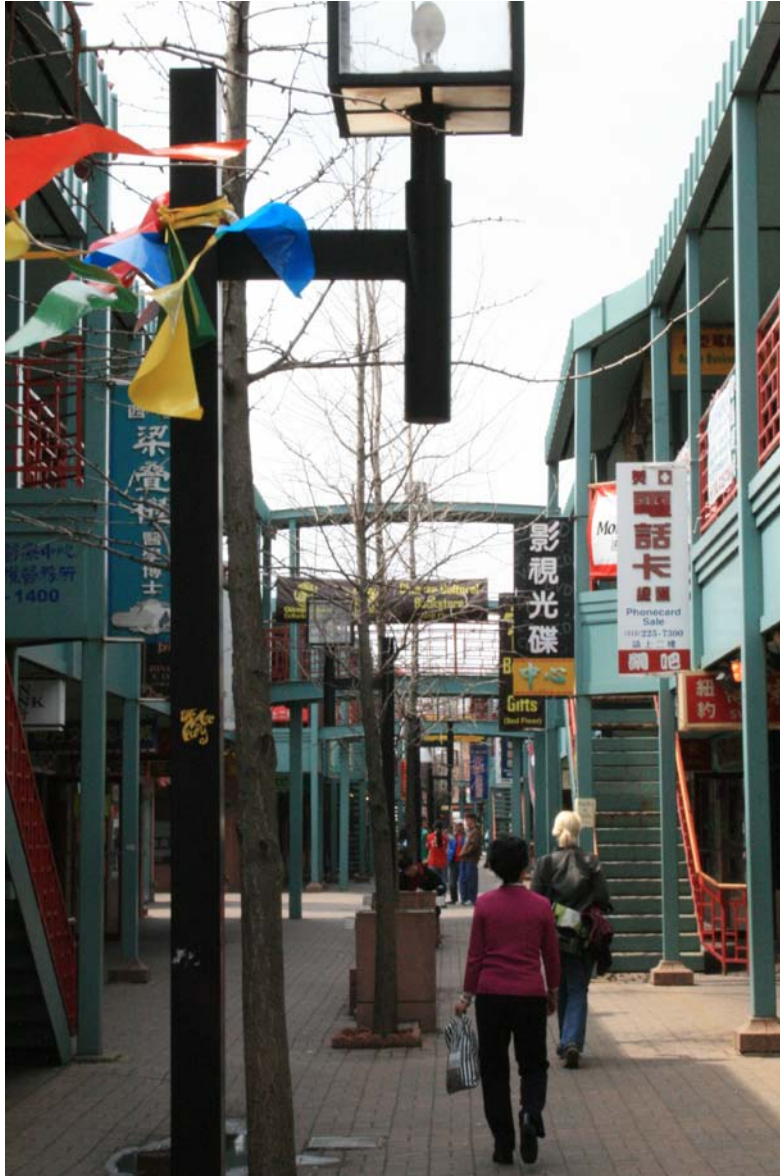


Figure 55: The shopping street in Chinatown Square adopts a courtyard-style design, ca.2007 (Photo by author)

The six-acre development of the commercial center was completed in 1992, and by then 80 percent of the stores had already been sold. The second phase of the redevelopment project focused on the construction of town houses and the Jade Garden condos. Most of the town houses had three-bedroom units and one-car garages. To accommodate the particular needs of the Chinese families, some larger town houses included detached “in-law” units designed for the elderly who wish to live close to their children. In designing the Jade Garden Apartments, *feng shui* was incorporated as a salient element for

spatial configuration with respect to the needs of Chinese clients. For instance, to produce a “good” *feng shui* for the Jade Garden, a road that aligned directly with a residence was relocated since it was considered bad *feng shui* to have a street pointing at the front of a building. The last phase of the development was the construction of four mid-rise apartment and condominium buildings that included condominiums, subsidized apartments for seniors, and some market-rated apartments.

Despite its great impact on the social and economic life of Chinatown as a whole, the new development has not really served the interests of low-income workers who formed a majority in the population. While this sector needed affordable housing, the redevelopment project instead aimed to attract middle and upper-middle class Chinese clients. The new constructions constituted the core of a new way of economic restructuring and organizing exclusion in the community by boosting the resale values of the older housing units. In consequence of this gentrification, rental apartments in Chinatown became scarcer and the rents remained high. According to the 1990 census, 70% of the housing stock in Chicago’s Chinatown was rental units, which is lower than San Francisco’s Chinatown (which had 84% rental). But the rental vacancy rate in Chicago’s Chinatown was only 3% while San Francisco’s vacancy rate was 4%.⁴¹ And from 1990 to 2000, the ratio of property owners decreased from 66 percent to 37 percent.⁴² In 1988, the average home value in Chicago’s Chinatown was \$171,407, while the media family income was \$28,961.⁴³ This shows that there was a severe need for affordable housing in Chicago’s Chinatown. Issues such as housing shortage, lack of outdoor recreational space, and overcrowdedness remained unresolved through the new development. The poor continued to be segregated in the old core of the Chinatown, but social differentiations and inequalities were now produced and inscribed in a new way. From the perspective of housing the poor, the development was a failure. However, it was successful with respect to economic diversification. The construction organized around the maximization of market and consumption generated different spatial distribution of social classes and economic activities, in which greater heterogeneity in income and social status became a characteristic of the newly expanded Chinatown.

In addition to the redevelopment of the Santa Fe railroad site, the city of Chicago also decided to create a 5-acre park on a strip of land on the east bank of the Chicago River as part of the city's plan to revitalize the riverside area. Though the main agent of the park construction was the government, the launching of the river park system in Chicago's South Loop was partly driven by real estate interests. The aim was to enable the sale of the new housing and commercial properties and help increase real estate values of the area. In the late 1980s, the Chicago Park District acquired the land along South Branch of the Chicago River and the railway line of the Burlington-Northern and Santa Fe Railroad, from Stewart Avenue on the south to 16th Street on the north, which was a switching yard for the railroad. The first phase of the project included removing debris, stone, and concrete blocks from the Chicago River and upgrading about 1,000 feet of seawall. The second phase focused on the development of the park site itself. Designed by landscape architect Ernest Wong, the park was completed in 2000 and was named after Ping Tom, the late Chinese community leader and developer who was pivotal in Chinatown's expansion on the Santa Fe railroad site. The design of the park was derived from ideas of a *feng shui* master, and then blended with different perspectives of the community members, some of whom wanted traditional design that would reflect Chinese culture, while others asked for a modern design "reflecting the exuberance and diversity of contemporary American life."⁴⁴ The design called for an approach that would "establish cultural identity for the greater Chinatown community" by "developing the cultural elements of the park."⁴⁵ The entry plaza was designed with a central axis, along which four columns etched with images of dragons and a riverfront pagoda-style pavilion was incorporated in order to indicate the cultural identity of the community."⁴⁶ Off to the north side of the entry plaza is a playground surrounded by guardrails. The playground is equipped with the traditional slides and monkey bars, hand-on games, little dragon-style tools for toddlers, which indicates the growth of Chinatown as a family-oriented community. To the south side of the plaza is an open lawn placed with large boulders in groupings. Two pathways meander across the site. One route is paved with asphalt and used for maintenance and security vehicles. The other is covered with fine crushed granite and serves a walking trail. The routes end in a memorial plaza arranged with steel benches and planting beds. At the center of

the plaza, a tree becomes substitute for a sculpture originally planned to mark the space.⁴⁷ Along the river, willows are planted on the sloped grass area to provide a picturesque look of the riverside. Though cut off from Chinatown by an Amtrak line and an elevated segment of a Chicago Transit Authority line, the Ping Tom Park has become important social space by hosting Chinese traditional festivals such as the annual Dragon Boat Festival and special events including music festivals and boating and fishing events. In many ways, the symbolic design around cultural themes was no longer passive cultural icons representing ethnic traditions, and it has increasingly taken an active role in manipulating and claiming cultural identities to address community demands. As the construction of the Dan Ryan Expressway in the 1960s took away the only park space in the area, the creation of the new park signaled the quest for an innovative and adequate depiction of the contemporary identity and experiences of the community in landscape design.

In 1998, the Chicago Department of Transportation launched a face-lift project for Chinatown's major streets, Wentworth and Cermak. The project included improvements of sidewalks, streetlights, and the creation of a small "town center" on Wentworth as a gathering space. The "town center" at 23rd and Wentworth was a small garden decorated with stone benches and plants with the Chinese symbol of happiness inlaid in the ground. But perhaps with too much hard surface and also sandwiched by the Chinese church and a gift shop, the space has not been used as it was intended. Instead, it is now used as a parking lot. The improved sidewalk featured a geometric design running at curbside and new pavers. A 20-foot-tall column entrenched with a pattern of dragon was placed at a median near 24th Place and Wentworth. Ernest Wong explained that the column was "actually similar to a piece (I saw) in Beijing. It's a cast-stone piece which has a dragon that is going to be wrapping around the column all the way to the top in bas relief. The dragon... is really the essence and the livelihood of the Chinese people."⁴⁸ For the Cermak Road, Wong envisioned a group of 18 spheres decorating the newly constructed median on Cermak in front of the Chinatown gateway. He explained that the gray orbs sitting in planters would represent the pearls in an ancient Chinese fairy tale. But some Chinatown residents feared that the design would attract graffiti and the spheres would be vandalized like the phone booths resembling Chinese

pagodas that once dotted the neighborhood. Emphasizing that community people should be incorporated in the decision making process, the executive director of the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce then proposed to build a topiary garden with trees planted in the median cut into the shapes of dragons and fish because “the trees would be less attractive to vandals.”⁴⁹

With the unsettled debates, the plan to upgrade the median on Cermak was laid aside. But considered as a link between the historic Chinatown and the new expansion of Chinatown, the section of Cermak Road in front of Chinatown gateway remained a central focus of community improvement. In 2003, a pavilion was built with funding from the Taiwanese government. And soon thereafter the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce constructed “Nine Dragon Wall” next to the pavilion (figure 56). Both structures are located opposite the Chinatown Gateway with a clear intention to evoke nostalgia for an ethnic past.



Figure 56: The pavilion facing to the intersection of Cermak and Wentworth is surrounded by guardrail to prevent vandalism, but also deny the visitors’ access to the pavilion. ca.2007 (Photo by author)

Traditionally the pavilion was a structure that usually appeared in Chinese gardens, mountains, or scenic spots, providing a shelter for viewing the scenes of the garden or picturesque landscape. But in Chicago, the pavilion can't serve its traditional function, because it is located at a busy traffic intersection. Cermak Road, a parking lot, and the train station constitute a very different landscape from the romantic settings of the pavilion historically. The spatial decontextualization and dislocation of the pavilion transforms it into an image without its original purpose, which results in a sort of “simulacrum” or “kitsch.”⁵⁰

The practice of kitsch architecture can also be found in the construction of the Nine Dragon Wall, which mimics a wall of the same name that was placed in the royal garden—Beihai Park—in Beijing. The Chinatown version is smaller and much less exquisite than the original (figure 57). The number of nine is a prestigious number in ancient China, and the dragon was a symbol of the soul of all things of creation and represented royal power and authority, possessing divine meanings in the ancient Chinese Empire. In the past, only the royal families had the privilege to use dragon images to signify their superiority and powers. With the collapse of the Empire of China, dragon has gradually evolved into a sign signifying Chinese national culture and identity, especially when the Chinese government endeavored to construct a marketable semblance of national heritage for political necessity and economic feasibility in the global market. In the new global context, the replica of the Nine Dragon Wall in Chicago's Chinatown does seem to reproduce a sense of place and sense of community in a way that inspires a nostalgic attachment to the authentic tradition of Chinese culture. However, dissociated from its cultural and historic context, the original meaning of the structure has been diluted. It is a mimicry, one that unsettles the relationship between place and tradition by employing a cultural symbol created by the nationalist agendas to compete in the global web of tourist consumption. In a sense, such practice is part of the processes involved in the manufacture of global cultural products of “Chineseness.”



Figure 57: The Nine Dragon Wall in Chinatown is displayed as a representation of the self-striving characters of the Chinese all over the world, ca.2007 (Photo by author)

Despite being patently fabricated for modern purposes, an ethnic monument can make tradition adapt to local life and community needs. For instance, the Nine Dragon Wall lies across the exit of expressway of I-55 and I-94, a location that is considered to produce bad *fengshui* for the community. Placing the Dragon Wall in its location thus was an effort to minimize the negative influence and provide a better *fengshui* that would bring fortune and prosperity to the community. In addition, the Wall is also claimed to have a piece of brick originated from the Great Wall of China, which accentuates the local pride of their cultural heritage. In a sense, the process of creating ethnic icons, even when stereotypical, is driven by local agents. These agents do not perceive the ethnic monument simply as a passive expression of market-driven cultural differentiation, but as an active force with the power to transform the space to fit

the local conception of place and community. When this happens, the meaning of heritage is reinterpreted to inspire a new identity and a sense of ownership for the community itself.

To comprehend the social agenda of modern design projects in Chicago's Chinatown, it is important to know that the use of architectural styles and spatial configurations not only represents cultures, but also validates the process of identity claiming and regulating relations of local cultural-political environments. The relation between built form and culture is affected by the need to construct identity and the manipulation of images for commercial consumption.⁵¹ The conscious intent of the local forces to "orientalize" Chinatown and make the area distinct incorporated the process of manipulating a particular form of tradition to attain the local-specific spatial product. James Ferguson proposes the notion of "isomorphism" of space/place/culture and argues that we need to go beyond the conception of culture as a spatially bounded phenomenon in order to explore the identity of a place within hierarchically interconnected spaces with "its cultural construction as a community or locality."⁵² Thus, even though Chinatown appears to be deviant and inconsonant with the national space, the transformation of its built environment is testimony to the nation's shifting socio-economic structure and a global culture of image consumption. In the era of globalization, there is a decreasing congruence between tradition and place, and identity and tradition are becoming "less rooted in place and more informationally based."⁵³ Thus in the case of Chicago's Chinatown, instead of searching for the authentic and enduring ethnic tradition manifested in the built environment, the local agents placed emphasis on the process of reinterpreting, packaging, and manipulating cultural tradition to encompass the politics of spatial reproduction in both the local and global context.

Conclusions

The making of ethnic landscapes in Chicago's Chinatown manifested the relationship between space, race, heritage, and power in the context of rapid urban transformation. The ethnic projects undertaken in the Chinatown strategically engaged in the process of urban redevelopment, in which community amenities and the economic and social vitality of Chinatown were improved. But meanwhile,

it created a problem in urban neighborhoods undergoing gentrification by privileging the needs of the well-to-do families and marginalizing the poor from the newly revalued land. Without the full participation of the lower-class community members, the new projects in Chicago's Chinatown came to serve an aggressive economic interest that catered to the needs and expectations of the Chinatown elites and the city officials. These took control of spatial reconfiguration and representation to boost the local economy by attracting tourists and capital. Aestheticization and image-making were at the central stage of community development; landscape thus served as a tool of manipulating consciousness, reproducing political and racial ideology, and naturalizing power relations.

The imposition of a narrow definition of "Chineseness" on the images, architecture, and parks of Chicago's Chinatown demonstrates that Chinatown itself is an emblem constituted in relation to the instability, multiplicity and hybridity of the process producing cultural identity. The reduction of the community to a landscape of visual consumption reflects its relationship to the global tourist market but also to practices of economic restructuring and social development. As the city of Chicago was transformed, its idea of ethnicity changed from an older model based on rigid racial segregation and ward politics (as demonstrated in Chapter Two) to the idea of new ethnicity that celebrates an ethnic mosaic, and ethnic identity became a spectacle with particular meanings for urban planning and design.⁵⁴ The ethnic markers created for the city's ethnic neighborhoods such as Greektown and the Puerto Rican neighborhood reflected such ideas of urban development. Within that context, Chinatown in particular created an image of itself in its architectural and park projects that entailed not only the commodification of ethnicity, but aestheticization of social inequality and exclusion. As the concretization of institutionally defined categories of "Chinese," the essentialized image of Chinatown consolidated the elite hegemony and promoted unequal social relations through its logic of patriotism, loyalty, and ethnic solidarity. The partnership of government officials and Chinese real estate developers that was formed to control the spatial use and expansion of Chinatown effectively excluded the working-class majority of the ethnic community. The latter lost the opportunity for upward mobility, and this intensified the growing spatial differentiation among social classes.

The notion of Orientalist “others” operates in the space of Chinatown and is reflected in stereotypical representations of the minority group, which provide clues about power relations and social control. But at the same time, the process of rearticulating and reproducing cultural traditions is also subject to the community’s own internal political and economic transformations. The celebration of ethnic identity in the built environment of Chinatown is not produced solely for tourists. It reflects the yearning for a new kind of collective ethnic identification that is integral to the lives of the ethnic community, no matter how artificially produced. By highlighting the cultural aspects of “Chineseness,” an ethnic identity grounded on a common tradition and cultural ancestry embraces--and indeed invents--a new notion of community that shares interests and destiny in America.

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Chapter 6: Demystification and the Spatial Division of New York's Chinatown

New York's Chinatown presents a case study of the contemporary transformation that has taken place in relation to both global geo-political changes and urban economic restructuring. Illustrating the way discourses of identity and heritage function to reinforce the very power structure of domination, the chapter examines the socially and materially constructed demarcations of the ethnic neighborhood through the lenses of architectural and landscape representation. As in San Francisco and Chicago, a remarkable, self-conscious process of community building took place in New York and other U.S. Chinatowns in the period after the civil rights movements of the 1960s, especially when the institution of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 led to the eventual abolition of Asian quotas. New York's Chinatown, in a similar vein, has increasingly become a site of conflict between U.S. global economic imperatives and the construction of a coherent national identity.¹ Within a peculiar narrative of ethnic and localist distinctiveness, the political acquisition of the very concept of cultural heritage and ethnic identity in the built environment in New York's Chinatown is examined through the understanding of their underpinning social agendas, cultural and political implications.

Since the 1960s, the Chinese population in New York has been continuously growing. In 1989, there were about 300,000 Chinese scattered across Queens, Brooklyn, and a vastly expanded Manhattan Chinatown. The new settlers represented the diversity of the immigrants who came from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia, and dramatically reconfigured the Chinese settlements in the city. Meanwhile the overseas Asian investments and immigrants into New York's Chinatown also brought about an economic and social restructuring of the ethnic neighborhood. Unlike earlier immigrants whose investments were relatively small in size, the new immigrants brought capital that effectively fueled the economic boom and caused a significant growth of real estate industry. The arrival of affluent Chinese investors coincided with attempts by New York City to court transnational capital and to encourage the new Asian immigrants to revitalize Chinatown. With the support of the city's agenda of growth, the infusion of overseas capital produced a contested form of the ethnic social life wherein the

Asian entrepreneurs were accused of developing the community by the means of gentrification. Thus through a series of spatial constructions and reconstructions, Chinatown made a transition not only in its self-image and claims on a notion of ethnic identity, but in its quest for adequate and tailored solutions to the community issues.

In addition to the conflicts between developers and local residents, there is a vital continuity between the politics of the home country in the past and community issues of Chinatown in the present, and it is visible in the troubled relationship between the long-term residents who came from rural areas of Guangdong Province and the new immigrants from Fujian Province of Communist China. Their encounter is a story of contestation and context-specific struggles over space. Doreen Massey writes that places do not have single and unique identities, but are “full of internal conflicts.” This, however, does not deny the uniqueness of place, for its specificity is continually produced by multiple sources.² Hence it is the conflicts themselves, rather than “some long, internalized history”³ that make a neighborhood distinct. Compared to the themed landscape of the Chinatowns in San Francisco and Chicago, New York’s Chinatown appears plain, without Oriental embellishment. Despite the efforts of the city and the Chinatown elites to Orientalize the built environment, their attempts were not successful because of the particular forms of local economic and social conditions. Thus instead of the expressive intention of endowing place with unique character, the identity-making of New York’s Chinatown was largely shaped by the contested process of spatial construction within which discourses of development and tradition have been employed by different social groups to address their interests and political ideology. The case provides an insight into the complex community dynamics and the changing significance of ethnicity and tradition in building an ethnic community.

A Chinatown without Pagodas

In the 1950s and 60s, the World Trade Center was constructed to launch a resurgence of Lower Manhattan, and the downtown waterfront was subsequently converted into a vast residential and commercial development.⁴ At the same time, the city decided to transform its central city slums through

extensive urban renewal planning. The Lower East Side was one of the prime locations for several urban renewal projects, and in particular, Chinatown, as one of the notorious urban slums. A project proposed by New York State Housing Commissioner, Herman T. Stichman, called for a vast, new housing project and enhanced commercial architecture to be implemented in the Chinatown area. Existing buildings in the central Chinatown would be demolished and replaced with a modern public housing project to be called “China Village.” The residential project would be surrounded by shops, restaurants, and museums, and a Chinese-style gateway would mark the eastern entrance of the village (figure 58).

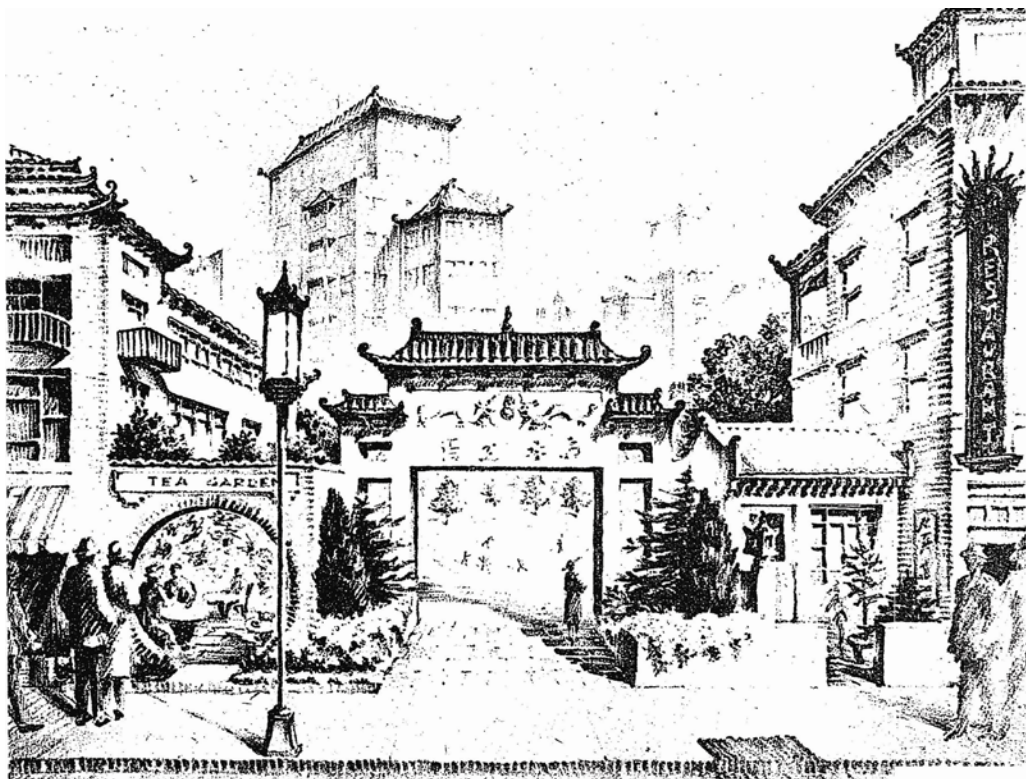


Figure 58: Drawing by Harold Thompson that shows an Oriental look of the China Village. (Source: *The New York Times*, Jun 25, 1950)

Chinese architectural features would be emphasized as a cultural and tourist attraction. Stichman invited the director of the China Institute, Chih Meng, to lead the design, who pledged to “bring the best of Chinese culture” to the project.⁵ However, Stichman’s efforts to orientalize Chinatown’s architecture were criticized by Robert Moses, the City Construction Coordinator who was in charge of slum clearance

and the construction of public housing. Moses complained that Stichman's attention to the needs of the city's minority groups obstructed his efforts to modernize the city and attract middle- and upper-income Whites. He and his staff ridiculed Stichman as "Chow Mein Houses Architect," and insisted that the project was too expensive for the city and the state.⁶ In response to Moses' critique, Stichman insisted that the China Village project was not only financially feasible but also very important in preserving the Chinese culture in an international context. In a letter for President Truman, Stichman wrote that "Today the people of China are struggling in the Communist vortex, but their culture which has progressed over scores of centuries should not be permitted to be extinguished." He perceived the project would be "a valuable indication of the desire of the United States to see China restored to democracy" as the Communist Party had dominated China since 1949.⁷ Regardless, the New York City Housing Authority and the Citizens Housing and Planning Council agreed with Moses and rejected Stichman's project.

In addition to the city's opposition, the Chinatown residents also reacted indifferently to the redevelopment project. For instance, one Chinese woman interviewed by a local newspaper simply denied the possibility of redevelopment, declaring that there were no vacant lots available. There was truth to this statement. During the 1950s, 193 buildings with 2502 apartment units housed 25,000 people in Chinatown, and the overcrowding and scarcity of land became a major obstacle to redevelopment. Furthermore, the redevelopment plan for New York's Chinatown represented an effort to infuse Chinatown with a sense of exoticism that would attract visitors. It claimed for the ethnic enclave distinct architectural characteristics that were uniquely "Chinese." Regarding the official attempts to showcase the unique character of the Chinese settlement, the community members worried that the plan might change Chinatown into a "Chinese Broadway," as had happened in San Francisco. They asserted that as there was no earthquake, New York could not build new Chinatown with "balconies and pagodas."⁸ The lack of political alliances and community support obliged Stichman to scale down his plan. Instead of constructing eight public housing towers on the 15-acre land, the new China Village plan proposed to build two public housing towers with pagoda-shaped roofs and a low-lying museum and recreation center on a 2-acre site at the corner of Worth and Baxter Streets. The reductions, however, still weren't enough,

as Moses had predicted that the state and the city would not finance a project for low-income tenants on such a valuable property.⁹ Instead, by the end of the 1960s, Chatham Towers, the market-rated condominiums, were built on the site, with modern and concrete-surfaced façade.

Despite the failure of China Village, some sympathetic business and association leaders in Chinatown continued to make efforts to orientalize the community. For instance, they renovated the On Leong Merchant Association building at the southwest corner of Mott and Canal Streets in 1950. A new three-roofed pagoda was added on top of the three-story brick building, as well as balconies with white rails and engaged red columns (figure 59). In spite of these efforts, only a handful of structures in Chinatown, such as banks and association buildings featured Oriental architectural elements. Greg Umbach and Dan Wishnoff have argued that New York's Chinatown appears to be "so authentic in its grittiness that any exoticism would have to be in the wishful eye of the beholder." But it was not because the community leaders were not willing to stage ethnicity for the tourists.¹⁰ Their unsuccessful attempts were partly due to the lack of political and commercial forces to promote a kitschy version of the ethnic neighborhood. The lack of success was also due to the particular form of enclave economy that thrived in New York's Chinatown.¹¹ Restaurants and garment shops constituted the most industries in Chinatown and occupied 70% of the community businesses, in which a large pool of cheap labors became the key for successful operation. Tourist-oriented business such as gift shop comprised less than 1% of the community business types, while it was 10% in San Francisco's Chinatown and 5% in Chicago's Chinatown.¹² In addition, the large influx of overseas Asian capital facilitated the fast growth of real estate industry. Thus, compared with Chinatowns in San Francisco and Chicago, New York's Chinatown tended to be more self-sustained with its thriving industries and real estate development, and tourism was not as crucial. In consequence, there was more desire to solve practical issues such as housing and employment and address the needs of the residents, rather than simply catering to tourists.



Figure 59: The pagoda roof and delicate balconies of the On Leong Merchant Association building indicated the efforts of the Chinese elites to Orientalize Chinatown, ca.2008 (Photo by author)

The construction of Confucius Plaza and the conflicts surrounding the project provide insight into the local dynamics of social transformation and identity-making. Confucius Plaza was one of the first major housing projects built in New York's Chinatown. In 1966, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of New York and the Association for Chinatown Housing approached City Hall seeking to construct a cooperative housing project to accommodate the growing population. The Housing and Development Administration of New York City approved the development proposal and subsequently formed a

cooperative corporation known as Chinatown Apartments to manage the project. A majority of the Board of Directors of the corporation was constituted by community leaders of the Chinatown. The project site was bounded by the Bowery, Division Street, and the Manhattan Bridge. As a middle-income and Mitchell-Lama housing project,¹³ Confucius Plaza was completed in 1976. It included a 25,000-square foot landscaped plaza and 762 living units, of which 10% were reserved for low-income tenants. The lower two floors of the complex were designed to accommodate office spaces and community facilities, while a three-story public school and a playground adjoined to the structure¹⁴ The project proved itself a triumph for the community. It not only showed a successful partnership between city government and the neighborhood organizations that effectively used governmental funds for a housing project, but it was also a winning business operation: all the housing units were sold within five months after the building's official opening in 1978.

Despite the successful implementation of Confucius Plaza, the actual construction process was controversial. In May 1974, several hundred demonstrators marched outside the housing project site to protest against alleged discrimination towards Asian American workers. Headed by the community-based organization, Asian-Americans for Equal Employment (AAFEE), and supported by the Black and Puerto Rican Coalition and U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the demonstrators castigated the project's contractor for not hiring any Asian American workers, even though more than 100 qualified Asian Americans had submitted applications. The construction company defended its compliance with minority-hiring regulations, pointing out that more than 40 percent of the workers at the construction site came from minority groups. But most of the minority workers were imported from other construction sites, a practice known as "checkerboarding." During the protest, 57 people were arrested and charged with criminal trespass. The confrontation had lasted for over a month, when the construction company eventually agreed to employ 12 Asian workers on their construction sites across the city and to hire 12 to 13 Asian American trainees from the list provided by AAFEE. The agreement was believed to be "the first in which a government compliance agency established goals specifically for Asian Americans."¹⁵ The petition for equal opportunities of employment was signed by some 8,000 Chinatown residents and

obtained wide support from the Chinese community. It was one of the few times that the city had witnessed the insurgency of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans fighting for their benefits. Because the struggles were grounded in and reflective of the specifically place-bound locality, they signaled a conscious link between the ethnic group and the place of Chinatown, which integrated in a positive way the political empowerment and a clear geographical dimension of ethnicity.

In a sense, the articulation of a Chinese American identity is constructed out of a persistent identification with Chinatown that is extroverted and connects with the wider world, rather than its segregated and introverted history.¹⁶ Moreover, as an organizing tool for facilitating a concept of political unity, the process of identity-making in New York's Chinatown didn't call upon the spectacle of ethnicity in transforming the built environment. Confucius Plaza, for instance, is a modern high-rise, without any obvious traditional Chinese characteristics (figure 60). There were critics who lamented the plaza as an intrusion onto "a treasured Oriental scene." In response, the president of the Association for Chinatown Housing stated that, "The older people like the old ways. But I myself saw no sense to put this up looking Chinese. It should be practical, to let people live comfortably; for the people here, not for the tourist."¹⁷ The architect of the plaza, Horowitz & Chun, also asserted that a Chinese treatment "would basically have been cosmetic and superficial."¹⁸ Their rejection of ornament to represent Chinese characteristics suggested that the building of place identity does not necessarily draw on race or ethnicity to transform the built environment into a themed setting. Instead representation of place is intrinsic to the political economic process of urban restructuring, including producing higher-end commercial and residential spaces, encouraging acts of consumption, and facilitating community-based social reproduction.¹⁹



Figure 60: The modern high-rise of Confucius Plaza with no obvious architectural efforts to show its connection with Chinese traditional architecture, ca.2008 (Photo by author)

Some critics pointed out that the streetscape of New York's Chinatown was incapable of representing Chinese identity, and that except for advertisements and festival decorations, the streets in general lacked signs of Chinese character.²⁰ The Chinatown Street Revitalization Plan, conducted in 1976, in a similar vein, asserted that one of the limitations of Chinatown was its lack of space for cultural and artistic displays. Thus it proposed designating portions of the streets for temporary exhibitions of art, sculpture, music and festivals, as well as forming a community cultural council that would be responsible

for scheduling outdoor sculpture and art shows, street theatre and concerts. The street revitalization plan also proposed to build an outdoor cultural park that would feature distinctive street signage and banners with Chinese characters (figure 61). Moreover, a merchants-supported tourist information kiosk was recommended to accelerate local tourism development.²¹ In addition to the official efforts of highlighting ethnic characteristics in the physical environment of Chinatown, street events such as the annual Chinatown Street Fairs that have been held on Mott and Bayard Street since the 1970s also reflected such intentions. In the fairs, firecrackers and dragon dances provided exotic ingredients that drew large audiences. But for the most part, the fairs were mainly oriented to the community's residents by imparting information and counseling on health, housing, education, legal issues, and the elderly programs. Thus the traditional performances can be understood as a way of celebration and assertion of the particular cultures of the ethnic community in order to attract local residents rather than visitors.

The events were organized by the Chinatown Street Fair Committee, which was a community group of activists, students, and professionals who shared common concerns for the critical conditions of the Chinese community. Influenced by the American Civil Rights movements, the street events not only served the community people in solving practical issues, but also as a political campaign aiming to educate Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants to fight for their civil rights by revealing the history of racial discrimination, oppression, and resistance. The street fairs have become a traditional event for the community. They continue to provide Chinatown residents with information and services, and this exemplifies how the specificity of a place is, in Massey's words, "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus."²² The attempts to impose a Chinese identity in the built environment of Chinatown were rooted in the assumptions that identity of place is produced from the invocation of past forms based on internalized cultural origins. In this interpretation, a unique sense of place is created through nostalgic references to tradition, a process that is necessarily distorted by stereotypical essentializations that reduces cultural complexity to basic representations.²³ In New York's Chinatown, such attempts didn't succeed because iconic signs of profitable exoticism failed to address the community's concerns over the resident's social and cultural

needs. Especially given that the thriving enclave economy did not depend on tourist trade, the Chinese community tended to be more attentive to the growth of identity politics and the “authentic” representation of the ethnic group.

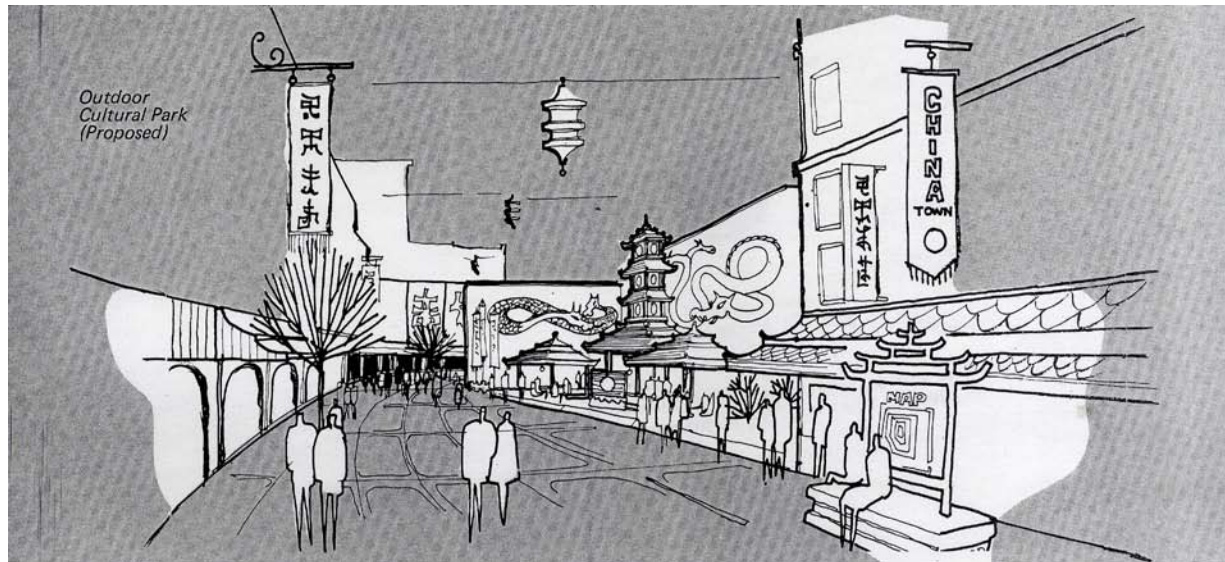


Figure 61: A drawing of the proposed Outdoor Cultural Park that was featured with pagodas, lanterns, and banners and signage with Chinese characters, ca.1976 (Source: *Chinatown Street Revitalization*).

Historic Preservation in Chinatown

Throughout the 1970s, there had been preservation efforts implemented to save historically significant structures in New York’s Chinatown. The city’s Landmarks Preservation Commission, for instance, dedicated the First Chinese Presbyterian Church on Henry Street as an official New York City landmark in 1976. The Gothic edifice was built in 1817 as a Dutch Reformed church. When the Dutch church dissolved in 1864, the New York Presbytery took over the building, and then in 1972 presented the church to the Chinese community, which renovated and refurbished it as the First Chinese Presbyterian Church. However, after these early attempts to preserve the actual historic buildings of the Chinatown, the focus of historic preservation shifted to the reconstitution of the diluted social and cultural memories of the Chinese community in the 1980s. These preservations of community documentations changed from built fabric to something more intangible.

With the progress of urban renewal, many of the old-fashioned stores in New York's Chinatown became too expensive to sustain. Especially in the early 1980s, many leases expired and were replaced with shorter ones requiring higher rents, which resulted in the closing of several longtime businesses in Chinatown. In 1980, Wah On Lee's dry goods store on Mott Street, for instance, closed after 101 years of operation as one of the community's unofficial post offices and medicinal herb stores. The family who owned the store proclaimed that they could no longer afford the ever-increasing rent. Upon its closing, New York State Museum offered to buy the interior and storages of the store with the aim of making it part of an exhibition on New York City neighborhoods. The physical remnants of the store included storefront windows imprinted with gold Chinese calligraphy, spice cabinets built by the great-uncle of the store owner in 1879, an accountant's cage, and a threadbare chintz mailbag that was used for the Chinese laborers to pick up letters from their home country. The whole retail store was disassembled and hauled to the museum, where it was precisely re-erected as an integral part of the exhibition called "New York Metropolis." To make the exhibition an authentic representation of the early Chinatown stores, no major renovation works were conducted, and supplies from the 1940s, the heyday of the shop, were displayed on the shelves. As in preservation strategies elsewhere, there was an emphasis on physical rather than social fabric. Although the physical artifacts of the old store were well preserved in the museum, the closing of the store itself indicated a significant social transformation of the Chinatown community. Until the 1950s, the Chinese residents had been used to visiting this kind of old stores for their mails, medicinal herbs, and also socializing with friends. When the urban revival started, with the simultaneous economic restructuring, the traditional socio-economic system of Chinatown was no longer sustainable. Some of the longtime stores and companies sought development opportunities by shifting to new modes of business. For example, Harold Lee & Sons, a grocery and curio store established in 1888, expanded existing services to include new businesses like foreign exchange to fulfilling the needs of increasing numbers of tourists and new immigrants. Quong Yuen Shing & Company, founded in 1891, abandoned the original grocery business and reorganized itself as a gift shop and travel agency.²⁴ With the displacement of the old stores by the new, high-volume businesses targeting tourists and new immigrants, the traditional way

of life in Chinatown that was based on kinship relations and intimate social interconnections among the community members, had been gradually replaced.

The shifting of the physical environment of Chinatown – associated with social transformations at various levels – was also a result of technological innovations. With the popularity of videotapes and Chinese cable television programs, movie houses in Chinatown became anachronisms and many were swept away in the process of community redevelopment. The Pagoda Theater, for instance, was demolished in 1992 to make a way for the Glory China Tower office building. The Sun Sing Theater was closed down in 1993, and the Rosemary was turned into a Buddhist shrine by 1996 (figure 62). The Music Palace located on Bowery Street remained the last Chinese-language theater to survive in New York City (figure 63). However, by 1999 the three-story structure had closed for business, and in 2007 it was torn down to make place for an office building. These movie theaters used to play an important role in the community's social life, bridging the Diasporas with the homeland and facilitating a sense of community and belonging. In the late 19th century, live Chinese opera was performed in Chinatown theaters. From the 1930s to 60s, Chinese theaters were an essential social space in the everyday life of Chinatown – not only the screenings of movies from Hong Kong were popular entertainment for the Chinese immigrants, but some theaters also hosted community events such as Chinese New Year celebrations. Nevertheless, since the 1970s, the theaters began to lose out to other forms of entertainments. New generations of Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants grew more familiar with mainstream American culture, while at the same time Hollywood movies were exported to China and elsewhere, dominating the global market. The demise of Chinatown theaters showed how globalization and the growth of the global cultural economy could affect neighborhood change in a way of altering the local cultural landscape.



Figure 62: Sun Sing Theater located at East Broadway was opened in 1911 and featured performances of Yiddish vaudeville and motion pictures (Source: <http://s158562511.onlinehome.us/BlogImages/SunSingTheatreExt.jpg>, accessed in Oct.11, 2010)



Figure 63: The Music Palace at Bowery Street was the last of the Chinese movie theatre. It was listed as the Universal Theatre in Film Daily Yearbook from the 1920s to 50s (Source: <http://www.nychinatown.org/photo3/bowery1.html>, accessed on Oct.11, 2010)

With the rapidly changing forms of social life, there was a perceived need to preserve the heritage and memories of the old Chinatown. A group of historians, community workers, photographers, artists, and writers thus conducted the New York Chinatown History Project in the 1980s to collect oral stories, old snapshots, historic documents, and artifacts that would represent the multifaceted living experiences of the Chinese immigrants in New York. The project included a program known as “Old Chinatown Streets” that interpreted the community’s physical evolution, and designated buildings with historical significance. The program also explored the indoor components of the Chinatown architecture by documenting how the Chinese immigrants transformed and adapted existing building interiors to serve their particular needs. As another part of the programs in the history project, the Chinatown History Museum was founded in 1980. Collections in the museum had a vernacular focus that explored the value and meaning of objects through stories and everyday life of Chinatown rather than the objects themselves.²⁵ The museum was dedicated to saving the discarded belongings of the old stores that exemplified life in Chinatown before 1965. For instance, it collected material from the Mee Heung Chow Main Company, one of the oldest noodle manufacturing companies on Mott Street that was sold in 1991 and later replaced by Ten Ren’s Tea and Ginseng Company, a Taiwanese-based company with chains of tea emporiums located throughout North America and Asia. The Chinatown History Museum made efforts to preserve the old equipment of the Mee Heung Chow Main Company and some of its historic items such as boxes of stationery, labels, containers, and noodle bags with the company name printed on them. Such objects have little value, except insofar as they represent a bygone way of life through material culture.

Such preservation practices are worth noting not only because of the need to document the memories of old Chinatown, but also because of what the memories represent in terms of the politics of ethnicity and place identity. Tchen has argued that, “Once racial identities become understood as changing cultural phenomena, then bicultural heritages can be understood as much more nuanced and

variegated experiences.”²⁶ Comparing with the preservation efforts in San Francisco’s Chinatown which was featured with the elitist practice of a top-down approach that stressed an essentialist and even quasi-genetic characteristic of the ethnic enclave, the community-based history project in New York’s Chinatown uncovered the heterogeneities and rich array of differences among Chinese Americans and their settlements.²⁷ By preserving “a more integrative and inclusive community history,” the preservation practices in New York’s Chinatown emphasized the history of the Chinese community as part of the cultural formation of the Lower East Side and New York City as a whole.²⁸ Such inquiry was urgent and necessary, as the physical environment became increasingly commodified and homogenized, washed over by the rhetoric of community revitalization and urban renewal.

From “Chinatown” to “Chinamall”

Rather than an exotic tourist attraction, Chinatown has grown into a flourishing self-contained center of manufacturing and service industries run by the Chinese. But with the aggressive growth of Chinatown real estate (as demonstrated in Chapter Three), many sweat shops were forced to move out of Chinatown to more affordable areas in Queens or Brooklyn in the 1990s. Replacing the original monopoly of restaurants and sweat shops, a variety of new commercial activities prospered in the ethnic community, such as long-distance transportation and remittance businesses. With the establishment of a bus transportation network across the United States, New York’s Chinatown has also become a social and cultural center for the new immigrants who exchange job information and commute between different areas, with New York as the central point. For the Fujianese immigrants in particular, Chinatown is a focal place for job searching, networking, holding wedding banquet, taking wedding pictures, and purchasing jewelry. They rely on the network and resources of the Chinatown to expand their social life and maintain their connections. Within such a context, Chinatown has gradually transformed from a place of industrial production to a service-oriented community. The constant stream of immigration and the growing market to fulfill the daily needs of new immigrants has facilitated more complex, diverse, extensive spaces of consumption in Chinatown. As traditional ethnic shopping streets still thrive with

curio stores, restaurants, and imported goods, large-scale shopping malls and commercial buildings emerge as important sites of community lived experience, in which new identity and social practices are formed.

According to a study conducted by the Hunter College Neighborhood Planning Workshop in 1992, there was a dramatic increase of Asian occupancy at the central areas of Chinatown including Canal Street and Grant Avenue in a space of twenty years: the Asian population increased from 55 percent in 1970 to 84 percent in 1990. However, despite the population growth and the fast development, more than 75 percent of the residential buildings in the area were built prior to 1939 and were in dilapidated condition. The rents remained high, usually demanding 25 percent of the household income.²⁹ From 1985 to 1990, about 28 new residential developments had been constructed in Chinatown, which varied from small projects of condominium conversions to large-scale developments such as Mandarin Plaza.³⁰ Nonetheless, these developments were mostly targeted at middle- and upper-income population. Very little affordable housing had been built for the low-income community to mediate its housing crisis. Since the 1990s, the process of community redevelopment that promoted luxury housing development has slowed because of the controversies regarding the Manhattan Bridge Special District plan and community-based resistance to residential displacement. In addition to the socio-political dilemmas of developing luxury condominium complex in Chinatown, real estate developers also realized commercial buildings were generally more profitable than housing projects because the city zoning law favored commercial over residential development, as commercial buildings allow a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 6 and residential only of 3.44. This means that on the same lot the developer could build a commercial building with a larger floor plan than a residential building. This stimulated an upsurge of developing commercial complexes in the Chinatown area. Accordingly, although commercial spaces occupied only 22 percent of the overall land use in Chinatown, 70 percent of ground floors were used for commercial operations by 1992.³¹

The commercial development of Chinatown has occurred in three general stages.³² The first stage was small-scale street-front stores operated by Chinese families that congregated at the old core of

Chinatown on Mott, Bayard, and Elisabeth Streets. These stores served as informal social center in the early times with a variety services such as grocery stores, post offices, herb stores, and tea houses. The second stage of commercial devolvement started in the 1960s, when a more liberal immigration policy accommodated the process of economic restructuring in U.S. cities. In this stage, the traditional grocery stores in Chinatown were revitalized with enlarged windows and open store fronts. The modernized steel-glass look of these stores dominated Canal, Bowery, and Catherine Streets, where an expansion of a new shopping district came into shape due to the fast growing immigrant populations and overseas investments. Since the 1990s, large-scale shopping malls constituted with small commercial units have prospered in Chinatown. It is often referred to as the third stage of Chinatown commercial development. The large-scale shopping malls carry a wide variety of clothes, housewares, groceries, and electrical supplies, at low to moderate prices. Although they are equally devoted to ethnic consumption, these shopping malls indicate the transformation of the ethnic neighborhood from an intimate and insular enclave to an economic entity embracing the dominant commercial culture of a global political economy. Locally, the ethnic shopping malls have to deal with the booming real estate development in Chinatown and the standing high rents of commercial properties. The small units within the malls make it possible for the Chinese business owners to operate their businesses with relatively low rents by sharing the costs of storefronts and commercial spaces. New waves of immigrants from Asia and growing numbers of tourists also bring in more diverse consumers to the ethnic market, wherein the locally based commercial cultures meet global culture to generate a new identity for the by no means homogeneous community.

Following the lead of market forces and commercial development, there have been constant efforts in Chinatown to enhance local growth through re-enacting the process of landscape construction. In 1978, the New York Transportation Commission started a test program in Chinatown, turning Pell and Doyer Streets into a pedestrian mall in the evenings for a two-week experimental period. The program was part of the city's commitment to clean up the air in accordance with the provisions of the Transportation Control Plan. It was also an endeavor to accentuate the commercial development in Chinatown by "creating a pedestrian oasis in a heavily congested downtown Manhattan area" and

“providing a pleasant shopping environment for New Yorkers who frequent the shops and restaurants in Chinatown.”³³ The process of “mallizing” the Chinatown was also manifested in the conversion of an asphalt parking lot under the Manhattan Bridge into a modern shopping mall in 1983, as part of the plan of providing more retail space in the crowded Chinatown. Under the 33-foot bridge arches, a four-story mall with two levels sinking below the ground provided 41,000-square feet of retail space. The Chinatown Chamber of Commerce optimistically envisioned the city-sponsored project would become a major boost to Chinatown’s tourist industry and generate more business opportunities; but they disregarded concerns regarding increased traffic and the high rental charges that would exclude the local small business owners. In 2002, the construction of Oriental Square, a large-scale shopping center at 75 East Broadway, indicated the climax of “mallization.” The site was originally occupied by Sun Sing Theater (see figure 5), which was destroyed in 1993 and remained vacant until 1996 when a developer purchased the site, planning to build a two-story multi-functional commercial center that would include retail, food wholesale, and restaurant businesses. It was estimated that the project, started in 2000, would provide 300 jobs for the Chinese community. Together with the landmark shopping center, Yi Dong Marketplace, the Oriental Square caused profound changes in the social and physical compositions of the area surrounding East Broadway, which was perceived as a fast developing area and a new settlement for the Chinese immigrants (figure 64).³⁴

In addition to the expansion of the market for the trading of goods and commodities, flows of international capital required a supportive infrastructure to provide specialized services for transnational investment transactions.³⁵ Chinatown thus became a strategic node within the transnational economy, in which banking services and financial institutions were concentrated, engaging in the circuit of capital flows between Asia and the U.S. Michel Laguerre asserts that the “transnationality” and “globality” of Chinatown had long existed. He defines Chinatown as “ethnople,” that is a “localized global space” produced by transnational experiences and practices.³⁶ In a similar vein, Jan Lin describes Chinatown as a nexus of transnational and local markets of capital and labor.³⁷ New investment patterns and a new

geography of transnational financial flows have fed the growth of New York's Chinatown as a crucial site for the implementation and management of the transnational financial operations. As these advanced



Figure 64: View of East Broadway Avenue, which has gradually become the new center of New York's Chinatown with fast development of shopping malls and banking services, ca.2008 (Photo by author)

services have developed, they have facilitated the spatial transformation in Chinatown. Chatham Square, for example, has served a banking center in which a cluster of financial institutions congregated, including the Abacus Federal Savings Bank, Asia Bank, Bank of China, Chinese American Bank, Citibank, and several other banks that are based in New York, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or China. In 1988, Glory China Development Ltd. of Hong Kong purchased the land on East Broadway that was originally occupied by the Pagoda Movie Theater. The company built the 15-story Glory China Tower and rented it to the Ka Wah Bank of Hong Kong, owned by the China International Trust and Investment Corporation based in Beijing, with the vision of developing East Broadway as the Chinatown's Wall Street.³⁸ With a fast economic development, China has played an increasingly important role in the global economy since

the 1980s. The involvement of the financial institutions from China conferred a new dynamicity to the economic system in the Chinatown. The opening there of China Bank in 1985 signaled that New York's Chinatown had become one of the key sites for the Chinese to form a new institutional framework to conduct the transnational economic operations.

The space of Chinatown has changed in response to transnational activities and specifically trade and investment. This includes the development of large-scale shopping malls, financial services, and zoning regulations aiming to facilitate commercial development in Chinatown. These spatial reorganizations had mixed consequences: one was the rising values of the real estate properties that had the effect of displacing low income residents by making housing less affordable; another was the devaluing of manufacturing as a sector, such as the decline of garment shops as factory buildings were converted into more profitable loft or office spaces. These spatial changes and the framework through which socio-economic transformations were implemented, in a sense, contributed to the establishment of Chinatown as a strategic site in the growing transnational trades and activities.

Conflicts and Divided Spaces

A series of political events led to new waves of immigrants from China. These included mainland China's "Open Door" policy, instituted in 1978, the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 which granted amnesty to certain illegal immigrants, and the 1989 Tiananmen protest in China. Together, these significantly changed the demographics, languages, and populations of New York's Chinatown. Though there were immigrants from various regions of China, many of the newcomers sought employment and settlement in Flushing, Queens, instead of the Cantonese-dominated Manhattan Chinatown. Since the early 1990s, with the dramatic increase of Fujianese immigrants, however, the situation has changed. The shared dialect and cultural traits reinforced the desire of the Fujianese group to live together and facilitate contacts and ties in the Chinatown. When the descendants of the early Cantonese immigrants followed the immigration pattern of other ethnic groups and gradually moved out of the ethnic enclave to merge into the mainstream society, the Fujianese immigrants filled that void,

appearing as the new political and economic power in the ethnic community. Their settlement in Chatham Square, an area surrounding East Broadway Avenue, has created a new spatial order for the Chinatown.

Chatham Square was formerly a thriving Jewish neighborhood filled with low-price clothing stores and hotels. But after World War II, the Jewish merchants and residents started to move out of the area. Especially with the construction of a new subway system in the city in the 1960s, Chatham Square no longer functioned as one of the city's major transportation centers, which greatly impacted the local business and led to the neighborhood's decline. As the Jewish people fled to the suburbs and other areas of the city, the Chinese immigrants gradually took their place, occupied Chatham Square, and established Chinese businesses there. In 1962, the Chinese American Veteran Memorial was constructed at Chatham Square to memorize Jin Liu, a second lieutenant of U.S. army, who died in the World War II. Designed by the Chinese American architect Jin-Pei Lee, the Memorial not only was an expression of patriotism and the ethnic pride, but also an effort of the ethnic leaders to create images that would stamp their cultural presence and political ideals. It offered a place for the symbolic expression of an ethnic identity in a form that showed loyalty to political regimes of the host society.

Since the end of the 1980s, immigrants from Fujian province of China began to take root at East Broadway. With the prosperity of Fujianese business in the area, a new Fujianese-flavored Chinatown emerged that was different from the old core of Chinatown, where Cantonese had dominated the economic, social and political structures. While today the old section of the Chinatown tends to be more tourist-oriented, with businesses such as souvenir and curios stores, East Broadway offers herbal stores, grocery shops, and supermarkets that mainly serve the Chinese. Like the division in San Francisco's Chinatown where Grant Avenue serves as the "front regions" and Stockton Street is the "back regions" (as described in Chapter Four), New York's Chinatown is also divided by the types of social performances and social roles staged in the place. But the geographic division in New York's Chinatown is somehow unique in terms of its affiliation to particular social groups differentiated by areas of origin, language, and levels of assimilation. Restaurants specifically catering to the taste of Fujianese spread out on East Broadway, wherein the presence of the headquarters of Fujianese organizations such as the

Fujianese-American Association and the United Fujianese-American Association indicates a new socio-political order of the landscape controlled by the dominant Fujianese group.

The Fujianese immigrants faced many challenges as they settled in New York's Chinatown. First, the language barriers between the Fujianese and the well-established Cantonese immigrants excluded the newcomers from the existing socio-economic resources of Chinatown. It was very hard for the new Fujianese immigrants to find employment or operate their own businesses at the old core of the Chinatown. Furthermore, there were clear political differences. Their support for the People's Republic of China appeared to be incompatible with that of the early immigrants who generally supported Taiwan, the Republic of China. But with the fast growing number of Fujianese immigrants in New York, the traditional leadership of the Chinatown was being challenged. The intra-ethnic tension started to become noticeable in 1978, when the United States decided to build an official diplomatic relation with Communist China. In recognition, about four out of sixty regional and family associations in Chinatown declared their support by erecting the national flag of Communist China above their association headquarters. The shifting political situations aroused heated debates among the community members and suddenly Chinatown became a divided community. The local merchants who looked forward to the resumed Pacific trade applauded the normalization of U.S.-China relations, while the old-timers insisted on the allegiance to the Nationalist Party of Taiwan.

The Nationalist Party had dominated U.S. Chinatowns for several decades. The party members constituted the governing core of Chinatown's traditional leadership by holding the permanent "inner-circle" voting seats of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). In New York, the hegemony of the Party was also evident in its power over the ethnic media. *The World Journal*, Chinatown's best financed daily newspaper, for instance, was owned by T. W. Wong, a prominent member of the Nationalist Party Central Committee. The newspaper was widely circulated and was a loyal and influential advocate of the Party. The *Chinatown Daily News*, a popular left-wing newspaper, had a very different destiny. It was forced to suspend publication in the 1950s because of its critiques of the Nationalist Party.³⁹ In addition to the media control, the particular political circumstances in the U.S.

after World War II also helped to consolidate the power of the Party in the Chinese Diasporas. With the defeat of the Nationalist Party and the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, there were posters calling for Chinatown residents to report neighbors or acquaintances they suspected of "Communist leaning." Chinese who attempted to contact relatives in the mainland were harassed. Especially during the Korean War in the 1950s, Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans had cautiously avoided any contacts with mainland China to prevent the suspicion of taking a political stance of Communism, in fear of losing their properties and being sent to internment camps, as occurred to the Japanese Americans during the war. When the consolidation of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China in 1972 deformed the power structure of Chinatown, the Nationalist Party pressed on with its domination by raising the capital investment in the community, intensifying media control, and even resorting to violence to enforce the party's interests and ideologies. This is when the Chinatown gateways in Chicago and San Francisco were constructed with the support of the Taiwan government. In response to the violent clashes that occurred between the Nationalists and supporters of Community China, the Subcommittee on International Operations of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee became involved in investigating the activities conducted by the Nationalist Party's intelligence services in the United States.⁴⁰

In addition to the tensions among the political groups, personal experiences also prompted community members to decide which side they would take in the process of political transitions. For those who had families and relatives in China, normalization presumed family reunion and the possibility of revisiting their hometowns. But for those who had lost their possessions and families during China's Communist revolutions, the bitter life experiences made them steadfast supporters of the Taiwanese government.⁴¹ At the same time, the new-generation of Chinese Americans, who were influenced by the American civil rights and antiwar movements in the 1960s, constituted a revolutionary force to reform Chinatown. However, the domination of the Nationalist Party in Chinatown served to dampen political activism since the long-entrenched order was carefully preserved to retain the existing power structure. Accusing the traditional community organizations of being more interested in anti-Communist and pro-

Nationalist activities than dealing with community issues and problems, the new-generation Chinese Americans perceived the reestablishment of U.S.-China relations as a force that could terminate the Nationalists' domination of Chinatown and allow the community to address its needs for improved social services and democratic political infrastructures.⁴² Thus the desire for change and the mood of expectancy facilitated the support of the new generation Chinese Americans for the resurrection of the U.S.-China diplomatic relations.

The arrival of Fujianese immigrants in New York's Chinatown in the 1980s and 1990s intensified the political divergences that had existed within the community after World War II. The new diversity of power was manifested in the disputes over the selection of parade routes celebrating the National Day of the People's Republic of China in 1994. The route was designed to start at Columbus Park, across East Broadway, and run through the old core of Chinatown at Bowery and Mott Streets (figure 65). Historically, the core area of Chinatown was the prerequisite route for the annual parade celebrating the National Day of the Republic of China, Taiwan, usually referred as "the Double Ten" Parade on October 10th every year. However, the traditional groups supporting the Nationalist Party feared that if the parade were patronized by Fujianese immigrants they would celebrate the National Day of the Communist China and demonstrate the new Fujianese political power, and thus, the traditional groups drastically rejected the parade's route through the old core. At the same time that the Chinese were fighting over political symbolism, the city police denied the route based on the concerns of traffic jams, because the San Gennaro Festival in Little Italy was scheduled to be held on the same day as the Fujianese parade. Although the police granted the "outer" route along East Broadway and St. James Place to the parade, the Fujianese immigrants regarded the police's decision as unduly influenced by the authority of the old governing elites of the Chinatown.⁴³ The controversy over the parade route for celebrating the National Day of China served as a reminder that space is an essential subject of political and social concerns.

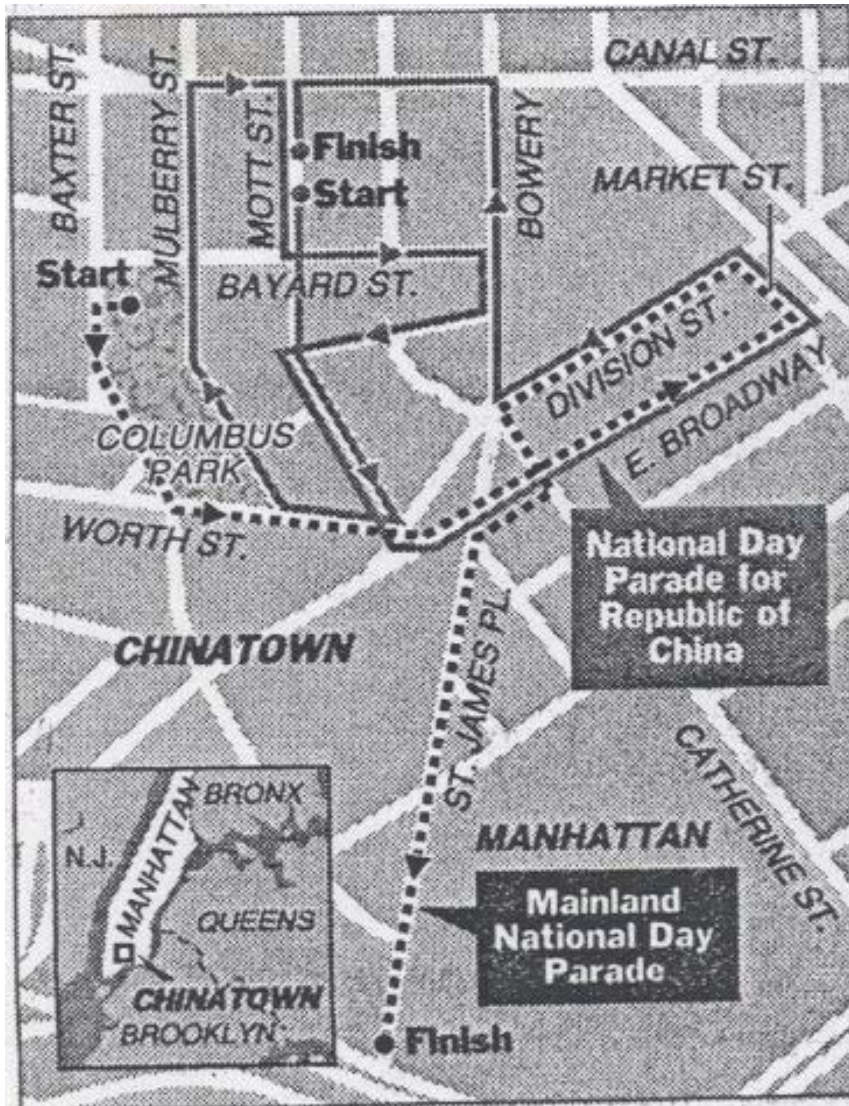


Figure 65: A map showing the routes for National Day parade for Taiwan, Republic of China and Mainland, People's Republic of China (Source: *New York Times*, Sep. 11, 1994)

In addition to space, the objects placed within that landscape could have symbolic input. The dedication of a statue of Commissioner Lin Ze Xu, a native Fujianese, at Chatham Square in 1997, represented the major opportunity for the Fujianese immigrants to publicly assert the distinctive virtues of their own identity (figure 66). Lin was a national hero of China because he burned tons of opium imported from Britain in 1839 and sparked the Opium War of 1840. As a patriotic symbol of law and order, the statue of Lin was designed to convey the determination of the Fujianese immigrants to make Chinatown safe and drug-free area, especially when the notorious activities of Fujianese gangs had been

widely publicized in the U.S. in the 1990s. After the erection of the memorial, the City Council approved naming the triangle plot where the statue was located at the intersection of East Broadway, Katherine Street, and



Figure 66: The statue of Lin Ze Xu and Commissioner Lin Ze Xu Square located at Chatham Square, ca. 2008 (Photo by author)

Oliver Street as Commissioner Lin Ze Xu Square. The creation and naming of the Lin Ze Xu Square was accompanied by an aggressive political campaign to foster a new cultural identity in the Chinatown. In many ways, Lin Ze Xu was a nationally important cultural figure in China – his rebellion against the British opium invasion was virtually a defense of his country and homeland nationalism.⁴⁴ But meanwhile, Lin was symbolized local pride, because he was from Fujian Province. Thus with the selection of such a commemorative figure that had guarded the ideals of the homeland, the Fujianese leaders attempted to please both their cohabitants in the ethnic enclave who were interested in the ideals of patriotism and cultural nationalism and their Fujianese peers who still were emotionally attached to the

homeland. The commemoration of Lin was actually an attempt to reconcile the intra-ethnic division in the community by weakening the political implications of the commemorative symbol and emphasizing its cultural attainments. It was an interesting and strategic choice because it sustained an interest in cultural identity that was not threatening to other political parties in the host society.⁴⁵

Although the growth of China as a new world power has led to the gradual blurring of political lines between the old-timers and the emerging community of new immigrants from the mainland, New York's Chinatown still remains socially and spatially divided according to the differences of languages, regional origins, and cultural affiliations. The homeland geopolitical processes have tremendous impact on the social formation and spatial configurations in the Chinatown. However, the fragmentation of community formation is not only a legacy of the political processes of the homeland countries, but also a response to the new order conforming to the structure of domination in the Chinatown. Thus the spatial identities deployed by the social groups are perhaps more crucial to their self-expressions than are attempts to proclaim pride in their native cultures. Architecture and other modes of representation intensified efforts to augment community self-esteem and restructure the identity discourses for the new diversity of power in the Chinatown.

Post-911 Constructions

Located to the east of the World Trade Center, New York's Chinatown was one of the neighborhoods most profoundly traumatized by the terrorist attack in 2001. With an estimated loss of 7,700 jobs, the Chinatown community suffered economic decline as well as health and environmental problems. However, Chinatown was not a priority for the federal Emergency Management Agency and other public or private relief foundations. Indeed, many Chinatown residents and businessman were excluded from assistance after 911, because Canal Street was marked as one of the boundaries for federal relief and many Chinese lived at the north of Canal Street. In addition, language and cultural barriers also prevented the Chinese immigrants from receiving outside help and relief funds. With a growing awareness of the community's plight and difficulties, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation

(LMDC), the major agency in charge of rebuilding plans in Lower Manhattan, started to reach out to the community and work with the community-based organizations, even though the initial blueprint produced by the agency rarely mentioned Chinatown.⁴⁶ Chinatown was the nearest poor neighborhood to Ground Zero where almost a quarter of the workers lost their jobs and the unemployment rate was 10 percent. Recognizing this, the City Council voted to create an “Empire Zone” in Chinatown in 2002 to offer tax credits to the neighborhood businesses.⁴⁷ The community-based organizations such as Asian Americans for Equality applauded the plan and launched a community-wide effort to develop a proposal of rebuilding and recovering the community. In the Rebuild Chinatown Community Survey, four key issues – sanitary conditions, affordable housing, employment opportunities, and senior housing – were highlighted as the most urgent tasks for the post-9/11 community rebuilding efforts. Traffic congestion and lack of parking space were also considered immediate dilemmas for community revitalization.⁴⁸

After the 9/11 attack, in fear of possible truck bombs and other terrorist attacks, the city closed off Park Row that runs from City Hall to East Broadway and lies behind the police headquarters. The barricades set up on Park Row might have effectively removed the potential threats to the governing center of the city, but they created predicaments for the Chinatown community by detouring emergency vehicles, keeping away tourist buses, and generating traffic congestions in Chatham Square. Representing the residents of Chinatown, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) filed a lawsuit in an effort to reopen Park Row, citing the negative environmental impacts caused by the closure of the street. They alleged the previous environmental assessment statement ignored the traffic effects of the street barricades, because it failed to consider the consequences of rerouting buses, closing an exit ramp near the Brooklyn Bridge, and shutting down a municipal garage. The Court denied the AALDEF’s request because it was believed that the security measures were necessary and there were no signs of significant impact at areas within 1,500 to 2,000 feet of the street closures.⁴⁹ This is an example of what Mike Davis calls the “post-liberal” city that has been torn by oppressed social control, racial enmity, and class disparity. Under the name of security, the militarization of city’s everyday life is accompanied by the division between “fortified cells” and “place of terror.”⁵⁰ The relations of surveillance, repression, and

segregation were manifested in the post-911 New York City where some people were denied access to certain public spaces and increasing measures of security and surveillance were applied to control urban public life. The fear of terrorist attack legitimates a new spatiality of separateness that has contributed to the construction of social inequality and enforced social boundaries between different groups.

The restriction of public access to Park Row has greatly affected the post-911 economic revitalization of Chinatown, and yet despite this, the city is eager to promote tourism as a driving force for community development. In 2004, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) and the September 11th Fund launched a campaign known as “Exploring Chinatown,” intending to rebuild the community’s economy. In the advertising campaign, “colorful stores” and “diverse and delicious food” were highlighted as the most attractive attributes of the neighborhood.⁵¹ The campaign slogan “SEE Chinatown”— as in “Shop, Eat, Explore”⁵² – reveals Chinatown as a spectacle for the tourist consumption. As part of the campaign, LMDC, 911 Foundation, and New York Tourism Company sponsored the construction of the Chinatown Tourist Information Center (figure 67). The structure is located at a triangle plot bounded by Canal and Baxter Street. Painted in red and topped with an oversized golden dragon, the center was evidently designed to mainly serve non-Chinese tourists, since its information materials were printed in English. However, in actuality Chinese tourists have consisted of more than half of the visitors.⁵³ In addition to the exotic-looking tourist information kiosk, a Chinatown gateway was also proposed as a means of reinforcing the distinctive characteristics of the ethnic neighborhood. The Chinese community has made efforts to build a gateway for a long time, beginning in 1979, when the CCBA coordinated with the city government and other related agencies. The gateway was proposed for the intersection of Chatham Square and Park Row, a busy entry to the Chinatown. The proposed arch would be 84-feet wide and 25-feet tall, embellished with a plaque proclaiming “The World is for All,” a famous saying by Sun Yat-sen that also appeared in the Chinatown gateways in Chicago and San Francisco. The proposal, however, was denied by the city government because of the intense opposition



Figure 67: The tourist kiosk is located at the divider between Canal, Baxter, and Walker Streets. It is part of the Explore Chinatown Campaign to promote the area as a tourism attraction. (Source: <http://www.gallagherstravels.com/newsflash/chinatownnyc/>).

of the non-Chinese residents who argued that the construction site was located outside the Chinatown territory and would cause traffic congestion by attracting large numbers of tourists. In 1992, Hunter College Neighborhood Planning Workshop revisited the gateway idea and recommended three possible locations for its construction: the entrance into Chinatown from the Manhattan Bridge, Chatham Square, and the triangle of land bounded by Canal, Center, and Baxter Streets. They emphasized “entry” and “visibility” as key criteria for selecting the sites for the gateway.⁵⁴ It was not until 2003, with the great impact of 9/11 attack on the economy and tourism of the Chinatown, that the CCBA decided to push the gateway project. In a letter to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the CCBA exclaimed that “San Francisco, Washington, DC, Montreal, Vancouver, Melbourne, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston... all have beautiful Gateway Arches that reflect Chinese culture... and serve as centerpieces for local tourism,” while “New York City has none!”⁵⁵ In response to the CCBA’s request, the City Council provided

\$250,000 for construction, but the total cost of the gateway construction was estimated to be about \$1,500,000. Thus although the project was perceived as a landmark that would propel Chinatown's revival, it turned out to be very difficult for the community leaders to find funds to match those provided by the City Council.⁵⁶ In addition, Chinatown residents showed no enthusiasm for the gateway project. In the community workshop meetings held in 2003, community members opposed the gateway idea and emphasized the "visual authenticity" of the quarter, arguing against the schemes that "emphasized tourists over residents."⁵⁷ Without community support and the short of funding, the CCBA's proposal for the Chinatown Gateway now has limited prospects for success.

In the last three decades, New York's Chinatown has turned to commercialism and tourism, which were already established as part of the local cultures as the result of urban transformations. After 911, in a context of regressive economic development, efforts to reinvent the neighborhood involved a commitment to tourism and, particularly, the dedication to the production of specific community images to attract tourists. Neighborhood improvements, such as the revitalization of the pavilion in Columbus Park in 2007, have been staged as efforts to enhance the quality of life for Chinatown residents. Such improvements are beneficial, but they are also instruments for capitalist control of the production of space by creating a desired image of the ethnic neighborhood for sale to the tourist and real estate market. The ethnic leaders and the city officials are still trying to resurrect the idea of the Chinatown gateway for the same reasons that they are marketing the ethnic imagery of Chinatown. Like other poor neighborhoods in New York, Chinatown suffered a social and economic crisis after 911. In a sense, the search for a local identity has become the foundation for new strategies of community redevelopment, especially when the older belief that the successful restructuring of low-income neighborhood should depend on displacement of working-class, marginal community identities has been recently challenged by a globalized economy that accommodates a variety of profitable and specialized places.⁵⁸

Conclusions

New York's Chinatown is facing competition from the nearby neighborhoods in Lower East Side and other Chinatowns emerging elsewhere in the city. The Chinatown in Flushing, which has the appellation of "Little Taipei," attracts those who immigrated from Taiwan and mainland China. For them, Flushing is more hospitable because Mandarin is the dominant language there. Another Chinatown in Brooklyn, stretching from 50th to 62nd Street on Eighth Avenue, is a relatively small and new Chinatown that is connected to the Manhattan Chinatown by subway and a tour bus run by the Chinese. Many Chinese working in the Manhattan Chinatown choose to live in the Brooklyn Chinatown because the rents are relatively low there. In addition to these new Chinatowns, the commercial development in Little Italy and the Lower East Side has also drawn some attention away from the Manhattan Chinatown. Thus in order to sustain the Chinatown as a profitable and thriving ethnic community in the changing political economy of the city, efforts to reinvent neighborhood stress the production of a specific and unique image that would attract new investment in the community. Despite the official attempts to cast Chinatown in an essentialized ethnic image, place identity emerges from the array of specialized interests that are grounded on the lived experience of the community. These interests are diverse and changing and can be contested because of the emergence of new social units, such as the Fujianese immigrants whose values and view of reality are very different from the early immigrants who settled in the Chinatown and defended the traditional structures of power and a system of beliefs that was produced from a political regime of the past. The growth of new immigrant communities challenged the social and political framework that had supported the traditional constitutions and created a new linkage between the formation of social identity and the constitution of territories.

In 1992, Manhattan Borough formed a Chinatown Tourism Council to market Chinatown as a tourist attraction. Not only targeted to western tourists, the tourist establishments in Chinatown also advertised in Chinese-language newspapers in Canada, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Hong Kong. Transnational tourism and businesses became central to the community redevelopment as they were embedded through time in various layers of community life. A productive economy based on real-estate development and transnational financial services caused Chinatown to be treated as a purely financial

asset by the private and public sectors. The disjunction between a neoliberal ideology of neutral space and free-market globalization, and the local issues of social reproduction became noticeably contested in the Chinatown through the local struggles over housing, zoning, and landscape changes. The official efforts of maintaining authority in land-use planning and the manipulation of distinction and ethnic identity played a seminal role in the ongoing processes of capital accumulation. As observed by Jan Lin, “ethnicity has a greater resilience and gravity in arenas of economic, political, and cultural interaction” through the opportunities created by the development of global capitalism.⁵⁹ The local agents who were active in promoting the globalization of regional economy likewise sought to restructure the built environment of Chinatown to accommodate a variety of transnational endeavors. Thus during a period of rapid restructuring, Chinatown has become a strategic site in organizing the transnational activities of capital circulations and cultural exchanges.

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Conclusions

The examination of landscape changes in the U.S. Chinatowns under the forces of urban redevelopment opens a window to the intricate relations between landscape, ethnicity, and urban economy and politics. The agenda for urban development that prioritizes the rationale of capital accumulation and the dominant social and cultural ideology led to the contested process of landscape construction and identity-making in the Chinatowns. Exploring the role of race and ethnicity in the making of urban forms provides a critical understanding of the complicated processes through which place is imagined and constructed. The three Chinatowns examined in this study were not only subject to the overarching economic restructuring in the national scale, but also were constructed out of a particular local and regional context. From the 1950s to 70s, the national crisis of deindustrialization and the declining urban economy facilitated a shift of urban policy that sought to regenerate devalued land and encourage growth in the service and consumption economies. As the first wave of urban renewal relied on the urban renewal bulldozer to eradicate or isolate the urban “slums,” Chinatowns in the major cities experienced various degrees of exclusion and marginalization. In each case, as examined in this study, Chinatowns faced the pressure of dislocation and gentrification. The rhetoric of slum clearance was a powerful apparatus that fortified the geography of segregation based on race and class. It also served as an instrument of power that continued to contain the colored bodies in the subordinated spaces.

In San Francisco, community activism fighting for low-income housing and recreation spaces nurtured the political power of resistance. The organized resistance against spatial orders imposed from “above”, with varied success, helped to develop the Chinatown community as a political unity that challenged the dominant agenda of urban redevelopment. The Third World Strikes at California and University of California at Berkeley in 1968 and 1969 established California as the center of Asian American political activism. Motivated by the local political culture, San Francisco’s Chinatown community showed great effort and success in protecting the low-income Chinese immigrants from being further marginalized by the process of urban redevelopment. In Chicago, however, the resistance was

relatively minor. Instead, the community leaders helped to fuel a pocket of gentrification within the Chinatown under the rhetoric of “self-help” and the stereotype of the “model minority.” In the 1930s, Paul Siu pioneered a study of the Chinese immigrants in his dissertation at the University of Chicago, which was published as *The Chinese Laundryman* in 1987. Siu’s book conceptualized the “sojourner” mentality of the Chinese immigrants based on the methodological tool of social types and assimilation theory.¹ His idea of the sojourners and their subsequent assimilation constituted the core of the “self-help” and “model minority” discourses, which perpetuated the Chinese immigrants as Others. In New York’s Chinatown, community redevelopment was closely tied to overseas investment and a successful enclave economy was built on thriving transnational financial and commercial exchanges. But at the same time, city-imposed public projects and the planning policies that emphasized commercial development over housing, and an upper-circuit economy over a lower-circuit economy, led to conflicts among city government, overseas Chinese investors, and local residents. Underlying the urban redevelopment strategies was the insistence that Chinatown, as a slum, had to be enhanced through outside capital investment and economic growth.

These differences among the three Chinatowns, located on the west coast, the midwest, and east coast, have helped to imagine and shape the Asian bodies and Asian places in distinctive ways. The particular regional history, culture, politics, and economy facilitated the unique embeddedness of Chinatown in the evolving urban system and its various responses to the challenges generated by the processes of urban redevelopment. The variations that arose from the particular regional institutions were also manifested in the practice of reinventing Chinatown and especially of making the built environment visibly “Chinese.” Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, there has been a shift in urban renewal strategies from the bulldozer to the development of incipient revitalization spaces.² The urban forms represented by the immigrant communities, although not viewed as belonging to an advanced economy, have been associated with the image projected of the global city as multicultural, tolerant, and democratic. In contrast with the early struggles of Chinatown residents over land-use changes generated by exclusive urban planning, the new wave of urban renewal advocated a liberal-pluralist formula of inclusion that

emphasizes the cities, especially the global cities, as iconic centers of diversity and democracy. The way that ethnic diversity is celebrated, however, is not significantly different from the historical discourse of ethnic tourism, for the practice of “Othering” is still central in the process, even though difference might be celebrated rather than denigrated.³ In addition, the emphasis on the distinctiveness of Chinese enclaves in North America also easily reinforces the stereotype of the places by defining special place qualities with selective history and cultural elements. Although there are many different cultural strategies of urban economic development, the common element in all these strategies is that “they reduce the multiple dimensions and conflicts of culture to a coherent visual representation.”⁴ In Chinatown, ethnic culture as a “way of life” is transferred into “cultural products” that can be sold and consumed in the global market.⁵ In the process, a simplified identity of “Chineseness” is forged through the less contested notion of “culture” rather than the controversial area of politics and economy.

In San Francisco, for example, tourism has played an essential role in urban transformation. By a variety of measures, San Francisco is one of the most popular urban tourist destinations in the United States. In 1985, San Francisco’s tourism industry generated \$130 million in local taxes, which was 13 percent of the city’s general receipts. Surveys collected by the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau indicated that visual perceptions of the urban environment and sensory dimensions of leisure experiences were the most attractive features of the tourist landscape in San Francisco. Moreover, tourists also stated that they enjoyed the political culture that was characterized by cross-cutting alliances among class, race, and sexuality and great tolerance to diversity.⁶ The dominant obsession of visual appeals that are ethnic and unique drove the process of “Orientalization” of San Francisco’s Chinatown. However, for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, the back regions of the quarter such as Stockton Street remained an authentic living environment providing the particular social and cultural infrastructures for the ethnic groups. In a similar way, the City of Chicago also emphasized visitor trade as a way to enhance the city’s position as the national center of convention and tourism. The development and refurbishment of cultural attractions such as art museums, restaurants, theatres, and sports stadiums were among the strategies to realize the re-invention of the city.⁷ Since the 1970s, Chicago’s Chinatown has consciously

incorporated an Oriental theme in its architecture and parks, which emphasized the visual representations and motifs reflecting Chinese tradition. But underlying the cultural layer of the exotic structures was not only the desire to protect the dominant socio-political interests of the society, but also a strategy to enhance the current value of the community. The promotion of the “model minority” imagery prompted efforts to build middle- and upper-income housing to attract wealthy Chinese and Chinese professionals into the Chinatown. It also led to the further segregation of poor immigrants.

In contrast with the Chinatowns in San Francisco and Chicago, New York’s Chinatown showed much less “self-Orientalization.” Though a few buildings followed the exotic designs that prevailed in other Chinatowns, the dominant physical space conveys an alternative sense of “authenticity” by focusing on the actual needs of the community members. The degree of freedom that New York’s Chinatown enjoyed for not being constrained by an ostentatious expression of ethnic culture was partially determined by the unique economic conditions of the community. The overseas capital investment and the thriving industries of garment shops and restaurants halved the importance of tourism in the community’s economy. The pressing needs for affordable housing and public health also emphasized practicality in the built environment. But meanwhile, intra-ethnic conflicts and divisions in the community produced a symbolic landscape that reflected the shifting terrain of ethnic pride and power within the community. As homeland politics were transformed into tensions within Chinatown, the expression of ethnic identity became very sensitive to the pursuit of present commercial and political interests.

In a sense, the three urban Chinatowns showed significant variations for exploring the new fields of power in cultural representation. They contextualized ethnicity in the local particularities, revealing a variety of endeavors in creating the landscape of ethnicity. But at the same time, the Chinatowns are interconnected in many ways. The major traditional family and regional associations, for instance, hold annual conferences in each major Chinatown by turns in order to assert their political connections there. And some manufacturing enterprises in large Chinatowns have an almost monopolistic grip on the provisioning of Chinatown restaurants, grocery, and gift shops all over the country. The economic and socio-cultural network has been deeply entrenched among the different Chinatowns, which generated a

significant foundation for the empowerment of the ethnic group. In 1992, the Chinatown Resource Center in San Francisco issued *Chinatown USA Report: planning and development in American Chinatowns*.

The report provides a critical insight of the common issues and neighborhood problems among American Chinatowns such as housing shortage, traffic congestion, and lack of recreational space. It also analyzes the role of the civic institutions in Chinatown formations by pointing out that the prevalent vision for revitalization sees Chinatown as a “capital city” constituting an important part of the city and regional economy.⁸ It says that Chinatowns present and future should share the following features:

“Chinatown should have an attractive environment that encourages tourism and economic prosperity and at the same time, remains a desirable and affordable place to live; Chinatown becomes an integral part of mainstream society and yet remains distinctive cultural heritage and identity; Balancing the need for aggressive growth and neighborhood preservation while contending with the constraints of spatial resources and available monetary resources.”

The passage reveals the major dilemmas for the future development of Chinatown including the threat of gentrification, politics of cultural identity, and the spatial constraints. With the fast growth of tourism and commercial activities, Chinatown has increasingly become a place of leisure and recreation, wherein the creation of a marketable environment of consumption produces an ahistorical and “depthless” landscape.⁹ It reconstitutes the spatial distribution of class and offers scant opportunities for poor Chinese immigrants to move up the social scale. . Meanwhile, the frequent circulations and global exchanges have produced new cultural identity and community space in the Chinese Diasporas. As for the Chinese immigrants, back and forth movements and electronic communication generate a new conception of home, which in the new context can be multiple and dynamic.¹⁰ Thus, there is a significant dimension to the discussion of cultural identity in that transnational perspective is adopted in this research to emphasize that immigrant communities sustain and are affected by the multi-stranded social relations between both host and home societies. The transnational processes challenge the narratives of transmigrant communities grounded on the rigid confines of nation-states. In the process, nation-states still play

pivotal roles in identity formation of transmigrants. But at the same time, Chinese Diasporas also contribute to and are being reconfigured within the global construction of deterritorialized nation-states.

As the Chinese American community becomes increasingly diverse, it would be difficult and sometimes misleading to generalize about the political and social positions of Chinese Americans as a group. The transnational connectivity opens up new social spaces for Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants to renegotiate and restructure the local identities, power discourses, and the racial relations in the host society, which for many has become the home society. Although in many ways historic Chinatown is no longer the sole focus of Chinese American life, it remains an important site in articulating Chinese American identity and their transnational political, economic, and cultural life. Especially for low-skilled Chinese immigrants, Chinatown continues to function as a major living community that provides working opportunities and social networks. The historic urban Chinatowns survived in the waves of urban redevelopment and engaged itself in a widening circle of socio-political actions. The distinct ethnic landscapes of these Chinatowns are important in themselves and for what they represent about social processes, but they are also important indicators of the dialogical processes across racial and cultural difference, generating the new fields of power in both local and global context. Their significance lies in the rich history and particular political and social status that has endured into the new century and does not seem to be affected by the emergence of satellite or suburban Chinatowns.

The examination of the landscape practices and spatial struggles of Chinatown in the process of urban redevelopment indicates the complicated processes in which the discourse of race and ethnicity continued to play a significant role in the making of urban space. Urban redevelopment is an instrument to enhance the socio-economic vitality of the cities, but it is also far more than that. It promotes a new mode of governance and citizenship that redefines racial/ethnic difference and social relations through the regulation of minority space. As such, the questions for the Chinatowns in the new century is whether any of them can step out of the often narrow and selective concepts of ethnicity and culture and embrace the widening circle of transnational actions and a broadened experience of the Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans.

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