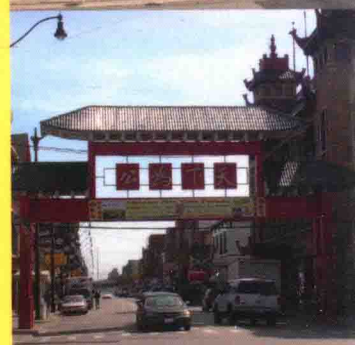


CHINATOWNS  
*around the* WORLD:  
GILDED GHETTO,  
ETHNOPOLIS,  
*and* CULTURAL  
DIASPORA

edited by  
BERNARD P. WONG  
and  
TAN CHEE-BENG



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# Chinatowns around the World

Gilded Ghetto, Ethnopolis, and Cultural Diaspora

*Edited by*

Bernard P. Wong and Tan Chee-Beng



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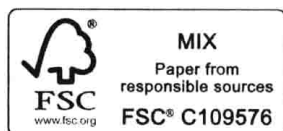
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## Chinatowns around the World

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## INTRODUCTION

# Chinatowns around the World

**Bernard P. Wong**

Authors of this volume on Chinatowns survey the changing nature and functions of Chinatown in different countries around the world. The authors seek to examine the changing aspects of Chinatowns in contemporary Vancouver, New York City, Chicago, Lima, Havana, Paris, Lisbon, Sydney and Tokyo. These nine papers written respectively by Peter S. Li and Eva Xiaoling Li, Kenneth J. Guest, Huping Ling, Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, Adrian Hearn, Ya-Han Chuang and Anne-Christine Trémon, Paula Mota Santos, Christine Inglis and Kiyomi Yamashita represent an effort to empirically answer these questions: What is the nature of Chinatown? To what extent Chinatowns have changed and to what extent Chinatowns have remained the same. Tan Chee-Beng concludes with a theoretical reflection and comparative remarks on Chinatowns discussed in this volume with those in East and Southeast Asia.

The phenomenon of “Chinatown” has been of great interest to the general public as well as scholars. Movies have made Chinatown to be exotic, mysterious, gangsters filled, and sometimes, a gilded ghetto, an ethnopolis, a cultural diaspora as well as a model community. Some community activists have viewed Chinatowns to be a place to be exploited by insider-labor bosses and a “zoo” for voyeurism and greedy tourism operators. Other community organizers have found Chinatowns to be important sites for voluntary activities and community mobilization efforts. Scholars’ treatments of Chinatowns have similarly varied, ranging from treating Chinatowns as monuments of racism, repertory of ethnic resources, destinations of transnational and circular migration, step-stones to the larger society, heritage centers, to powerhouses of talents and leaders. Some hypothesize that Chinatowns are on “on their way out” in that they are in a process of assimilating into the larger society or into the suburbs. Contrary to the contentions of many, the authors of this volume found that established Chinatowns continue to thrive and in certain countries, Chinatowns proliferate. Thus, it is simply premature to suggest the demise of Chinatowns. The authors in this volume have convinced us, with their painful

documentations and research, that Chinatowns still exist and that the study of Chinatown is a worth-while academic enterprise. To debunk any stereotypes or answer any serious academic questions, one may need more social analyses and research data. From these authors one sees the phenomenon of satellization of Chinatown in Lima-Peru, Sydney-Australia, Vancouver-Canada, New York, Chicago and Paris. In these cities, there was a traditional or older Chinatown. From the original Chinatown, many Chinese neighborhoods or Chinese districts expanded. My personal research in San Francisco also shows the satellization process of Chinatown. Starting from the Chinatown, one now can find other satellite communities in the Clement Street area (called the New Chinatown or Xin Huabu 新华埠), the Irving Street, Noriega and Visitation Areas. All these satellite communities have commercial and residential sections but do not have the interlocking community associations.

### Definition, Types and Functions of Chinatown

What is Chinatown? Before we theorize the existence or demise of Chinatowns, we need to establish a definition of Chinatown. Although a simple question, it is difficult to obtain a consensus on its definition. North American specialists tend to emphasize the existence of a segregated community with residential and commercial areas and are governed by interlocking associational social networks with an overall community organization such as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association or the Chinese Six Company. Others speak of Chinatowns as if they are just places of Chinese populations and Chinese shops. Still others define Chinatown as a tourist center with Chinese cultural symbols. Some use the term, *Chinese Quarters* (Chuan and Trémon in this volume) to refer to Chinatowns. Some used the term *ethnopolis* to refer to Chinatown as an urban ethnic enclave with social and economic resources. Yamashita (in this volume) sees different types of Chinatowns and their evolution in Japan from historical Chinatown, tourist Chinatown to just concentration of Chinese stores. The newest of them is the area filled with Chinese shops in Ikebukuro district in Tokyo. Among local Chinese residents, the term, *huabu* (华埠) or *tangren jie* (唐人街), are used to refer to areas with Chinese residents and shops. Overall, umbrella-like Chinese community organizations may or may not be present in them. In fact, many European Chinese communities do not have an overall umbrella organization coordinating the various local, kinship, regional or hometown associations. Consistent with the current emphasis on the *emic* or *insider* approach in social science theory, personally, I

think we should use the term *huabu* or *tangren jie* to refer to Chinatown. Having defined it that way, the term Chinatown is used in an inclusive sense covering various types of Chinese concentrations in urban areas. However, in any academic treatment of Chinatown in a specific locality, one need to delineate in details what it contains and its characteristics. Thus, there are many different types of Chinatowns. Most of the European and Australian types of Chinatowns do not have hierarchical, interlocking associational structures like those in Lima, Havana, New York, Vancouver, Chicago and San Francisco. However, contemporary Chinatowns (established after 1960s) in North America are not always segregated communities either. Nor they do always have associations. Thus, for examples, the Richmond district of Vancouver (Li and Li), the various residential/suburban communities of northern Chicago (Ling), the “Chinatowns” in Flushing and Elmhurst areas of New York City, the “new Chinatown” in Clement Street or the Chinese sections in Irving, Noriega areas and Visitation Valley in San Francisco do not have the traditional kinship and clanship associations characteristics of traditional Chinatowns in North America. They also have non-Chinese living in their midst and thus they are not segregated neighborhoods. They are similar to most of the Chinatowns in Europe and Australia (Pieke 1998, Christiansen 2003, Inglis, Chuang and Trémon). Speaking generally, there are many types of “Chinatowns” in the world ranging from the traditional Chinatowns founded in 19th century, to the new Chinatowns without these associations. Some are both commercial and residential and some are commercial only. Some are theme-parks like those in Yokohama and Kobe. Some cities have several Chinatowns. In San Francisco, some scholars counted the existence of five Chinatowns. Some of the Chinatowns have not only the associational networks based on locality of origins, kinship, friendship but also based on politics, trades, dialects. Some have Chinese schools, Chinese hospitals and Chinese cemeteries. In Paris, there are four *Chinese Quarters*. Only one of the four, in the 13th arrondissement, has a community association which specifically oriented to the Chinese from Indo-China. The other three *Chinese Quarters* have Chinese from Zhejiang Province, specifically, from Wenzhou (温州) and Qingtian (青田) (Chuang and Trémon). None of these have the Chinese gates and street names in Chinese characters. In Portugal, the Chinese who are contemplating the building of “Chinatown in Lisbon” actually intended to be an area with Chinese retail stores (Santos in this volume). Fleming Christiansen 2003, Frank Pieke 1998 and others noted that “Chinatowns” in Europe are not segregated community with only Chinese residents. In Japan, the two large “Chinatowns” in Yokohama and Kobe are principally tourist centers and both have the “Chinese Gates”. Thus, there is

no one clear and distinct universal definition of “Chinatown”. The differences of Chinatowns are observable and researchable. Local Chinese could identify their uniqueness and differences of their Chinatowns. The insiders’ perception and labeling of their community are useful in the understanding the feeling of the members and in the prediction of social actions to be taken by the natives. Thus, for instance, Chinatown — Stockton/Grant area of San Francisco — is called by the Cantonese as Dai Fau Tong Yan Gai (大埠唐人街, Dabu Tangren Jie in Mandarin, the big city’s Chinatown) because the city at one time had the largest Chinese population. Sacramento’s Chinatown was referred to as Yi Fau Tong Yan Gai in Cantonese (二埠唐人街 the second city’s Chinatown or *Erhu Tangren Jie* in Mandarin). The local terminologies used by the natives are most meaningful and relevant and thus should be used whenever possible.

The functions of Chinatowns, as indicated by the authors, vary. Some Chinatowns are havens for the new arrivals that need mutual aid from each other. Familiarity with the language and customs of Chinatown ease them into a new country. With the assistance of their co-ethnics, the newly arrived immigrants will be able to adjust to the host country quickly. Some Chinatowns specifically functions as agents of acculturation. They educate and introduce the immigrants to the host society. They have newcomer clubs, immigrant employment assistance, language training, real estate services and other agencies set up with funding from the community or the larger society to help the new arrivals (Wong 1982, 1998). Some Chinatowns are manpower centers which provide employments in Chinese restaurants throughout the city (Wong 1988). Some are intended to be wholesale or distributions centers as suggested by Santos, Chuang and Trémon in this volume. Some are rallying points for native politicians (Wong 1998, Ling in this volume); they are places where the second-generation Chinese return to gain political supports to harvest their political capital. Some Chinatowns are agents of cultural maintenance (Tan in this volume). They are the cultural heritages centers with Chinese schools and organizers of Chinese festivals and cultural events in the community. Chinatowns could also be the lifelines for the economic activities of the Chinese. In some countries, Chinese restaurants, gift shops, grocery stores and other tourist-oriented stores support the Chinese ethnic economy. Thus, many economic, social and cultural functions are performed by Chinatowns. The differences among them vary depending on locality. Some emphasize the *huaren sanguan* 华人三馆 (three businesses of the Chinese: restaurant, garment factory and laundry) like those in New York’s Chinatown in the pre-1980 era (Wong 1988). Havana’s Chinatown is to be reconstructed to be a “bridge” between China and Cuba (Hearn in this volume).

## Chinatowns and the Larger Societies

The authors also showed that the paths of evolutionary developments of Chinatowns vary due to historical and local factors as well as social conditions of the larger societies. In essence, the most important causative factors affecting the formation of Chinatowns do emanate from outside of the community. The larger/host societies and the global economic forces play a pivotal role in shaping the development of the various Chinatowns.

The Nagasaki Chinatown in the 17th century, for example, was the oldest in Japan. It was established during Tokugawa period. The Tokugawa set limits on copper exports and restricted the movement of the Chinese (Pan 1998). Starting from 1688, the Chinese were allowed to settle only in a confined area. It was a kind of ghetto settlement of 31,025 square meters (Pan 1998). This restriction was lifted only at the beginning of the 19th century. The formation of the Chinese settlement, from the very beginning, was related to international trade and the policy of the Tokugawa government (Wong 1999). However, Nagasaki's Chinatown is much less popular with tourism today and is smaller than the Chinatowns of Kobe and Yokohama.

The history of establishments of the Chinatowns of Kobe and Yokohama was similar to that of Nagasaki. They were the results of treaties signed between Japan and the foreign powers (Wong 1999). As early as 1858, there were Chinese people working as sailors, middlemen and interpreters for European foreigners. Yokohama's and Kobe's Chinatowns were founded in 1873 under the Sino-Japanese Friendship Agreement as a commercial area (Ohashi 1993, Wong 1999).

Yokohama's Chinatown is the largest one in Japan with 260 restaurants and 500 shops attracting some 12 million visitors a year (Pan 1998; Wong 1999, Wong's fieldwork 1995, 2006).

Yokohama has Japan's first over-all Chinese organization, the Chinese *huiguan*, established in 1873 (Chen 2002). The residents were mostly from Guangdong and Fujian. The community first Chinese School had a close tie with Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolution. The Yokoma's Chinatown was politicized by political events in China. There were anti-Manchu faction vs the Emperor Protection faction in late 1800s and early 1900s. Yokohama's Chinese community today has two Chinese schools. One is sympathetic to PRC and the other is pro ROC. In recent years, the conflicts are minimized. For community events, the community agrees that they display neither the flags of PRC nor Taiwan (Chen 2002; Wong's fieldwork 1995, 2006). While Yokohama's Chinatown is known as Chukagai, the Kobe's Chinatown is known as Nankincho. Like Chukagai, the

Kobe Chinese community has similar kinds of immigrants from Guandong and Sanjian (三江) areas of China.

Today, Yokohama's and Kobe's Chinatowns are developed into important tourist centers with the help of the larger society (Ohashi 1993). Both Chinatowns developments were accomplished in recently years with the support of the larger society (Ohashi 1993). The Yokohama Chukagai (Chinatown) Development Association was formed in 1971. Under the plan developed in 1971, Japanese and Western businesses were welcomed into Chinatown area. The Development Association has both Chinese and Japanese members and have close ties with the Yokohama City Government which helped promote tourism into the community. The city government of Yokohama also promotes the celebration of the Chinese New Year in Chinatown. It has become now one of the most popular tourist spots for the Japanese. Many high school graduates make their graduation trips to Chinatown every year. International and local tourists also like to visit the community (Wong's fieldwork 1996, 2006).

Kobe's Chinatown also got its support from their Japanese neighbors. In 1977 the Nankincho Merchant's Association was formed. After 1981's Nankincho Restoration Plan was implemented, the Chinatown area of Kobe was beautified. A Sakura gate was installed and a plaza was constructed. Similarly, Kobe's Nankincho Merchants' Association also helped the promotion of tourism and the celebration of the "Spring Festival". The Merchants Association has both Chinese and Japanese members and the development of Nankincho benefits both the Japanese and the Chinese merchants in the area (Wong's fieldwork 1998, 2006).

The revitalization projects in both the Chinatowns in Kobe and Yokohama attracted many second and third generation Chinese to participate in Chinese cultural projects such as Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, dragon monuments, New Year festival, Kanteimyo construction activities. These symbols of ethnicity were originally used for re-development of the community but have become important vehicles for cultural renewal and the tracing of roots. Chinese culture classes, calligraphy, folk music, *qigong* classes were also developed for both the insiders as well as the tourists. Paradoxically, the economic revitalization projects in Kobe and Yokohama have turned out to be projects of social construction and the reconstruction of ethnic culture in Japan (Ohashi 1993). In many ways, it is a cultural citizenship project. The Chinese become more accepted through these collaborative activities with their Japanese neighbors. The latter assist the Chinese to gain political and economic support from the local governments of Kobe and Yokohama. Thus, Chinatowns in Japan were developed under the reinforcement and constraints of the government policies and the assistance of the general public of the larger society. The three



Chinatowns mentioned above are not strictly segregated communities. Some Chinese live there some do not. In the Chinatowns, there are also Japanese shops. From my fieldwork in Kobe and Yokohama, I found only provincial associations like Guangdong Association, Sanjian Association. Family (or clan) associations were not visible. Both Chinatowns survive mainly on tourism and are run like theme-parks where Japanese high schools graduates tend to have their graduation picnics.

The origin of Manila's Chinatown was traceable to the colonial policy of the Spaniards in the Philippines. The Philippine Chinese, in fact, is a perfect example on how public policies could affect the social formation and identity of an ethnic group.

In 1571, Spanish colonizers occupied Manila area and organized Manila into a city and the capital of the Philippines (Alip 1959). The Spanish colonizers needed the Chinese as laborers, artisans and traders. Further, the Spanish merchant class began utilizing the Chinese traders for their commercial enterprises. Encouraged by the fair treatment of the Spanish government and pressed by the economic difficulties at home, the Chinese flocked to the Philippines. During the early years of the Spanish era, the Chinese were allowed to settle freely in Manila and its suburbs (Alip 1959). The Chinese set up bakeries, foundries, repair shops, laundry houses and tailoring stores. They were also traders and suppliers for the Spaniards. In 1584, in order to control the Chinese, the Spanish colonizers set up the first Chinese quarters, *parian*, in Manila (Liao 1964). It is a buffer zone as well between the Spaniards and the natives. All the Chinese were required to live in the *Parian* (settlement) which was ruled by a Spanish *alcademayer* (Blair et al. in Liao 1964:23). This was the beginning of the Chinatown in Manila and was also the start of antagonism between the Chinese, the Spaniards and the Filipinos. Thus, colonial power and the larger society have established, shaped and conditioned some Chinatowns.

Western power and colonial expansions of Europeans similarly are responsible for the development Chinatowns in the Americas and Europe. Chinatowns in Lima, Havana and other parts of Latin America are related to the colonial activities of the Spaniards. They were recruited to work in plantations, mines and the railroad. In North America, similarly, colonial expansions brought many Chinese laborers to build the railroads, exploit the gold mines and the clearing of agricultural lands. They later had to move into areas to develop Chinatowns in 1830s to develop their economic niches and to organize mutual help associations and protective societies to fight racism for their survival in the New World as they experienced intense discriminations in the larger society (Wong 1978, 1982, 1998). After the completion of the Central Pacific railway and the closing of the mining companies, the Chinese in the U.S. had to go to