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Introduction Imagining Chinatown

It is a little before 9:00 A.M. on a summer morning in July 2009, and Chinatown is just waking up. As I walk up Ninth Street toward Vine, I see men unloading a large whole pig from a nondescript white delivery truck through the front door of a small storefront. Looking ahead, I see a busy highway and, farther off, a massive rusting industrial structure. Ninth Street does not continue over Vine Street, so I move over to Tenth Street via Spring, a quiet side street populated by antebellum row houses and a blond brick church with a red tile roof, the Chinese Christian Church and Center (CCC&C). Over on Tenth Street, storeowners are setting up umbrellas and crates of fruits and vegetables on the sidewalk. Elderly men and women walk slowly down the street, carrying bags of groceries, their backs bowed from a lifetime of labor. Many stop every five minutes or so to greet and talk animatedly with others they know. Unceasing traffic clatters down Tenth Street, dodging potholes and construction cones. I see one little boy, about six years old, supporting the arm of his elderly grandfather. Most of the shops and restaurants are closed, the neon lights dimmed until lunchtime. In one vacant storefront hangs a poster depicting five Chinese boys in baseball uniforms, standing in front of a bulldozer. “Looking Back,” its text asserts. In the window of the On Lok Social Service Center, a yellow photocopied flyer declares, “Bad for our City, Bad for Chinatown. No Casino.”

Philadelphia’s Chinatown is a neighborhood where elderly men gather in cafés every morning and afternoon to drink tea and share news and stories; where teenagers play basketball on the church playground after school or congregate in bakeries to drink bubble tea and huddle over each other’s cell-phone screens; where senior residents can walk down any street and point to the second-story rooms where they were born; and where second- and third-

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generation Chinese Americans who live in the suburbs commute in on weekends to maintain their grandparents' shops, attend church, visit the family association, or take their children to kung-fu class. This is the Chinatown of families, children, elders, churches, and kinship associations, and it is a Chinatown that almost ceased to exist. That it still does exist is the story of this book.

Philadelphia's Chinatown has a lot in common with other Chinatowns around the United States. It is a marginalized community born historically of intense segregation that was viewed for more than a century by outsiders through alternate lenses of exotic spectacle and impure danger. It is a transnational community that has incorporated successive waves of increasingly diverse new immigrants. Philadelphia's Chinatown is much smaller than the well-known Chinatowns of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; it is even smaller than Chicago's or Boston's. But at a time when many smaller Chinatowns disappeared or became attenuated into touristy shopping districts, Philadelphia's Chinatown survived and remained a community where families live, raise children, go to church, care for the elderly, play basketball, and, of course, do business.

In 1945, this community was on the brink of major change. Five years earlier, a new Chinese Catholic mission church—Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church and School—had been dedicated at the corner of Tenth and Vine Streets. It was not the first mission to be located in this neighborhood, but it was the first Catholic Church for Chinese in the Western Hemisphere, and the first school in Chinatown. As World War II ended and immigration restrictions were lifted, servicemen and others brought wives from China, and more families settled in Philadelphia's Chinatown. This church and the CCC&C, founded in 1941 on the other side of Vine Street, at Tenth and Race Streets, became central sites of activity and identity for a new generation of Chinese Americans whose youth was shaped by Chinatown and who in turn would grow to shape the neighborhood's future.

That same year, 1945, Philadelphia's city planners studied surveys of traffic patterns and made elaborate models of a newly imagined urban landscape. Discussing theories and plans for the postwar city, they measured travel times across the city, calculated traffic-light timings, and dreamed of a rational metropolis encircled and crosscut by several major expressways that would enable efficient movement in, through, and out of the city. They conjured high rises, shopping malls, and historic districts that would draw visitors to downtown. Two years later, the planners offered their ideas to the public in the Better Philadelphia Exhibition, displayed at Gimbel's department store just a few blocks from Chinatown. Offering a vision of the city in twenty-five years, the exhibit displayed a model of Center City that flipped over to show the city in 1982. Included were many projects that eventually became part of the Planning Commission's 1960 master plan for the city: an expressway loop around the city, a national park

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surrounding Independence Hall, a retail project joined to an underground train station (Market East), and the development of the Far Northeast.¹ The first three of these four projects would directly affect Chinatown in the coming decades. One of the proposed expressways, along Vine Street, would entail the destruction or relocation of the recently erected Catholic Church in Chinatown—Holy Redeemer—a fact that escaped notice for several decades, or if it was noticed, was not deemed important. After all, the church was located right next to Skid Row, and no one really lived there—except the Chinese.

Chinatown's inconvenient location in Philadelphia's Center City was typical. Most Chinatowns in North America were located near the old downtowns of cities, often near the docks (as so many Chinese were early on involved in shipping) or on the outskirts of central commercial districts. In Philadelphia, this area was northwest of the warehouse district abutting Market and Chestnut Streets, an area dominated by working people's boardinghouses and some small-scale manufacturing, the backstage of Philadelphia's bustling commercial downtown. The earliest Chinese presence in the United States was the result of trade networks with China, supported by the demand for "fancy" Oriental and Chinese goods throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Eastern Chinatowns had their genesis in the displacement of Chinese Americans from the American West. The first Chinatowns in North America appeared in the nineteenth century in major cities along the west coast: San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, and Seattle. San Francisco and Seattle boasted the largest Chinese populations, in part because they were major points of entry for Chinese immigrants. Most nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants came from the province of Guangdong, particularly Canton (Guangzhou) in South China. Canton was a cosmopolitan port city heavily involved in trade with North America, including Philadelphia. Later, the discovery of gold in California led Chinese to try their luck in the minefields of "Gold Mountain" or take up business to provide support services in mining camps, such as domestic service, food service, and laundry—services traditionally provided by women, who were in short supply. By the 1860s, railroad work beckoned, and the Union Pacific Railroad actively recruited Chinese labor. Most were sojourners who never intended to permanently settle in the United States but rather make their fortune on "Gold Mountain" and then return to China.²

After the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, Chinese immigrants in western states experienced a violent backlash, known as the "Great Driving Out." Throughout the 1870s, violence and intimidation against Chinese laborers were commonplace in California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, and other western states. A labor-based movement emerged from the sandlots of San Francisco, led by rabble-rouser Dennis Kearney and rallied around the anti-Chinese cry, "The Chinese Must Go!"³ This persecution sent many Chinese laborers deeper into established western Chinatowns and east to such cities as New York, Chicago, Saint Louis, Boston, and Philadelphia,

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where they formed new Chinatowns.⁴ As sojourners, most Chinese had left their families in China, seeking their fortune as single men, although many were married in China. Settling in Chinatowns, they found employment and cultural refuge, often living in extended-kin arrangements and socially supported by many traditional associations.

The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 further isolated the Chinese and their Chinatown communities. With travel to and from China effectively ended except for merchants and others of substantial property, most Chinese men in America could not marry or rarely, if ever, see their wives and families in China. Chinatowns remained largely “bachelor” enclaves, and a hierarchy between merchants and laboring men solidified.⁵ The prevalence of men living as single in Chinatowns—although the product of American law—also contributed to the public perception of the Chinese as essentially and unrelentingly foreign. Unlike other immigrants of the period from Europe and the Middle East, the Chinese could never “become white,” and unlike African Americans, who were also segregated and viewed as racially inferior, they could never become American, since naturalization was denied them until 1943.⁶ Large-scale immigration from China and Asia would not be possible until after the passage of new immigration legislation in 1965. While second- and third-generation Chinese Americans took advantage of new opportunities in mainstream American society, Chinatown remained an important entry point and stepping-stone for new immigrants from China, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia.

Space

From its beginnings, Philadelphia’s Chinatown was both segregated space and immigrant sanctuary. Like other Chinatowns, it was formed from both necessity and desire, as Chinese men sought the safety of segregated space and the cultural and social comfort of their own people. At a time when a great wave of European immigrants found work in burgeoning manufacturing and other industries—when Philadelphia boasted of being “the Workshop of the World”—Chinese immigrants and migrants were restricted to domestic service, laundry work, and small commercial ventures, such as import/export gift shops, groceries, and later restaurants.⁷ Likewise, they were largely restricted from living anywhere but their own shops (many laundrymen ate and slept in the backrooms of their laundries) or the boardinghouses of what became known as Chinatown.⁸

This kind of ethnic segregation was not uncommon in postbellum Philadelphia, which underwent dramatic economic and demographic change during this period, engendering an increasingly segmented and segregated urban landscape. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, white middle-class families flocked to new streetcar suburbs, escaping the disor-

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der of the city center. New immigrant neighborhoods emerged in areas just outside Center City. In South Philadelphia, long home to concentrations of African Americans and Irish immigrants, Italians and Eastern European Jews established enclaves along South Ninth and Fourth Streets, respectively. Eastern Europeans and other immigrants who clustered around opportunities for factory work in a variety of industries settled neighborhoods to the immediate northeast, such as Kensington, Bridesburg, and Fishtown. But in the case of the Chinese, boundaries were even less fluid; violence and harassment kept them in their segregated place.⁹

Situated within a larger urban landscape of power, Chinatowns are often as much about the attitudes and behaviors of non-Chinese as they are about Chinese cultural or social needs. The very idea of Chinatown is a predominantly white idea, a projection of the Western imaginary that produces larger relationships between place, race, and power, in which space embodies a larger racial ideology.¹⁰ Chinatown is Chinatown not only because Chinese, whether by desire or under duress, live there; Chinatown is also Chinatown because of discriminatory racial attitudes toward the Chinese and the need to distance Chinese Americans as exotic and essentially non-American. This distancing shaped not only the need for Chinatowns as separate spaces but also outsiders' perceptions of the ways Chinese Americans created and inhabited those spaces. Seeing the space of Chinatown as exotic, sinful, and mysterious was an articulation of Orientalism. In Orientalist discourse, the "East" exists for and in relation to the West as an inferior mirror image that is separate, backward, sensual, passive, deviant, often coded feminine, and invariably mute. It is constituted in part by the production of knowledge about the East, what are really the "ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies" about a "region of the world called the Orient," an "imaginative geography." Categories of social, cultural, and scientific knowledge, implemented through the state, gave this imaginative geography a cognitive and material reality through the production of space. To this extent, Chinatowns were and are a racial category embodied by landscape.¹¹ Chinatowns were also perceived in the early twentieth century as mysterious and dangerous spaces where non-Chinese could consume inexpensive cuisine or exotic cultural displays while thrilling to the presumed presence of white slavery, tong violence, gambling, and drug use. In this way, Chinatowns have something in common with Harlem of the same period, as a space for the consumption of transgressive jazz culture and the display of black bodies. So too did non-Chinese consumers enter Chinatowns with the expectation of license and exotic spectacle.¹² Embodied in its name, Chinatown was constructed as a separate entity within the city, where one would travel to experience the customs of a distant land.

Chinatowns are sometimes referred to as "gilded ghettos," ethnic neighborhoods that sport the colorful flavor of a Little Italy yet are tightly bounded by the larger spatial control of an African American ghetto.¹³ While all immi-

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grant and ethnic neighborhoods manifest this dynamic of vibrancy and constraint to some extent, it is much more insidious for communities of color, which historically have been both contained and consumed by the larger society that marginalizes them. Like other ethnic neighborhoods, Chinatowns function as immigrant enclaves, offering culturally specific businesses and institutions that serve the immediate community, particularly new immigrants, and constitute local microeconomies. And while Chinatowns historically were economically relatively self-sufficient, many of their residents have been poor, and the neighborhoods neglected by city services.¹⁴ These neighborhoods, vibrant but marginalized, were often vulnerable and consistently threatened by displacement or encroachment by other urban priorities.

Beyond the racial constructions, Chinatowns have served different functions over time and been characterized by scholars of Asian immigration in a variety of ways. Chinatowns have been conceptualized as bachelor societies marked by a hierarchy between merchants and workers, as urban villages, gilded ghettos, ethnic enclaves, and even festival marketplaces.¹⁵ Originally places of safety and cultural specificity, Chinatowns were segregated enclaves that commercially connected to a wider society but remained socially and culturally apart. After World War II, with changing immigration and urban redevelopment (as well as suburbanization), Chinatowns became less central to Asian immigrant life but remained important cultural and community centers. During this period, many Chinatowns were also threatened by twentieth-century urban-renewal plans; some disappeared, were relocated, or became attenuated.

More recently, changing trends in Asian immigration have complicated spatial expressions of Chinatowns, and the functions and identities of Chinatowns have changed again. While historically most Chinatown residents originated from Guangzhou in South China, subsequent second and third waves of immigration have arrived from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and more recently Fujian province in China. Increasingly Mandarin, not Cantonese, is the language of Chinatowns. In addition, Chinatowns have become increasingly pan-Asian, due in part to the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia in the 1980s (many of them ethnic Chinese), groups that formed their own enclaves as well as diversified Chinatowns' geographies, primarily through commercial ventures. In addition to Vietnamese, Philadelphia's Chinatown also includes Malaysian, Indonesian, Burmese, Japanese, and Korean businesses.¹⁶ Most new Chinese and Asian immigrants live or work outside Chinatown; since 1965, a significant percentage of these immigrants have been professionals who settle directly in the suburbs, where housing and jobs are more accessible. Philadelphia's Chinatown also has important ties to New York City.

Increasingly, most Chinatowns are linked across a larger geographic region to "satellite Chinatowns," or suburban concentrations of immigrant settlement.

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In New York, Flushing, Queens, and Sunset Park, Brooklyn, have emerged as secondary Chinatowns, as has Monterey Park in California.¹⁷ Today the touristic function of Chinatowns is heightened, and their roles as symbolic centers are increasingly significant. Chinatown is one node in a larger cultural diaspora, located within larger transnational economic resources and social networks, an organizing point for immigrant labor, a delivery site for cultural heritage, an asset for the globalized city.¹⁸ More common are Chinese or Asian clusters in suburban areas “ethnoburbs” that coexist with traditional inner-city enclaves. Such spaces exist as part of larger “ethno-spectrums” linking historic Chinatowns to a larger network of Asian settlement and commerce. In Philadelphia, potential ethnoburbs have emerged in Northeast Philadelphia and Montgomery County, where Asian immigrants have created small, enclave-type spaces in shopping centers and established local houses of worship and other spaces, while other community institutions, such as family and regional associations, have remained in Chinatown. None of these outlying areas in the Philadelphia area currently rival Chinatown, and many residents of these areas still maintain strong connections to Chinatown. Likewise, Philadelphia’s Chinatown retains the residential aspect of the residential/commercial mixed use that characterizes Chinatowns historically, remaining a living community despite its increased role as a symbolic cultural center.¹⁹ As sites within larger “ethno-spectrums,” historic Chinatowns are specific kinds of space and place. Some Chinatowns, such as London’s and or those in other European cities, have recently been developed or augmented to serve as global emblems and may or may not contain historic structures or be located in original areas of Chinese settlement. The older Chinatowns of North America are based in spatial templates and senses of place deeply conditioned by history. They are a specific kind of ethnoscape within the larger spatial spectrum of the Asian diaspora and remain salient as historic points of origin and symbols of Asian American struggle and survivance.²⁰

Place

Many historic Chinatowns today are hybrid spaces that balance multiple functions and remain relevant spaces for local and regional Chinese and Asian populations. In Philadelphia, Chinatown still functions as an immigrant entry point where new arrivals can secure a foothold through language access and employment opportunities, even if they live elsewhere in the city or region (and some new immigrants still live in Chinatown). Chinatown also functions within a larger regional geography as an important site of historical and cultural point of origin. Many family and other traditional associations are located in Chinatown, as are ethnic-specific cultural resources, such as traditional-medicine practitioners, martial-arts schools, language classes, senior centers, and banquet facilities. Festivals and other cultural events are held in Chinatown, which is a

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spatial repository of memory, both individual and collective. Across the generations, Chinatown is a historical point of origin, a place of cultural expression, and a “cultural home space” where many claim actual or fictive roots. This home space is characterized by a specific sense of place; a site of ethnic self-expression in living arrangements, social space, cultural events, and spiritual life; a distinct cultural, economic, and social environment, where “a sense of ethnic attachment to place based on historical, actual and/or perceived experience” drives claims to urban space and racial justice.²¹

The creation of this place, like Chinese American identity and ethnicity, was not a monolithic process, but rather the result of a dynamic interplay between attribution from without and self-representation from within, an entity interactively co-constituted by Chinese and non-Chinese Philadelphians. Its boundaries were both physical/spatial as well as cultural/social, dual and overlapping, creating and defending an ethnic urban territory.²² Such territory could be called an “ethnoscape,” a term describing neighborhood landscapes that emerge in globalized cities as a dimension of global cultural flows.²³ Ethnoscapes represent the ways in which diasporic communities free themselves from localizations, from place-bounded restraints in commercial and cultural activities. Yet ethnoscapes remain localized in the city of resettlement and are still highly significant as “focal points of economy, culture, and heritage.”²⁴ As such they are sites of spectacle, objectified by visitors in search of the exotic or the “authentic,” as well sites of identity and meaning for resident ethnic groups.²⁵

Chinatown’s sense of place, embodied in part by the ethnoscape, was historically conditioned by prior spatial use and earlier constructions of Chinese culture and identity, often within a discourse of Orientalism. Chinese in early-twentieth-century Philadelphia inscribed a sense of identity on the existing urban landscape, with specialized shops, services, and sites (such as houses of worship and family association halls); foreign-language signage; ancient decorative elements; and other material markers of culture.²⁶ Its residents also altered that landscape architecturally, imbuing the built environment with Asian architectural features, particularly along façades, upper stories, and rooflines of turn-of-the century buildings. Many of these architectural features represented or marked the unique ways in which Chinese immigrants used space, devoting the upper stories of commercial buildings to residential and community purposes, a mixed-use strategy that characterizes Chinatown to this day. Most of these new architectural features also referenced, at least nominally, the stylistic template established by San Francisco’s Chinatown, particularly after the 1906 earthquake, when Chinatown merchants commissioned a renewed landscape and aesthetic for Chinatown that Orientalized the urban environment through color schemes, eaved pagoda-style lines, tiled roofs, lanterns, and other imagined markers of Chinese identity. These Oriental features celebrated traditional Chinese art and culture on the one hand but

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also replicated the terms of a larger cultural discourse of Chinese racial and cultural divergence, embodied by and in space.²⁷

This transformation of the landscape also embodied a sense of place in the sense of the contemporary or historic rights of persons to own a piece of land or occupy a social world, the creation of a territory through culturally and socially meaningful interventions in the urban landscape.²⁸ This sense of place as territory took on new meaning in Chinatown in the second half of the twentieth century, as new waves of immigration transformed a blighted area of the city into a community made meaningful by the presence of churches and family businesses alongside traditional Chinese institutions, and subsequent immigration dispersed into suburban clusters and satellite Chinatowns. Despite the challenges of life in this neighborhood, families made lives and memories in Chinatown. For the Chinese American youth who grew up there during the 1940s–1970s, the neighborhood was and is a powerful site of attachment and place of memory.²⁹

Writ large, these attachments constitute a memoryscape, in which collective or individual associations shape and are shaped by the landscape and constitute place as the embodiment of memory. Such memoryscapes function to locate the self in a sense of identity tied to where one comes from, of a history somewhere, promoting a sense of belonging and thus a key component of community building and of history.³⁰ They are also spaces in which one can be recognized, as Debbie Wei's son reflects; he likes to buy candy in Chinatown at a particular shop, because the shopkeeper there "knows my Chinese name."³¹ As a product of history, memoryscapes also provide powerful counternarratives of the past or resources for resistance and contestation over the use and meaning of space.³² Ethnic or minority memoryscapes may become zones of conflict or construct and maintain "counterspaces" of cultural autonomy or empowerment. They are also often vulnerable to erasure or truncation, particularly in ever-changing urban environments.³³ They may constitute "place-based collective-action frames," catalyzing activism based on an idea of a neighborhood and the material experiences of that place.³⁴ All these senses of place—attachment, memoryscape, territory, action frame—catalyzed the movement to "Save Chinatown" in the 1960s and 1970s, when urban-renewal projects threatened Philadelphia's Chinatown's survival.

Ethnoscapes and their creators have played an important role in revitalizing urban spaces as well as resisting displacement by larger urban-renewal entities. Yet immigrant and ethnic communities are largely missing from existing historical narratives of urban renewal in the United States, which tend to focus on larger structural changes within cities and their effects across a black/white racial binary. Thus while we know a good deal about ethnoscapes and the ways in which immigrants transform urban spaces in their neighborhoods, this transformation is rarely situated within larger changes in or discourses about the urban landscape.³⁵ The revitalizing efforts of immigrant and

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ethnic populations in blighted neighborhoods are likewise largely unexplored. Ethnic and immigrant communities were also vulnerable as communities of color, often displaced or left as vestiges of themselves after suburbanization. Asians in particular are left out of this history, even though most Chinatowns and other Asian enclaves across the country felt the negative impacts of urban renewal, and many resisted through activism and protest. Their histories of activism and community rebuilding provide an important counternarrative to larger stories of urban progress or decline.³⁶

Struggle

Activism in the “Save Chinatown” movement in Philadelphia emerged specifically from the struggle against urban redevelopment, which led to mass demolitions on the eastern, southern, and northern boundaries of Chinatown at a time when the area was in the midst of a growth period. This struggle against urban redevelopment played out in other cities as well, born of larger efforts to contend with a postwar “urban crisis” characterized by a decline in industry and manufacturing, disinvestment, white flight, and failed urban-renewal and public-housing initiatives. In other areas of the country, minority neighborhoods were razed and their resident populations warehoused in public housing, fueling gentrification and further urban problems.³⁷ In Philadelphia, neighborhoods in North Philadelphia that had been manufacturing centers declined as factories closed. Decaying housing stock, abandoned factory buildings, and vacant warehouses came to characterize this neighborhood landscape. As former immigrant residents relocated to suburban areas and the Greater Northeast, the inner ring of neighborhoods around Center City became almost entirely black and Latino. Local industries collapsed, making these residents “displaced labor migrants” who occupied areas now stigmatized as blighted.³⁸ Some of these areas, referred to as “gray areas” by the city, were the focus of initial renewal efforts by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority in the 1950s, before the redevelopment of downtown took center stage. Many others were and remain neglected. This struggle was similar to those of other neighborhoods that resisted urban-renewal projects during this period, fighting back against slum clearance, expressways, housing, gentrification, and displacement due to the development of downtown attractions.³⁹ Most resistance in Philadelphia, however, was conducted by middle-class whites, sometimes in alliance with African Americans. In this respect, both Chinatown’s central location and its ethnic composition were unique, as was its history and economic life.⁴⁰

Lacking any industrial base in a local microeconomy that was largely based in service and retail (with the exception of small-scale garment manufacturing in the 1980s–1990s and current wholesale provision to the restaurant industry), Chinatown escaped the direct experience of deindustrialization and econom-

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ic dislocation that reshaped so many other neighborhoods in the city in the 1950s–1980s. At a time when urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia experienced rapid racial and ethnic change, and the city an overall population loss, Chinatown remained stable and expanded through new waves of immigration, initially from Hong Kong, later from Vietnam and other parts of China and Asia. Unable to secure sufficient housing in Chinatown and enjoying a new period of opportunity after World War II, more Chinese and other Asians settled in the suburbs, a trend that diluted Chinatown's resident population but ultimately strengthened its position as a symbolic center for Asians in the region.

As redevelopment efforts in Philadelphia turned to Center City, Chinatown's location adjacent to this central business district became a liability. Numerous renewal projects (Independence Mall, a commuter rail station and tunnel, a downtown mall, and a crosstown expressway) threatened Chinatown's housing and community institutions with demolition or relocation. These projects were part of a postindustrial move to make over the spaces of the city to improve Philadelphia's "symbolic economy," remaking the urban landscape into a "marketable commodity destination for tourism, consumerism, and resettlement."⁴¹ The campaign to "Save Chinatown," rooted in a second generation's attachment to the neighborhood and the radicalism of a new Asian American movement, worked in coalition with the first-generation leaders of traditional family and other associations to challenge these projects, force the city's hand on the redevelopment of Chinatown, and create a new, more inclusive community leadership structure. The community's efforts to save and renew itself through urban planning, territorial claims, and culturally specific rebuilding led to Chinatown's growth and its continued ability to serve as a reception point for subsequent waves of new immigration.

The story of the "Save Chinatown" movement's struggle to defend and preserve the neighborhood remains a central narrative in the collective memory of this community. It is commemorated on local murals, invoked when new threats to the community emerge, referenced at community events, and featured on local tours of the neighborhood. And the struggle goes on, as Chinatown in the contemporary era continues its vigilance regarding the retention of cultural specificity, room to grow and expand on its own terms, and the preservation of its past. More than anything, it still struggles for recognition of its existence as a "living community," a neighborhood for families and new immigrants "beyond the restaurants."

Spatial Justice for Chinatown: Enduring Legacies and Dilemmas

Chinatown's ability to remain a living community is still precarious, even though Chinatowns in general retain an important place within globalized

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city landscapes. As recent studies of transnational Chinatowns have pointed out, Chinatowns are increasingly global emblems, urban markers in an age of interplace competition between cities, part of the “standard inventory” of urban attractions. Chinatown, as a themed space, is a sign of Philadelphia’s globalized identity, a marker of its status as a destination city and a player in global trade and communications networks. Chinatown functions here as an emblem, a recognizable landscape of “Chinatown-ness,” a “projection surface” for cultural performances aimed at outside consumption.⁴² This function perpetuates an old story of strategic self-commodification and self-Orientalization that dates back to Chinatown’s origins.

Chinatowns are important because they were the first “ethnic neighborhoods” in American culture—that is, the first urban landscapes to be identified and commodified as ethnic—and a prototype for later ethnic enclaves and today’s destination neighborhoods. Histories of Chinatowns allow us to chart the emergence of such areas and their place within larger histories of urban development. Like other Chinatowns across North America, Philadelphia’s Chinatown was settled and created by a demonized immigrant group who occupied undesirable urban space in the commercial margins of the inner city. Like other Chinatowns, Philadelphia’s consistently experienced stigmatization and encroachment. Like some Chinatowns and other Asian ethnic enclaves, Philadelphia’s resisted renewal and survived to reclaim space and place within the city. Others did not survive. Philadelphia’s Chinatown highlights the role of urban space as land in all its manifestations. It is commodified as real estate, its value subject to the demands of local, regional, and even global markets. It is territory, a space for expression, identity, and cultural inheritance. As a shared community resource, urban space is a foundation for collective place making and claims to justice. The struggles of Philadelphia’s Chinatown to remain a living space remind us that place making, a popular idea today in public arts and urban renewal, is only partially about themed space and landscape; that it is deeply shaped by time, social interaction, identity, experience, and power; that it is the embodiment of historical legacies and personal/collective memories; and that not all places are made or created equal.⁴³ Thus we might be as fruitfully concerned with “place keeping” as “place making.” Place keeping acknowledges the necessity of struggle for place as a “consequential geography” shaped by historical legacies, and that the “right to the city” is complemented by a “right to difference.” Both “rights” are a foundation for larger spatial justice.⁴⁴

On today’s cultural landscape of multiculturalism and consumption-driven urban development, we might take for granted the presence of ethnically identifiable areas to go and eat, shop, and experience “difference.” The creation of these areas is now part of established neoliberal strategies for neighborhood renewal (often attended by gentrification), such as branding, heritage tourism, or historic preservation.⁴⁵ These strategies, inflected by multiculturalism,

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necessitate the commodification of Chinatown as a product for outside consumption. For communities of color like Chinatown, this commodification is located within a much deeper history of objectification and risks solidifying, not undoing, racial preconceptions as well as effacing real socioeconomic inequalities.⁴⁶ The community's visible, racialized difference can perpetuate a marginalization that works against the aims of community developers and activists to claim rights and resources for Chinatown as just another Philly neighborhood. What spatial justice looks like in this context is complicated and fraught with dilemmas.

Geospatial racialization made Philadelphia's Chinatown vulnerable to displacement in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet packaged as an ethnic image, it was also the means of Chinatown's renewal and redevelopment in the 1980s and beyond. Being an entry point for new immigrants renews its cultural connections to China and Asia and allows the neighborhood to continue as a center for a larger, geographically dispersed cultural community as well as an even larger transnational Chinese diaspora.⁴⁷ At the same time, Chinatown's position locally as an immigrant neighborhood, underserved and underrepresented within the larger power dynamics of the city and serving working people's needs, makes creating the resources needed for the non-destination aspects of the neighborhood challenging. Low- or mixed-income housing for working immigrants, for example, is often challenged as fiscally unfeasible and at odds with image making, place marketing, and transnational commerce. In Philadelphia's Chinatown, place making, and community development have gone hand in hand with activism for a significant part of its history. Chinatown is thus consistently under threat, its everyday living space and authentic sense of place in need of vigilant protection in a quest for spatial justice.

Chinatown's development was shaped from the beginning by the needs of its largely working-class residents and by the expectations of outside consumers in productive, sometimes contested, dialogue with one another. Born of segregation and continually reliant on ethnic spectacle and struggle for its survival, since the early twentieth century, this place has emerged from a series of tensions between neighborhood life/ethnic representation, inside/outside, past/present, and themed space/lived reality, tensions that embody the neighborhood's multiple existences as an intergenerational family community, immigrant entry point, cultural center, historic touchstone, globalized urban marker, and tourist destination. They also embody the instability of the larger racial categories that define Chinatown, revealing the hybrid and strategic ways in which Chinatown's denizens negotiate their identities, represent their history, and create their community. Like other immigrant and ethnic communities, Chinatowns are agents of urban renewal, historically occupying and rejuvenating urban spaces, infusing capital into blighted areas, and serving as destinations within an urban-heritage tourism market. Their histories and contemporary realities yield insights into the precarious

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and multifaceted effects of neoliberal urban development, the now-ubiquitous practices of spatial theming and branding, place marketing, and other consumption-driven development strategies that constitute many urban-renewal movements today.

Tracing the beginnings of Philadelphia's Chinatown in the late nineteenth century as a refuge for Chinese laborers and merchants, through the organizing activities of the community during the postwar period, to Chinatown's relationship to urban renewal today, this book outlines the varied spatial inscriptions of identity, memory, struggle, and transformation in Chinatown. Chapters 1 and 2 describe how immigrants claimed space and created a place called Chinatown that was home to successive generations of Chinese Americans. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the ways community members, driven by a sense of attachment to place and sense of social justice, mounted challenges to urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. These challenges were balanced with the strategic redevelopment of the neighborhood along clear ethnic lines, creating a key component of the contemporary Chinatown landscape. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the legacies of the community's resistance to and engagement with urban renewal, outlining continuing struggles and the ways in which the American-born and immigrant Chinese, other Asians, and others who live in, work in, or advocate for Philadelphia's Chinatown understand and work to preserve a sense of place that is part ethnic expression, part Western imaginary, part memoryscape, and, above all, lived space.