Towards a **Greener Chinatown**

Re-Visioning a Culturally-Responsive and Inclusive Public Space System in Boston’s Chinatown

A Thesis

submitted by

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Abstract

Public spaces are of great significance in densely urbanized areas for their environmental and social benefits to the communities. Throughout Boston’s Chinatown’s history, the neighborhood strove to preserve its historic landscape and improve its quality of life. But development encroachment from adjacent areas and nearby downtown has resulted in a severe lack of good public spaces to satisfy the needs – either environmental, social, or cultural – of its residents and visitors. This thesis aims to propose a redesign framework that would reconfigure Chinatown’s public space system so that it responds to the rich cultural and historic heritage of the community, interacts inclusively with a diverse population, and promotes sustainability along multiple dimensions.

Existing public spaces were reviewed and in-depth public outreach was conducted. A set of guiding principles was established to help develop a comprehensive redesign framework. Sites were selected to illustrate how the redesign framework could be applied, and specific design scenarios were visualized. Recommendations on funding, community collaboration, and future planning effort are provided.
This research project would not have been possible without the support of many people. The author wishes to express deepest gratitude to the members of her thesis committee, advisor Prof. Julian Agyeman whose extensive knowledge in the field and scholarly attitudes have greatly enlightened and encouraged the author, and reader Ms. Christine Cousineau who diligently supported this thesis research in her uniquely exquisite and knowledgeable manner. Without them, this study would not have been successful. The author also wishes to extend her appreciations to her academic advisor, Dr. Justin Hollander who was abundantly helpful and offered invaluable assistance, support and guidance to the author throughout the graduate program.

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Finally, the author wishes to express her love and gratitude to her beloved families, especially her husband Kangping Si, for all their understanding, support, and endless love and care, through the duration of her studies.
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Public spaces have always played a very important role in urbanized areas whether in terms of their environmental benefits of adjusting the urban microenvironment, or their social benefits of accommodating and incubating neighborhood activities. Generally, urban public spaces exist at different scales ranging from large scale citywide public parks, squares and plazas, to street scale pedestrian environments, to smaller scale community gardens and neighborhood everyday spaces. Each scale of urban public space contributes distinctively to the urban environment but they are also functionally interconnected.

Boston has a well maintained reputation for creating and preserving public space. However not every neighborhood in Boston is equally served by adequate and accessible open space, especially those downtown neighborhoods with higher building and population densities. As one of Boston’s oldest neighborhoods, Chinatown has gone through dramatic physical transformations over the last 50 years, generally in the form of increased density. While the original neighborhood fabric evolved with these changes, the quantity and quality of accessible public open space has decreased significantly. In addition, the cultural vitality of the Asian
community has been challenged in multiple ways as public spaces for social interaction and cultural identification have diminished in the neighborhood.

This thesis aims to explore and analyze the development of the public space system in Boston’s Chinatown and attempt to develop a redesign strategy for such a system from the perspective of promoting social and cultural sustainability in Asian communities. Established theories and practices of urban public open space system design and management, including classification, functionalities, and planning and design strategies, are reviewed systematically to serve as theoretical foundations for the research. Special attention is given to urban public space in downtown areas where higher building and population densities pose greater challenges to open space preservation and design.

The history of both Boston’s public open space preservation and development efforts, and Chinatown’s neighborhood transformation is reviewed to provide social and policy contexts for the research project. Extensive field reconnaissance has been carried out in a targeted research area within the neighborhood to portray how the present public spaces function in Chinatown. A considerable effort has been dedicated to solicit public input – in the form of interviews – in order to understand how the needs – whether physical, social, or cultural – of using public spaces vary
among diverse user groups and how to design a more responsive and inclusive system that readily accommodates these needs.

Based on comprehensive research and historical review, as well as site and user needs analysis, a redesign framework is proposed to help reconfigure the public space system and foster a culturally prosperous and functionally robust neighborhood center. The thesis concludes with recommendations on funding strategies, community collaborations necessary to realize the vision, and on future planning and design approaches that can truly create thriving minority communities.
CONCEPT: What is urban public open space?

Urban public open space can be defined as publicly accessible open space such as parks, plazas, streets, community gardens, and greenways (Carr et al. 1992, Lynch 1972). They are what the sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls “third places” — spaces that “host the regular, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg 1989, p.43).

A quick review of the history of public open space shows how its concept and connotation have evolved with the history of urbanization. Around 1900, city spaces functioned primarily as meeting place, marketplace and connection space. While dramatic improvement in the economic conditions of the city and its residents accelerated in the second part of the twentieth century, the importance of traditional public spaces was diminished with the development of three events. The surge in car ownership, starting in the 1920s, shifted the emphasis of the use of public right-of-ways from mainly pedestrian to mainly vehicular; the growth of suburbs privatized open space and took away from cities the constituencies and fiscal resources necessary
to support and maintain urban parks and public spaces; and cities cleared and redeveloped downtowns and neighborhoods, through urban renewal and highway construction, in an effort to attract reinvestment. By the early 1960s, public life had been more or less phased out of new city districts, while what remained of public life in older parts of the cities was being squeezed out of streets and squares by traffic and parking (Thompson and Travlou 2007).

In 1961, Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Like of Great American Cities* marked a turning point in the gradual erosion of the concept of public spaces and public life; since then, urban public space has been promoted by growing research and publications in a “Public Life oriented wave” of urban research and urban planning (Gehl 1987). Public spaces, rather than hosting essential work-related activities as around 1900, started to accommodate more optional leisure- and consumer-related activities, in the forms of both passive and active recreation. (see Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1 From necessary to optional activities: Development of public life 1880-2005](source: Open Space: People Space by Catharine Thompson and Penny Travlou, 2007.)
TYPOLOGY: What do urban public open spaces look like?

Generally, there are twelve types of urban open spaces (Francis 2003, Carr 1992), ranging from larger scale spaces like public parks, squares and plazas, and linear green spaces like recreational trails and paths, and urban wilderness and waterfronts, to smaller scale spaces like streets, community garden/park, and everyday neighborhood spaces (see Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type / Subtype</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Parks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Central Park</td>
<td>Publicly developed and managed open space as part of zoned open space system of city; open space of city-wide importance; often located near center of city; often larger than neighborhood park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Parks</td>
<td>Green parks with grass and trees located in downtown areas; can be traditional, historic parks or newly developed open spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commons</td>
<td>A large green area developed in older New England cities and towns; once pasture area for common use; now used for for leisure activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Park</td>
<td>Open space developed in residential environments; publicly developed and managed as part of the zoned open space of cities, or as part of new private residential development; may include playgrounds, sport facilities, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini/Vestpocket Park</td>
<td>Small urban park bounded by buildings; may include fountain or water feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Squares and Plazas</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Square</td>
<td>Square or plaza; often part of historic development of city center; may be formally planned or exist as a meeting places of streets; frequently publicly developed and managed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memorials</strong></td>
<td>Public place that memorializes people or events of local and national importance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Markets

**Farmers Markets**
Open space or streets used for Farmer’s Markets or Flea Markets; often temporary or occur only during certain times in existing space such as parks, downtown streets or parking lots.

### Streets

**Pedestrian Sidewalks**
Part of cities where people move on foot; most commonly along sidewalks and paths, planned or found which connect one destination with another.

**Pedestrian Mall**
Street closed to auto traffic; pedestrian amenities provided such as benches, planting; often located along main street in downtown area.

**Transit Mall**
Development of improved transit access to downtown areas; replacement of traditional pedestrian malls with bus and "light rail" malls.

**Traffic Restricted Streets**
Streets used as public open space; traffic and vehicle restriction can include pedestrian improvements and sidewalk widening, street tree planting.

**Town Trails**
Connect parts of cities through integrated urban trails; use of streets and open spaces planned as setting for environmental learning; some are designed and marked trails.

### Playgrounds

**Playground**
Play area located in neighborhood; frequently includes traditional play equipment such as slides and swings; sometimes include amenities for adults such as benches; can also include innovative designs such as Adventure Playgrounds.

**Schoolyard**
Schoolyard as play area; some developed as place for environmental learning or as community use spaces.

### Community Open Spaces

**Community Garden/Park**
Neighborhood spaces designed, developed or managed by local residents on vacant land; may include viewing gardens, play areas, and community gardens; often developed on private land; not officially viewed as part of open space system of cities; often vulnerable to displacement by other uses such as housing and commercial development.

### Greenways and Linear Parkways

Interconnected recreational and natural areas connected by pedestrian and bicycle paths.

### Urban Wilderness
Undeveloped or wild natural areas in or near cities. Often popular for hiking, dog walking and recreation. Frequently involves conflicts between users and ecological preservation/restoration.
### Atrium/Indoor/Marketplaces

**Atrium**
Interior private space developed as indoor atrium space; an indoor, lockable plaza or pedestrian street; counted by many cities as part of open space system; privately developed and managed as part of new office or commercial development.

**Marketplace/Downtown Shopping Center**
Interior, private shopping areas, usually freestanding or rehabilitation of older building(s); May include both interior and outdoor spaces; sometimes called “Festival marketplaces”; privately developed and managed as part of new office or commercial development.

### Found/Neighborhood Spaces

**Everyday Spaces**
Publicly accessible open places such as street corners, steps to buildings, etc., which people claim and use.

**Neighborhood Spaces**
Publicly accessible open space such as street corners, lots, etc. near where people live; can also be vacant or undeveloped space located in neighborhood including vacant lots and future building sites; often used by children and teenagers, and local residents.

### Waterfronts

**Waterfronts, Harbors, Beaches, Riverfronts, Piers, Lakefronts**
Open space along waterways in cities; increased public access to waterfront areas; development of waterfront parks.

Source: Urban open space: designing for user needs by Mark Francis, 2003
Table adapted from Carr et al. 1992.

Although the ownership of different types of urban open spaces varies from publicly or semi-publicly owned to privately owned, they are considered public open space as long as they are publicly accessible. For example, a public space can be owned by a national or local government body; or it is owned by a 'public' body (e.g. a not-for-profit organization) and held in trust for the public; or it is owned by a private individual or organization but made available for public use (e.g. privately owned gardens for public uses).
BENEFITS: Why do we need urban public open spaces?

It has been widely acknowledged that urban public space has multiple benefits for both individuals and the society as a whole. For downtown neighborhoods in particular, these benefits mainly cover the aspects of public health, economic revitalization, and improvement of social cohesion.

Strong evidence shows that when people have access to green space, they are more likely to engage in physical activities, which leads to improved health and quality of life (Giles-Corti 2002, Humpel 2002, CDC 2001). Beyond the recreational opportunities offered by urban public spaces like parks and gardens, a growing body of research shows that contact with the natural world improves psychological health as well (Kelley 2007, Kuo 2001, Strife 2009).

E.O. Wilson’s (1984, 1993) biophilia hypothesis, which suggests “the human urge to affiliate with other forms of life”, also indicates that natural elements are critical to people’s mental well-being. This concept, as later discussed by Farr (2008), has become one of the core elements in sustainable urbanism, emphasizing the indispensableness of open space and natural habitat in urban settings. Particularly for inner-city neighborhoods, vegetated public spaces have been proven by a number of studies to aid in the recovery from mental fatigue. Contact with nature in a variety of forms — wilderness areas, community parks, window views, and street-side plants — is

One of the economic benefits of urban public space, according to John L. Crompton’s extensive research on open space and the real estate market, is that parks and open spaces contributed to the value of neighboring properties (Crompton 2000). Also, improved public space helps revitalize the local economy by attracting and retaining businesses and residents. For downtown neighborhoods, high quality public space means an additional signature attraction and a prime marketing tool to attract tourists, conventions, and businesses. Organized events held in downtown public parks, such as art festivals, athletic events, food festivals, musical and theatrical events, often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities, filling hotel rooms and restaurants, bring customers to local stores, and help shape community identity and give residents pride of place (CDC 2001).

Public space, on the other hand, also functions as a community development tool. Pleasant open spaces make inner-city neighborhoods more livable; they offer recreational opportunities for at-risk youth, low-income families, and elderly people, and give them a better sense of community (Kuo 1998). In a beautiful, well-maintained place where they feel safe, people behave in a civil and pleasant way, and by extension they feel
pride in themselves and in their neighborhood and city (Miller 2009).

Research also shows that residents of neighborhoods with greenery in common spaces are more likely to enjoy stronger social ties than those who live surrounded by barren concrete. The presence of trees and grass supports common space use and informal social contact among neighbors (Kuo 1998). Specifically, outdoor spaces with trees in inner-city neighborhoods have been proven to stimulate a greater number of simultaneous users consisting of mixed-age groups (Miller 2009).

In addition, vegetation and neighborhood social ties are significantly related to residents’ sense of safety and adjustment (Kuo 1998). Vegetated public spaces in low income inner-city neighborhoods can inhibit crime through the following mechanisms: by increasing residents’ informal surveillance of neighborhood spaces, by increasing the implied surveillance of these spaces, and by mitigating residents’ mental fatigue, thereby reducing the psychological precursors to violence (Miller 2009).

Creating Successful Urban Public Spaces

Designing successful public open space requires an integrated approach where ecology, economics, technology, social and cultural concerns, and design are all combined in the making of such space (Francis 2003). However, a design will not be enough if the goal is to create a place that has both a strong sense of community and a comfortable image. It is equally important
to emphasize programming and the evolving nature of good public space (PPS 2000).

**Evaluating Urban Public Spaces**

Identifying issues and conflicts in public space is the first step to transform the place successfully. There are several methods that are most commonly used to evaluate urban public space, including archival research, observation, behavior mapping, interviews, environmental autobiography, mapping, participation, photography, aerial photo analysis, GIS and CAD (Austin 1985). Five indicators can be used to evaluate whether a public space is successful (Francis 2003), they include:

1) a high proportion of people in groups use space;

2) a higher than average proportion of women use the space, which indicates a higher level of perceived safety and comfort;

3) different age groups use the space, together and at different times of the day;

4) a range of varied activities occur simultaneously;

5) more activities of affection are present, such as smiling, kissing, embracing, and holding hands.

**Ingredients of Successful Urban Public Space**

William H. Whyte, widely recognized as the pioneer in analyzing the social uses of urban open spaces, has provided a set of useful guidelines for designing urban public space (Whyte 1980, 1988). He found that adequate
sitting space (people sit where there are places to sit), food, access to and relief from the sun, protection from wind, and the provision of water and vegetation are all essential ingredients for a space to be well used. He was also an early advocate for incorporating the street into the design of urban public space, arguing against creating separate spaces from the streets’ public environment.

Inherited from Whyte, the Project for Public Spaces (PPS, 2000) suggested four key qualities that make great public open spaces (also see Figure 2.2):

1) **Accessibility**: including factors such as linkages, walkability, connectedness, and convenience;

2) **Activities**: including uses, celebration, usefulness, and sustainability;

3) **Comfort**: including elements such as safety, good place to sit, attractiveness, and cleanliness;

4) **Sociability**: involving dimensions such as friendliness, interactivity, and diversity.

They believe the failure of public spaces mainly results from a lack of good places to sit and gathering points, poor entrances and visually inaccessible spaces, dysfunctional features, blank walls or dead zones around the edge of a place, and absence of activities and events.
Francis (2003) moved the research forward by comprehensively addressing the imperative of designing for user needs. He believes that providing for human use and enjoyment is a basic requirement in creating and maintaining successful public open spaces and he summarized six major categories of needs that should be considered in the design and management of public space (see Table 2). While user needs may differ somewhat by age, sex, and cultural differences, these are common to most people’s enjoyment of open space.
Henry Shaftoe (2008) on the other hand explored what makes a public space convivial through some unique perspectives. He believes that good public spaces should first be legible in terms of visual coherence, and that it should be designed “loosely” to allow change attuned to user needs. When designing public spaces, consideration should be given to psychological...
factors such as territoriality, distribution of observation locations, and innate curiosities, just as he noted that “a series of linked but not immediately visible spaces are designed to gradually reveal themselves as you move through them”.

Aesthetics counts as another indispensable ingredient for successful public space. While we tend to understand and interpret the city through the technical rather than the sensory, it is however the sensory from which we build feeling and emotion and through which our personal psychological landscapes are built. And these in turn determine how well or badly a place works and how it feels to its inhabitants and visitors (Landry 2006 p40). When attempting to improve the aesthetic qualities of public spaces, several principles should be considered, including movement through space (along with time of day and seasons), reassurance of safety through space layout design, as well as comfortable spaces to linger, sit, eat, drink and converse.

In addition, natural elements offer the opportunity for intense experiences of change or difference in nature – especially those that are particularly enjoyable – that may provoke shared expressions of delight and pleasure (Lennard and Lennard 1995 p39). This has to do with our evolutionary generality that we feel comforted by experiencing natural elements in the landscape (Guite et al 2006). As a pioneer in introducing sustainability and resilience into the design, planning, and operation of cities,
Sustainable Urbanism holds its uniquely comprehensive principles for public spaces design which highly emphasize the concept of Biophilia -- the name given to the human love of nature based on the intrinsic interdependence between humans and other living systems – and seeks to connect people to nature and natural systems, even in dense urban environments. Partly derived from the concept of Biophilia are the design criteria for walkable streets and networks – “walkable” defined both by the components that make up a place and by its overall look and feel -- which highlight street trees and landscaped greeneries along pedestrian routes. It also states that a proper outdoor public space within walking distance should serve as a recognizable heart of the community where the public feels welcome and encouraged to congregate both in an organized way and spontaneously for ceremonies or day-to-day casual encounters (Farr 2008).

Culture and Public Space

In addition to above discussed considerations in addressing general needs of users in public spaces, more attentions should be given to special usage preferences defined or influenced by cultural and racial differences. Various studies have indicated that people in different racial and cultural groups use park spaces very differently. For example, white Americans are observed to prefer camping or hiking in natural areas (Gobster 2002); they tend to engage in active sports individually when using parks while they are
more involved in active uses such as swimming and boating in water activities (Gobster 2002). Yet elderly white users are said to be more engaged in playing card or croquet games in small groups (Loukaitou-Sideris 1995).

When it comes to things they dislike in parks, white people strongly disfavor litter and vandalism, crowding, trail user conflicts, and the presence of homeless and strange people (Gobster 2002).

In contrast, African Americans are less likely to travel further and visit wildland parks and natural areas; instead they prefer more formal, well-maintained, and sports-oriented urban recreational spaces and are more likely involved in active uses such as ball playing or picnicking (Gobster 2002, Byrne and Wolch 2009). They are also reported to primarily visit parks in peer groups rather than individually and instead of adjusting the place for their needs, African American park users tend to use the park spaces the way they were (Loukaitou-Sideris 1995). Furthermore, recreational activities of black communities can be constrained by preserved or present discrimination (Floyd et al. 1993). They avoid certain public spaces or participating in certain kinds of activities because they have a sense or feeling that these places are exclusive to white people or that there will be discriminations against them (Arnold and Shinew 1998, Gobster 1998).

Hispanic and Latinos, on the other hand, have been reported to use public spaces primarily for socializing, especially with extended families. They
therefore desire more developed settings where they have access to group activity facilities (Byrne and Wolch 2009), and are more likely to engage in sedentary and casual group activities like parties, celebrations, and picnics but also enjoy other things like camping and hiking (Gobster 2002, Loukaitou-Sideris 1995). Unlike African American park users, Hispanic groups tend to re-arrange park spaces to better meet their needs (Loukaitou-Sideris 1995; Sanchez 2010). Park visitation and uses of Hispanics can also be influenced by their nativities as reported in a study that Mexico-born Hispanics favor litter-free areas more while native born Latinos emphasize park safety more (Baas et al. 1993).

Studies have also found interesting behavioral patterns of Asians in public spaces. Asians are said to value the aesthetic qualities of places more than recreational functionalities (Gobster 2002). They tend to use parks with families or organized groups, but also for relaxing, socializing or exercising like playing Tai Chi (Loukaitou-Sideris 1995, Byrne and Wolch 2009). Asians were reported to complain more about litter and vandalism in parks, as well as parking and access problems associated with park uses (Gobster 2002).

While researchers have long attempted to explain differentiated park uses, Byrne and Wolch’s (2009, p. 750) have developed a model that went beyond the factor of individual’s socio-demographic characteristics. Three other elements in the model – including (1) the political ecology and
amenities of the park itself such as design, vegetation, and facilities etc. (2) the historic and cultural landscape of park provision like discriminatory land-use practices or politics of development; and (3) individual perception of park spaces, e.g., accessibility, safety, or sense of welcome – along with the socio-demographic characteristics of park users and non-users all work together to “produce spatially uneven development of park resources and access, typically to the detriment of communities of color and disadvantage, and thus disproportionately affecting their health and well-being” (p. 751). Such situation, according to Professor Agyeman (2012), constitutes a classic case of spatial injustice.

When reviewing the histories of local and community public space development, as well as assessing public space usages in Chinatown, the above mentioned elements and concepts need to be incorporated into the research practices to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of Chinatown’s public spaces – in and behind the sense – and to guide the development of a more holistic redesign framework for the system.
Chapter 3 Historical Review

History of Boston’s Public Space Development

The earliest notion of public open space in Boston was established upon a clear mental image brought by the first immigrants from Europe. This shared image reflected their deep connection with the open, pastoral landscape they left behind in England.

To embody this ideal, the colonists set aside a parcel of land in the midst of their homes in 1634, four years after Boston’s charter was formed, and chose to tax themselves to pay for and maintain this civic space, which then became known as the Boston Common and has been seen and defended as “sacred” and as an essential part of the community landscape for nearly four centuries.

Figure 3.1 Boston Common in 1900 (Source: Boston Public Library)
The colonists’ legacy of commitment to environmental stewardship lives on in Boston; however, what public space should look like and how it should be used are deeply held notions inherited by modern Boston and often involve exclusivity (Lanfer and Taylor 2005). While the pastoral ideal in Boston was reinvented over time and culminated in the creation of Emerald Necklace Parks – another landmark of the city – at the end of the nineteenth century, this bucolic vision for Boston’s green space didn’t appeal deeply to a large portion of the city’s people. Particularly, it was found in Van Damme’s (2004) research on recreation in Boston at the close of the 19th century that working-class immigrants largely rejected Olmsted’s ideal about the purposes of public open space.

Such tension still remains more than a century later and has been further complicated by increased immigration from not only the “old countries” of Europe but also those from countries of Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. According to a recent demographic research prepared by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 2009, almost 28% of Boston’s total population is foreign born and comes predominately from the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Africa (BRA 2009). The lack of engagement of more recent immigrants in “friends of the park” organizations and other environmental groups of today, as well as the lack of consideration on the part of park planners for how the public spaces are designed, maintained, and used by immigrants have led to a challenge that the traditionally inherited notion of
public open space provision in Boston may not resonate with the majority of those who are having a greater impact on the City’s future. (Lanfer and Taylor 2005)

A public open space opinion survey during the Open Space Plan for Boston 2002-2006 strongly echoed this challenge. While people generally claimed to enjoy the scenic beauty and relaxation created by the large scale urban wilderness (an Olmsted concept), the majority of survey respondents preferred to have more accessible neighborhood open spaces near their residences that are equipped with more physical features and diverse programs and social events. They also expressed the desire for improved landscape and tree coverage, as well as improved maintenance. When asked about what they believed the park, recreation, and open space needs are in their neighborhood, they addressed the importance of acquiring or gaining access to a variety of types of open spaces (BPRD 2002).

In addition, it has been observed extensively that there are different patterns of public space use by immigrant minority groups to adapt to a new land in response to a lack of social and cultural identify offered by available public spaces (Lanfer and Taylor 2005). Santeria worshipers from Cuba and Haiti were seen gathering at Boston’s Tenean Beach for outdoor religious rituals which are often misunderstood or reviled by their new Boston neighbors. Families from Central America gravitate toward Boston’s Herter
Park because the landscape there – gathering place on riverbanks, willow trees along the shore - reminds them of home. People from South American countries who spent their childhoods in the central plazas of their home towns transform lots and street corners to create similar places in Brighton and Revere. Chinese immigrants plant crops in every available growing space in the Berkeley Street Community Garden because they view soil as a precious resource and appreciate the close contact with vegetation.

These social, religious and cultural activities represent a tendency for immigrants to transfer core cultural patterns from their home landscape onto the Boston landscape. This allows them to make use of public space in ways that are familiar to them and to create a context that reminds them of their home country. These spaces grant them more accessible opportunities to meet friends and family facing similar challenges and offer one another advice and support, while they are most often struggling to adapt to a new society in which they feel marginalized by language and cultural differences.

While Boston is becoming a more diverse and multicultural city, there should be more room in Boston’s conservation ethic for public open space to allow other rich cultures to make their own marks on the landscape that could be understood and honored by all. The inherited notion of public space has been challenged, yet the challenge can be transformed into opportunities that help diverse constituencies develop a strong sense of ownership and
“sense of place” in their city. In order to accomplish that goal (or seize that opportunity), it is crucial to engage immigrant communities, to understand the history of their neighborhood’s history, and to develop cultural competencies that facilitate deeper comprehensions of their cultural attributes. For the purpose of this thesis research, Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood and its associated minority groups will be examined through the above mentioned layers.

**Evolution of the Chinatown Neighborhood**

The earliest history of Boston’s Chinatown dates back to the mid-19th century when the leather industry, attracted by the presence of the railways, started to thrive on cheap land running the length of the South Station rail yard and into today’s Chinatown. This development in turn populated South Cove, which had been filled in 1833, with successive waves of immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Syria, and China. Chinese workers settled on Oxford Street in the area now considered the heart of Chinatown’s business district. For the following decades the community remained contained within a block area bounded by Harrison Avenue, Essex, Hudson and Kneeland Street (The Chinatown Coalition 1994). Due to the severe growth limitation imposed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Boston’s Chinatown was still predominantly a bachelor community of 200 people by 1890, with around 1,100 living and working in the Boston area at that time.
During the early 20th century, the Chinatown community gradually established businesses on Oxford Place, Harrison Avenue, and Tyler Street.

The exclusion of Chinese immigration established with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was lifted in 1943 when the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943, allowed new Chinese immigrants into the country and allowed Chinese nationals already in the country to be naturalized as American citizenship. Restrictions were finally abolished in 1965 when the Immigration and Nationality Act replaced a national origins quota system that had been in place since 1924, with much higher numbers of annual visas based on a per-country-of-origin quota that did not include immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, in fact allowing for family reunification outside of quotas. These turning points encouraged a vibrant community growth that was supported by a strong employment base formed by garment and restaurant industries and other growing Chinese businesses (Chinatown 2010). Between 1910 and 1950, 80 percent of the Chinese in Boston resided in Chinatown (The Chinatown Coalition 1994).
The neighborhood boundary expanded actively southward since the 1950s (see Figure 3.3). However, the social and physical fabric of the community was devastated by two major planning forces. The first one is the invasion of highways. In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government built two major highways, the Massachusetts Turnpike and the Southeast Expressway, straight through the heart of Chinatown (Chinatown 1990). These highways brought severe air pollution into the neighborhood to an extent that carbon monoxide levels projected here were once some of the highest in the City of Boston (Massachusetts Department of Public Works 1991). The building of the highway also contributed to a chronic housing
shortage in Chinatown as the highway construction took one third of the neighborhood’s housing and one-half of its land area (Chinatown 1990).

The second planning force, which occurred in the same period, was the urban renewal program of the 1960s. The wholesale taking of homes by eminent domain in several neighborhoods including Chinatown was conducted by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the city’s planning and development agency. A total of seven hundred Chinatown residents were estimated to have been displaced by the clearances, and much of the lands acquired from demolished homes were sold to Tufts University and New England Medical Center for institutional expansion (Leong 1995).

By the early 1970s, Boston’s Chinatown became one of the City’s oldest, yet least-known, minority neighborhoods. Conditions among Boston’s Chinese at that time were in many respects worse than among any other group. (Sullivan 1970). Suffering from continuous institutional expansion and environmental racism, along with increased immigrant influx, Chinatown’s overall living conditions further deteriorated over time. The area as a whole was considered “dense, urban, and heavily populated, and had little greenery” (Bourguignon 1988 page number). A 1987 report by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) on Boston’s Chinatown indicated that while the neighborhood had a population density of 51.4 persons per acre, compared to 17.6 in the City as a whole, there were only 2.9 acres of open
space, or less than an acre per 1,000 residents, compared to 3.9 acres per 1,000 residents for the City (Brown 1987). Yet these numbers became more egregious later into the 1990s when Chinatown became the most crowded neighborhood in Boston, with over 111 residents per acre, with the least amount of open space per resident in Boston, at a ratio of about a half-acre for 5,000 residents (see Figure 3.4). An historic cultural landmark has been encroached upon through the aggressive turbulence of urban reconfiguration.

![Figure 3.4 Neighborhood Comparisons: Population Density vs. Persons by Acres of Open Space](source)

In fact, this severe contradiction between an increased population density and an inadequate provision of urban open space has been a primary concern of the neighborhood for decades. Constant efforts have been made, both by the community itself and by the City, to improve the public realm of...
the neighborhood or to rouse broader awareness of this urgent community
need. As early as 1971, elements such as green parks, sitting areas,
pedestrian streets, and the general landscaping of Chinatown were proposed
in the *Chinatown Planning Project* as high and medium physical planning
priorities based on the community’s capability and needs (Hall 1971). In the
1990 *Chinatown Community Plan: A Plan to Manage Growth* – a joint effort
towards a community-based master planning process between the
Chinatown/South Cove Neighborhood Council, the City of Boston, and the
BRA – objectives were set up for extending the open space network to
incorporate a wider variety of facilities and alternative forms of green spaces
throughout the public environment in Chinatown. It also advocated for
enhancing Chinatown’s cultural heritage and historic legacies and
environment.

Such momentum continued in the *Chinatown Master Plan 2000: Agenda
for a Sustainable Neighborhood*, in which the need for enhanced streetscape
to reinforce the community’s cultural and ethnic ambiance and pedestrian
flow had once again been addressed as a top priority, along with a strategy
framework aiming at creating new facilities and open spaces with more
greenery and plantings. In addition, community participation was encouraged
in the design of the Central Artery Corridor parcel 23 in Chinatown to ensure
that Chinatown’s needs were incorporated in the design models.
Ten years later, the Chinatown Master Plan 2010: Community Vision for the Future recognized reinforcing connections between Chinatown and other immediate downtown districts – though improved public spaces like streets, sidewalks, and parks, etc. – as a key strategy for community enhancement. Furthermore, the Plan recommended establishing a ribbon of green space in Chinatown to link existing parks, temporary parks, and landscape features.

It has been clear through these Plans that the Chinatown community constantly values the creation of an environmentally and culturally sustainable public realm through improvements in streetscape and green spaces, the provision of parks and diverse amenities, and the preservation of cultural and historic heritages. While they have framed a common vision towards public space improvement in the community, most of the public space plans stayed at a “recommendation” level without moving further into a detailed and implementable design proposal. After forty years of planning endeavors, the status quo of the public space system in Chinatown is neither satisfactorily meeting the community’s needs, nor functioning as a major vehicle of neighborhood revitalization. In the following chapters, a tangible public space system design proposal for Boston’s Chinatown will be developed based on extensive research, investigations, and public outreach,
and in alignment with community visions embodied in existing planning initiatives. This proposed design strategy will strive to answer the community’s outcries for a greener and healthier neighborhood environment, respond to a deeply rooted yet eroded cultural heritage awaits revival, and communicate to its diverse user groups in an inclusive and equitable manner.
Chapter 4 Methodology

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, multiple research methods were adopted throughout different phases of the thesis research.

**Geospatial Analyses**

Geographical and spatial characteristics of the physical environment in the research area were analyzed to facilitate design considerations. For example, land use type analysis can reveal use patterns of public space due to the different foot traffics generated by varied uses. It also helps to identify potentially usable land parcels in the neighborhood that can be transformed into more meaningful spaces. A land use type analysis therefore can show how the configuration of the public space system can be improved physically.

In addition, an analysis of the geo-spatial relationship between the research area in Chinatown and nearby downtown districts, especially in terms of the connectivity of the public space network, will provide positive feedback to the decision-making process by introducing influencing factors such as the spatial compatibility in the transition area from one district to
another and a beneficial integration into the regional public open space system.

Qualitative Analyses

Due to the nature of the research topic, qualitative analysis is the most extensively used method throughout the thesis research, including:

1. **Field Investigation:** Site investigations were conducted in Chinatown at different seasons, weekdays and weekends and different times of the day (morning, noon, evening). The neighborhood was observed to gain personal impressions and an understanding of both the physical character of neighborhood spaces and the dynamics of social interactions. Targeted areas were identified for in-depth analysis, such as established neighborhood parks, different types of sidewalks, street corners or vacant spaces.

2. **Photographic analysis:** Photography was used to visually record unique characters of neighborhood public space as well as distinctive social and cultural behaviors and activities. Special attention was paid to potential gaps between user needs and the design of spaces.

3. **Interview:** On-site interviews were conducted to collect first hand data on neighborhood assessments of the public spaces in Chinatown. To improve sampling validity, interviewees included both
people who are living or working in the neighborhood and use the public spaces on a daily basis, and people who occasionally visit Chinatown for shopping, entertainment, business, or tourism.

**Precedent Study**

Precedents of best practices of public space design in downtown Chinatown and other historical immigrant neighborhoods were identified. Precedents not only offer direct inspirations for landscape design in Asian communities, but also give valuable information on how well or poorly certain public space design considerations work for the minority groups who have special needs defined by their cultural and social preferences.

**Landscape Analyses, Graphic Design, and Visualization**

These three major tools were used for the design component of the thesis research: landscape analysis, graphic design and visualization. The structure of the public space network in the neighborhood was described and interpreted to gain an overall comprehension of the landscape characteristics of the system. Further design potentials were explored, by identifying and classifying the public space system into different elements with similar attributes, such as nodes and connecting corridors. The design proposals were developed through graphic design and other visualization tools such as photo montage.
Chapter 5 Research Area Analysis

Defining the Research Area

Today’s Chinatown, spanning nearly 137 acres in the heart of Boston, is bordered by Downtown to the north, the Leather District and Southeast Expressway to the east, South End to the south, and Midtown Cultural District, Boston Common, and Bay Village to the west. While the Boston Redevelopment Authority defines the Chinatown District as bounded by Essex Street to the north, Surface Artery/I-93 to the east, Marginal Road to the south, and Washington/Tremont Street to the west, the community presented a different definition of the neighborhood in the Chinatown Master Plan 2010, both out of respect towards the neighborhood history and
for guiding the understanding of future growth and change in the community (see Figure 5.1).

This disparity reflects unbalanced expectations of the City and the Chinatown community towards the elasticity and future spatial orientation of the neighborhood. However, consensus has been reached on which area

Figure 5.2 Research Area: Chinatown Main Street District
Base Map: Bing Map
within the neighborhood most adequately preserves and represents the social, economic, and cultural heritages of the Chinese community.

The area contains four blocks bounded within Essex St, Washington St, Kneeland St, and Surface Rd that survived the bulldozer of urban renewal and the invasion of institutional expansion (see Figure 5.2). This is the area circled as “Main Street District” by the BRA and referred to as “Commercial Chinatown Subdistrict” and “Historic Chinatown Protection Area” by the community (1990 Plan, 2010 Plan).

For the purpose of the thesis research, this “Main Street District” was adopted as the primary research and design area for the following reasons:

1. It includes the most economically, socially, and culturally active blocks of the Chinatown neighborhood that function as the focal point of Asian communities in Boston and throughout New England for culturally related activities including Asian dining, grocery shopping, festival celebration and non-English services.

2. It therefore becomes the most publicly known and visited blocks in Chinatown that attract not only Asian residents or visitors with its home-reminding ambiance, but also tourists from various ethnic backgrounds who come to experience and seek exotic Asian physical and cultural environment.
3. It contains most of the historically preserved Chinatown streetscapes that are defined by buildings with traditional Chinese architectural designs and a compacted street scale which fosters social interactions.

These unique characteristics of the “Main Street District” make it an ideal target area to launch a pilot project of cultural enrichment in the public realm, from which an enhanced cultural and social identity can expand to the whole community.

Physical and Social Context

The Main Street District is an important regional node of Boston’s segregated but thriving Chinese community. It functions as a vital component in the urban fabric of a disjointed Chinatown neighborhood and serves as social welfare institutions by creating a sense of place and social identity.

Land Use

Within the research area an interesting array of land uses defines the context of the space. Predominately on the west edge of the area, along Washington Street lie the major commercial uses including office, retail, and restaurants (see Figure 5.3). This is the frontline where historic Chinatown confronts the reviving downtown cultural district, whose increasing impact on Chinatown can be seen from the soaring land use intensity along the east side of Washington Street over the past two decades.
Residential and mixed-use of residential and commercial uses dominate the middle and southeast portion of the research area, many of which are seen in the form of residential space on top of semi-underground, or first and second floor commercial space. A majority of Chinatown’s restaurants, supermarkets, and health and entertainment services are clustered in this portion of the neighborhood, which therefore attracts a high volume of foot traffic on a daily basis.

On the north side of the research area remains a number of industrial buildings that have existed since the early history of Chinatown. While some are not actively used, there are a few food production plants operating normally. Though their workshops are not directly exposed to the street, the...
buildings have a heavy industrial feel: the disproportionately large windows and steps that face the street have framed a less inviting, less pedestrian-scaled streetscape.

Despite the compactness in the research area, there is still abundant open ground surviving among crowded buildings. Unfortunately, 90% of all these open areas are occupied by surface parking serving both the industrial and commercial uses.

**Architecture**

The current physical environment of the research area in Chinatown has been established upon an urban structure formed during the 19th and early 20th century. A tight and intimate character typical of 19th century neighborhoods is preserved in the historic and commercial core of Chinatown. A prevalent building height and massing, which is in scale with the irregular neighborhood street grid, creates an environment free of excessive shadows or turbulent downdrafts. Interesting building details and warm textures complement the

Figure 5.4 Typical architectural styles
Top: Greek Revival row houses
Bottom: Brick or masonry building
animated street life and spontaneity in the neighborhood.

Two typical architectural forms can be found in historic and commercial Chinatown: 3 to 4 story Greek Revival row houses dating from the mid-19th century and 6 to 8 story brick and masonry buildings of relatively plain design, which were constructed in the late 19th century for the burgeoning wholesale textile and leather industries (see Figure 5.4).

Chinatown’s streetscape has been enriched by the eclectic collection of turn-of-the-century buildings, with cultural and historical emblems and markers such as the Gateway on Beach Street and the dragon-coiled colonnade. The Asian heritage also appears ubiquitously in the multi-lingual signs, small decorative appliques on building facades, interiors, street furniture, and inside shops and restaurants.

In addition, within and around the research area there are two historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Liberty Tree District and the Beach/Knapp Street District. Ten other individual structures in the Chinatown business area have been rated as Category III by the Boston Landmark Commission1.

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1 Buildings’ significance was decided according to their individual relationship to history, architects, or building style. Category III is associated with city significance.
Demographic Profile

Chinatown is a distinctive downtown residential and commercial neighborhood and a unique regional business and cultural center. It has a population of 4,444 residents within the area defined by the community, 76.9% of which are Asian\(^2\). While the neighborhood has a relatively balanced age structure with a median age of 37.1, there is a fairly large elderly population aged 60 and above. Overall, there male and female populations are similar in size except in the age group of 60 and above, where women significantly outnumber men (see Figure 5.5).

![Age structure of Chinatown residents](image)

**Figure 5.5** Age structure of Chinatown residents  
*Source: U.S. Census 2010*

More than half of the 1,982 households in the Main Street district of Chinatown are nonfamily households, among which 76.9% are householders living by themselves, with 34.6% of male householders and 42.3% of female householders. Furthermore, among the female householders who live alone,

\(^2\) US Census 2010
nearly half of them are 65 years and over. These populations have more urgent needs for a public setting that allows them to maintain active social connections.

Beyond serving its residents, Chinatown’s Main Street District also draws a great variety of visitors all year around, a majority of which are Chinese from other neighborhoods. According to the *New Bostonians 2009* report by the BRA, Chinese immigrants made up the largest share of Boston’s immigrants in 2007 (see Figure 5.6). This growing Chinese population has generated great needs for ethnic cuisine and grociers, traditional health services and entertainment, bilingual community services, and above all an acute sense of cultural belonging, which is usually achieved through personal contact with surrounding environments. Visitors of other ethnic backgrounds, on the other hand, come to seek novelty out of the exotic ambience embodied with Chinese cultural symbols.

![Figure 5.6 Top countries of origin for Boston’s foreign-born population, 2007](source: New Bostonians, Boston Redevelopment Authority, 2009)
Chapter 6 Assessment of Present Public Space System

Structure and Elements

To understand Chinatown’s physical fabric and diagnose its public space issues, we not only need to zoom out to a holistic image of its skeleton, but also need to zoom in for a clearer view of its tissues.

Due to the scale and street grid of the Chinatown Main Street District, the public space system within the research area has a distinct structure. Washington Street on the west, Essex Street on the north, Surface Road on the east and Kneeland Street on the south together define a circulation corridor surrounding the exterior of the District. Inside, Beach Street and Harrison Ave open up major internal arteries, allowing circulations crosswise. Several minor roads and sidewalks add up additional longitudinal connections. Public spaces within this frame can be classified into 4 categories: 1) major park and plaza including Rose Kennedy Greenway Chinatown Park and Chinatown Plaza, 2) pocket parks including Mary Soo Hoo Park and Oxford Place Playground, 3) sidewalks, and 4) alleys (see Figure 6.1 next page).
While a majority of trees, landscaping and seating are concentrated in major parks along Surface Road, which have created an inviting image from the east entrance to the neighborhood core, only two small trees and barely any designated seating are found deeper into the Main Street District.

**Evaluation of Design and Uses**

The purpose of public space evaluation is to better understand its present condition and assess potential gaps between users’ needs and the design and functioning of Chinatown’s public space system. An evaluation matrix, refined based on prior literature research, has been established to facilitate analyses (see Table 6.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Visual Variables</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Activities  | A range of varied activities occur simultaneously | • Type of activities going on in the public space  
• Major population groups served by the public spaces  
• Distribution of different activities |
| Sociability | Friendliness, interactivity, diversity | |
| Accessibility | Good linkage, walkability, and connectedness | • Comfort of design  
• Utility of design  
• Connectedness |
| Comfort     | Safety, attractiveness | • Cultural elements  
• Cleanness  
• Reconditioning |

In addition to the factors mentioned above, ethnic culture is an important design consideration, especially in minority or immigrant communities like Chinatown, and
should play a significant role in both place making and promoting social cohesion.

Therefore, how cultural elements have or have not been incorporated into the design and functioning of public space in Chinatown will also be evaluated.

The strategy of nonparticipant, distant observation has been adopted for site reconnaissance to prevent obtrusiveness, increase internal validity, and minimize researcher bias associated with qualitative research (Gaber and Gaber 2007). Multiple field visits have been conducted at different times and seasons to capture public space uses in various conditions.

**Chinatown Park & Plaza**

The Chinatown Park, originally covered by highway ramps, was transformed into a park space as part of the Rose Kennedy Greenway in 2004 when the Greenway construction reached the Chinatown neighborhood (see Figure 6.2 below).

Chinatown gateway plaza, historically established as a landmark in the neighborhood,

Figure 6.2 Spatial and physical transformations of the Chinatown Park and Plaza
Source: Google Earth
was later renovated and incorporated into the Greenway Chinatown Park and Plaza.

Today the Chinatown Park and Plaza accommodate a wide variety of activities daily, including active uses like Chinese chess gaming, pigeon feeding, and passive uses like wandering around, sitting and resting, etc. The majority of the park and plaza users are Asian and cover a broad age range (see Figure 6.3).

The dominating activity that involves the majority of the group users on the plaza is playing and watching people playing Chinese Chess (see Figure 6.4). These activities mainly occurred around the picnic tables with sun umbrellas – trophies of community outcry against inadequate seating – located along the edge of the plaza, especially during sunny days. Yet in the center of the plaza there aren’t as many
active uses happening daily due to lack of shade and seating (see Figure 6.5), except for some community celebrations and exhibitions occurring occasionally.

Next to the plaza on the north is the Rose Kennedy Greenway Chinatown Park designed by Carol R. Johnson and Associates. This small portion of the greenway park is beautifully landscaped with stone benches and bamboo screens along both sides of the passage way. A few more landscape rocks were installed to serve as extra seats and a unique fountain was put in place suggesting a waterfall and shallow river bed.

However, in comparison with the less landscaped plaza, the park space is not well used. While children were observed to occasionally explore the stream fountain...
during summer times with their guardians watching, most people seen walking through the park didn’t stop, sit, or use the space in meaningful ways. Homeless people are often found to make this linear and mostly enclosed space their temporary shelter (see Figure 6.6).

Some interesting behavioral patterns observed during field visits offered a glance at why these beautifully designed park spaces have not been used adequately. First of all, park users, predominately Asian, seek shade when trying to rest or engage in activities and disfavor the exposed center of the plaza. Secondly, they prefer to sit in socially interactive manners such as in circles or close enough to observe other people and activities, which explains why the Greenway Park, with its linear seating and minimum ongoing activities, has been left out (see Figure 6.7 and Figure 6.8).
Other ways people seat themselves also indicate some discrepancies between the design of park seats – one of the most important elements of successful public space – and users’ expectations. For example, people sitting around the picnic tables tend to lean their back or arms on the table for upper body support in response to the back-less seats (see Figure 6.8). In winter, a group of women standing by a stone bench rather than sitting there when they socialized indicated an aversion against cold stone seats in low temperatures, while two elderly women sitting on stone pillars near the Chinatown gate on a summer afternoon shows the desire for more versatile seating options (see Figure 6.9).

Mary Soo Hoo Park

Mary Soo Hoo Park, originally the Chinatown gateway park located on Hudson Street under the Mass Turn Pike vent tower, recently went through a landscape redesign and has been renamed in memory of Ms. Mary Soo Hoo,
an active community advocate in Chinatown (see Figure 6.10).

The renovation enhanced the cultural ambiance of the park by highlighting elements such as the red fence around the park which resembles the traditional Chinese knot, a symbol of happiness and harmony, the large traditional Chinese ink painting of mountains and forests covering the Mass Turn Pike vent tower, and the lacquer painting, at the bottom of the vent tower, of legendary figures from famous ancient Chinese fictions (see Figure 6.11).

Other improvements to the park space included new pavement, new wooden benches, small chess game tables with chairs, and a landscaped area for children to play (see Figure 6.12). However, many of the new designs have characteristics that make their future use questionable. Wooden benches are lined up straight against
the park fence, depriving park users of their socializing venue in circles and their chance to observe a lively street scene behind them. The design of the new chess tables also lacks cultural considerations. To Chinese people, the players and the spectators are inseparable in chess games. While players enjoy the attentions from bystanders and the sense of satisfaction associated with the process, spectators find themselves not only enjoying the games but also getting acquainted with their neighbors. Yet the new chess tables in the park are so closely installed to each other, leaving no room for bystanders to gather around. In addition, all chairs are fixed to the ground, making it hard for people to rearrange them to socialize. The landscaped playing area, on the other hand, consists of concrete structures with sharp edges,
which pose potential safety concerns for young children climbing on or running around the bumps.

**Oxford Place Playground:**

Another pocket park in the research area is the Oxford Place Playground, located on Oxford Street. It is privately owned by Oxford Place Associates but publicly accessible. Though called “playground” and with a size of 2020 sq.ft — considerably large in a dense neighborhood like Chinatown — this park is far from benefiting the community. Without any seating or amenity, the playground is simply landscaped on the edges with small bushes, while the empty concrete ground in the middle leaves nothing but dullness.

Surprisingly, on the flank wall of the building next to the space, a huge colored Chinese landscape painting casts a sudden and pleasant light upon the space with its distant mountains, old trees, wooden bridges, and flowing streams. Head lamps are hanging aside the painting, lighting up the pocket park. These features clearly demonstrate the efforts to

**Figure 6.13 Oxford Place Playground**
Dirty sidewalks and pedestrian obstacles happen in neighborhood streets.

However, except for people walking through the playground to access the residential buildings behind, barely any activity occurred during multiple site visits, indicating that this privately-owned pocket park is largely used as a passage way for Oxford Place residents.

Street Space

Street spaces primarily consist of sidewalks, street corners, and alleys, and are the largest component in Chinatown’s public space system. Among these places, sidewalks are the ones that need special examinations because they are the most pervasive and heavily used type of public space in the neighborhood, and more importantly they bring enormous social benefit to the community by hosting activities such as street parades.
festivals, and celebrations that offer opportunities for the community to develop a collective identity and demonstrate their pride (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht, 2009). The field investigations, unfortunately, revealed a discouraging condition of how the street spaces are designed, maintained, and therefore used.

- **Lack of Maintenance**

  While the well-maintained Greenway Chinatown Park and Plaza, as well as Mary Soo Hoo Park, have fostered a lively scene around the Chinatown Gate, such momentum deteriorates dramatically once beyond the gateway area into the neighborhood. Uneven pavements and arbitrarily placed utility structures made the narrow sidewalks far less walkable. Trash bags are left idle on street corners, graffiti and scribbles are seen all over telephone booths and newspaper boxes due to poor street maintenance (see Figure 6.14).

  A comparison of curbside on both sides of Kneeland Street further magnified the issue. While on the south side where Tufts Medical School is located, both the street and the sidewalk are clean, on the north side where local businesses are, litter prevails (see Figure 6.15). This overall inferior condition of street spaces in Chinatown can partially be explained as a Broken Window (Wilson 1982) scenario.
caused by inadequate maintenance first and then exacerbated by following vandalism.

- **Lack of Shade or Greenery**

One dramatic change observed when stepping from the gateway area into the neighborhood is the extreme lack of greenery and street shade. Inside the Main Street District there are only two street trees, leaving the whole area barren and pale looking, while across Kneeland St. on the Tufts Medical School side of the neighborhood street trees and planters can be seen everywhere.

Though some of the historic streets such as Tyler Street and Hudson Street have sidewalks that might be too narrow to allow trees, streets such as Harrison Ave with a sidewalk width of nearly 18 ft showed very different images when there are street trees to the south of Kneeland St and no street tree on the north side in the Main Street District (see Figure 6.16).

Interestingly, a dramatic change was captured during two site visits that spoke loudly to what the community needs. The concrete traffic island on the north end of Harrison Ave, which was empty in an earlier visit, was later found to be decorated
with a giant Christmas tree planted in a container (see Figure 6.17). No matter whether it was out of a municipal or community initiative, this temporary greening action fully demonstrated the difference a single tree can bring to the streetscape of a downtown neighborhood.

- **Negligence of Users’ Needs**

  The field investigations identified that an exceptionally large percentage of
people using the neighborhood streets on a daily basis are elderly Asian people living in the neighborhood. Many of them are seen carrying shopping bags or walking with canes (see Figure 6.18). Given the fact that the elderly in urban neighborhoods don’t usually travel a long distance to run errands or seek relaxation, walking on neighborhood streets and hanging around neighborhood public spaces become their primary way of maintaining mobility and social contact with the outside world.

However as mentioned earlier and as shown in Figure 6.19, most of the sidewalks throughout the neighborhood are in relatively poor conditions, which poses tremendous challenges for neighborhood seniors. For example, sewer covers with big holes on the sidewalk make it difficult for seniors walking with their canes; uneven pavement can easily cause those who are less agile to stumble; many unreasonably placed utility boxes and light poles become obstacles narrowing down the sidewalk.

Figure 6.19 Poor sidewalk conditions
Another gap between the design of street space and users’ needs also surfaced during field investigations. People are often observed to sit on window sills or storefront steps when they chitchat or simply just relax (see Figure 6.20), indicating a clear need for more street seating other than those installed in parks. This is particularly true for elderly people as they tend to walk shorter distances and seek leg rests more often than young people. Yet throughout the neighborhood streets there is no established seating, even though some wide sidewalks have the capacity to support it.

Figure 6.20 People sitting on window sills

Public Input

The best answers to “How does the public space system function?” come from people who use public spaces. To hear the voices of diverse user groups commonly sharing the public spaces in Chinatown, neighborhood interviews were adopted as the primary qualitative research method.

Interviews were conducted over a period of three months and substantially covered changing seasons and different times of days. Interviewees were approached while they were using the public spaces and were first explained the purpose of the interview (see Interview Informational Sheet in Appendices), then
they independently decided whether or not to accept the interview. The main principle for interviewee selection is inclusivity, which means that the composition of all interviewees should represent or match the general composition of people who use the Chinatown public spaces at different times and for various purposes. Therefore each interview attempt was made based on careful observations revealing that the potential interviewee would adequately represent the demographic profile of public space users. All interviews were first recorded using a digital voice recorder at the scene and later transcribed indoors into written record with additional Chinese to English translations where necessary (see Interview Transcript in Appendices). According to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, no one under the age of 18 was interviewed and no individual identifiable information was recorded or published in this research.

Interviewee Profile

A total of 33 interview attempts were made by the author, 14 of which resulted in valid interview contents. Among these successful interviews, 6 of the interviewees are women, and 10 are Asians who speak Chinese at home. The majority of the interviewees live in or near the neighborhood, a few of them work nearby, and others were visiting Chinatown from their neighborhoods outside of Chinatown. The interviews took place in most of the major parks and streets, and covered all age groups above 18. Figure 6.21 describes the profile of the 14 interviewees.
Interview Analysis

More than half of the 14 interviewees who finished the interviews claimed that they know Chinatown very well or are familiar with this neighborhood. While many of the local residents said they used Chinatown’s public spaces on a daily basis for the purposes of relaxation, socializing, entertainment, and exercise, visitors from other neighborhoods came here much less frequently and often for the purposes of Asian dining, grocery shopping, or enjoying the performances during Chinese festivals.

Detailed analysis of interviewees’ responses to the questions revealed various topics of concern regarding the design and use of public spaces in Chinatown. As
shown in the word cloud (Figure 6.22) drawn from the frequencies of words mentioned during the interviews, there are five major themes of users’ concerns: 1) comfortable and adequate seating, 2) shade provision in various forms, 3) diversity of programs and activities, 4) cultural representations, 5) street maintenance.

● **Comfortable and Adequate Seating**

Interestingly almost all the local residents who claimed to know the place well and use the public spaces regularly complained about seating when they were asked whether their needs are satisfied or how they want the place to be improved. Issues related to seating included uncomfortable designs such as chairs with no back rest or being unmovable and an inadequate supply of seats especially in the streets, an issue
that seemed to particularly concern the elderly. A few visitors also expressed their frustration about not being able to find good outdoor sitting areas where they could engage with the public.

- **Shade Provision in Various Forms**
  Many interviewees, both local residents and visitors, emphasized or indicated the importance of providing more shade from the sun in the public spaces. Some suggested greening the neighborhood with more and larger trees that can provide natural shade in both the streets and the Chinatown Plaza. Several others specifically mentioned that the community had appealed for new pavilions on the Chinatown Plaza which they believe will transform the empty center of the plaza and therefore draw more people and activities.

- **Diversity of Programs and Activities**
  Lack of diverse activities was another issue surfaced during the interviews. Several middle-aged and elderly local residents who use Chinatown’s parks and streets daily to exercise said they would engage in more entertaining activities such as Tai Chi, traditional fan dance, traditional Chinese opera or Chinese Yoyo (diabolo) if they were provided with the “right” space. Women from the neighborhood particularly emphasized that more female-friendly programs will make the presently male-dominated parks and plaza more welcoming. Some visitors who didn’t usually spend time in the parks also indicated that they might enjoy the Chinatown parks and plaza more if there were more entertainments.
- **Cultural Representations**

  When asked whether the existing public space system in Chinatown helps enhance the characteristics of Chinese culture, most interviewees responded that the Chinatown Gate area establishes a strong cultural quality with abundant Chinese cultural elements displayed in the parks and plaza. The rest of the neighborhood however, has been losing such ethos due to the lack of cultural representations. Interviewees coming from a Chinese cultural background highlighted that an enhanced cultural atmosphere will boost their cultural identity, whereas interviewees with different backgrounds believed they would also benefit from an enriched cultural setting that offers them an ethnic cultural immersion.

- **Street Maintenance**

  Another issue people complained about is poor street maintenance. Several interviewees claimed that they didn’t enjoy walking on the “dirty” streets. Some local residents also expressed dissatisfaction with the under-maintained sidewalks and over-parked streets that pose walking challenges to pedestrians.

  The public interviews on one hand have echoed with the author’s earlier findings through the qualitative research on Chinatown’s public space, while on the other hand have future unveiled how the users have enjoyed or feel discontented when using the public spaces and how they expect it to be improved. Their first hand perspectives provided useful guidance in the development of the redesign strategy.
Guiding Principles

For many years Chinatown has served as a vital resource for Asian immigrants, temporary residents, and transient visitors to maintain their ethnic identity and lifestyles. With the arrival of new generations of Asian Americans, the need to become reacquainted with the Chinese/Asian heritage has grown parallel to the assertion of a distinct immigrant history and identity for Chinatown. The primary goal of re-visioning Chinatown’s public space system is to reinforce and diversify its roles as a historic cultural center, a unique regional commercial center, and a neighborhood common that responds to the needs of its residents for social and cultural identities, consolidates the cultural and historic heritages of Asian communities, and creates an inclusive environment in which communications among diverse populations are encouraged.

To achieve the final goal, several design principles have been developed based on the thesis research. They provide general guidance to the framing of the redesign concepts and navigate the design process through such concepts.
Enhancing the Historic Streetscape

Chinatown’s historic streetscape along with its rich and lively ambience has defined a unique neighborhood image that represents the historic heritage of this immigrant community. Such streetscape should be maintained and enhanced through means of creative building design and landscaping, sidewalk space management, event programing, versatile extension of indoor-outdoor space, and circulation improvement.

In addition, increased recognition of the existence of historic buildings and architecture also help to reinforce Chinatown’s “street-places”. For example, signage designed with appropriate color, pattern, and scale can be used to highlight important architectural features that help define and delineate a building façade such as cornices, window sills and lintels, and columns, and hence to accent an otherwise nondescript building.

Integrating Culture and Art

To further establish Chinatown in the downtown landscape, the neighborhood’s cultural heritage should be reflected in ways that go beyond the multi-lingual store signs or a few standardized cultural props such as the pagoda-topped phone booths, which are no longer actively utilized and often seen poorly maintained. Motifs and art elements that are widely endorsed in Asian cultures should be adapted,
represented, and preserved innovatively in the design and management of parks and street spaces.

More importantly, the integration of Asian culture and arts should not only respond to the psychological needs of immigrants – local residents and visitors alike – seeking cultural identification or people with other cultural backgrounds searching for exotic cultural novelty, but should also be functional in ways that are responsive to various physical needs of those diverse users who pursue comfort and enjoyment through their interactions with each other and with the surrounding environment of the public spaces.

**Improving Visibility and Orientation**

Improving the visibility and orientation of Chinatown’s Main Street District, which is currently somewhat suffocated by intensive new developments surrounding it, has strategic significance for the revitalization of the neighborhood center. It offers residents, workers, and visitors a stronger sense of the place and a better navigation through intimate neighborhood streets, and therefore introduces more foot traffic essential to local businesses and actively used public spaces.

Street signs and maps can be used to improve pedestrian orientation and judicious placement of cultural and community landmarks. Signs at critical intersections and entries to Chinatown will also strengthen the connection between Chinatown and adjacent districts, especially the midtown cultural district to which
Chinatown presents a relatively weak image. Such directory systems should be designed to help tourists and other visitors identify the unique ethnic cultural characteristics of the neighborhood. Major visual and circulation corridors such as Beach Street and Harrison Avenue should be preserved and reinforced, while important intersections like Essex St. @ Harrison Ave. – known as Philips Square – and the crossing of Beach St. and Harrison Ave should be programmed with more pedestrian attractions. Additional considerations should be given on how to integrate Chinatown’s public space system into the regional open space network to create a smoother transitional experience for visitors.

Program- and Activity-oriented

Urban public spaces should be seen as a multi-faceted matrix performing a variety of functions and hosting a variety of uses (Moughtin 1996). A successful reform of any public space system depends largely on whether the redesigns encourage and support an increasing variety of programs and activities taking place in the system because it is exactly the constant social intercourse amongst the people and the explorative interaction between humans and their built environment that injects endless vigor and vitality back into the environment.

The author’s vision for the public spaces in Chinatown’s neighborhood center would be one that generously accommodates the variations of the daily bustling of residents, workers, and visitors, and the rhythm and scenarios brought about by
cultural, recreational, and educational activities and seasonal events, all of which are interwoven with the dialects, the aroma, and a rich display of ethnic foods and specialty goods. Every redesign intention should be program- and activity-oriented in order to identify and address potential users’ needs and possibly generate opportunities for additional activities in the context.

**Biophilia in Action**

The strong desire to stay in intimate contact with nature has always been an indispensable part of Asian culture and it is also true here in this densely populated and intensively built-out neighborhood based on what we have learned from the public interviews. The redesign of the public spaces in Chinatown should respond to the community’s demand for increased greenery and vibrancy of natural life throughout the neighborhood. This natural life can take various forms such as street trees, flower beds, running water, and all vitalities derived from their existence because at a compact neighborhood scale, it is this type of fine grained and heterogeneous bits of nature that form the functioning green networks (Girling and Kellett 2005).

**Design Concepts and Elements**

A comprehensive design concept for Chinatown’s public space system has been synthesized based on all previous research, analyses, and the design guidelines (see Figure 7.1 next page). Four layers of design elements in this concept model, namely
Figure 7.1 Chinatown Public Space System – Design Concept and Elements
History, Culture, Nature, and Activities, interwoven with each other, establish a mutually supportive and complementary relationship that lubricates the functionality of the public space system throughout different dimensions.

Among these four layers, neighborhood History, ethnic Culture, and Nature provide primary sources of physical design elements drawing from their distinctive compositions. The upper layer of Activities is the core of the design concept. It is on the one hand fostered and sustained by various design improvements achieved through integrating elements of the lower layers, while on the other hand its positive feedback to the public spaces nourishes the system with constant human vitality, a crucial determinant of whether a downtown public space system will succeed and maintain such success in the long term.

*Culture*

Asian culture, particularly Chinese culture, has bred a number of universal elements that resonate with the ethnic identities of most Asian populations. To ensure the cultural-responsiveness of Chinatown’s public space, it is crucial to identify such elements and integrate them innovatively into the system design in ways that help to promote cultural prosperity in the minority neighborhood.

Ideal cultural elements can come from various dimensions, such as typical decorative patterns, established cultural and art symbols, widely known architectural representations, and even well-recognized culinary art forms. In addition, behavioral
models defined by specific cultural attributes should also be acknowledged as one of the critical elements because they offer strong indications of how people prefer to use the public spaces and what types of design will work toward or against such preferences.

While a single and symbolic structure such as the glazed tile gate commonly seen in many Chinatowns conveniently displays an ethnic image that helps to identify the neighborhood, this redesign research aims to go beyond such a level and to restore the charm of Asian cultures in greater depth that penetrates into the daily life, work and fun of people, no matter what their ethnic backgrounds are. Therefore as stated in the design principles, the identified cultural elements should be used to enhance functionalities wherever possible in addition to improving the aesthetics of the public space system.

*History*

Although ethnic culture plays an important role in reinforcing the public realms of minority communities, it is the neighborhood history which documents the adaptive evolution of the immigrant communities that adds the essential elements to the sense of place. Celebrating the history of the neighborhood encourages people living in this place to take pride of their predecessors and carry forward their cause into the future. It also offers valuable educational opportunities for outsiders to understand the essence of the community through exposures to its historic
heritage. To some extent, a more holistic understanding of an unfamiliar place will give a visitor greater certainty in their experience and make them feel more included in such a place which otherwise might appear to be irrelevant or impersonal.

Various types of historic elements, such as neighborhood celebrities and anecdotes, architectures, traces of geographical evolution, and existence of renowned community organizations can be highlighted in the neighborhood design in creative ways. For example, stories can be told through paintings, sculptures, or inscriptions on monuments; interpretations signs can be installed for a better appreciation of historic buildings and structures; art works depicting how the neighborhood has changed over time can be displayed to satisfy people’s curiosity about the past and incite their imagination of the future of this place. Way-finding signs and characteristic nameplates can help improve the visibility of community organizations and promote communications.

**Nature**

While cultural and social sustainability is one of the major goals to achieve through the redesign of Chinatown’s public spaces, increasing the environmental sustainability in the dense downtown neighborhood will add more vivid color to the notion of a greener Chinatown. Natural elements such as plants, water, and rocks can appear in different forms and be integrated into various spaces like parks, sidewalks, and buildings.
The selection of natural elements could also enhance the social value of the minority community by taking into account the cultural preferences of people who will be in the closest and most frequent contact with the environment, which based on earlier field research are the local Chinese residents and workers. Plants like willow trees, water lilies, and chrysanthemums, as well as the textures of pebble, wood, rock, and flowing water, are universally appreciated in Chinese culture. With the right combination, nature in the neighborhood will not only be seen, but also be touched, smelled, and heard throughout changing seasons of the year.

Activities

A public space system in Chinatown empowered by the charm of Chinese culture, the flavor of the neighborhood history and the touch of nature will offer endless possibilities for generating diverse programs and activities, which in turn further enrich and complete the cycle of sustainability within the system.

While activities in a good public space system are expected to evolve by themselves over time, some of them can be identified and embedded in the design as catalysts for positive change. Upon the overlying of different elements, different types of activities emerge. For instance, educational activities and seasonal events happen where history is combined with culture; people come together to celebrate the change of seasons and engage in active recreation when cultural atmosphere is embellished by nature; in the core of the overlying where history, culture and nature
Come together lies the daily socializations in the neighborhood which happen in the least deliberate and yet the most indispensable manner that permeates everyone’s experience of the place. Other types of activities such as art exhibition, outdoor vendors, horticulture, and passive recreation will also find their breeding grounds in various dimensions and scales throughout the neighborhood.

**Redesign Scheme**

Given the fact that Asian people have very unique preferences for when and whether direct sunshine is desirable, a shadow analysis of the neighborhood needs to be conducted before developing the redesign proposal in order to identify areas suitable, with or without additional improvements, for potential activities that require different sunlight intensity throughout the day and the seasons.

**Shadow Analysis**

The shadow distributions in the neighborhood for both summertime and wintertime were simulated in Google SketchUp (see Figure 7.2 and 7.3). The behavioral patterns summarized through field observations and public interviews were that in summertime many people seek early morning sunshine when it’s still cool outside for exercises and then highly prefer shaded areas throughout the rest of the day to stay away from the heat; in wintertime while warm areas with sunshine are generally appreciated throughout the day, places with scattered shadows are more attractive for afternoon activities.
While it’s challenging for a dense downtown neighborhood like Chinatown to have adequate daily sunlight throughout the winter, the street layout in the Main Street District enabled a few well-lit places at both the Chinatown Gate area and the street space along Harrison Ave (see Figure 7.2).

As shown above in Figure 7.3, Greenway Chinatown Park and the Plaza have the best early morning sunlight condition, while part of Harrison Ave receives morning sunlight too. During early afternoon hours these locations are partly shaded by surrounding buildings and suitable for recreational activities as well. However the
lack of shade during midday hot hours made these spaces daunting for any substantial social activities.

**SUMMERTIME**

6:30am
areas with early morning sunlight suitable for morning exercises and passive recreation

12:30pm
midday lack of shade on major pedestrian connection and plaza

15:30pm
ever afternoon partly shaded area relieved from heat for recreational activities

Figure 7.3 Shadow Analysis: Summertime
Data source: Google Earth
The shadow analysis indicates that the Chinatown Park area and the Harrison Avenue corridor have the most desirable illumination conditions to accommodate the needs of varied activities throughout days and seasons. Therefore special consideration should be given to these areas in the redesign proposal to maximize their utilization efficiency.

**Network Design**

The redesign proposal attempts to restructure Chinatown’s public space system through enhancing its connectivity with the overall public space system, partially improving its established parks, establishing new destinations, and improving internal and external circulation while presenting a stronger community image to nearby downtown districts.

As shown in the site master plan on the next page, park improvements are proposed for Greenway Chinatown Park, Chinatown Plaza, the Chinatown Gate area, and Oxford Playground in order to address present issues of inadequate park functionalities. Instead of overthrowing existing designs of these parks, the proposed improvements will try to boost the park spaces with minimum but targeted upgrades that not only accommodate desired uses but also minimize capital and maintenance costs. While some potential issues have been identified during the field investigations in the newly renovated Mary Soo Hoo Park, no specific recommendations will be made at this moment by the author due to the fact that
Figure 7.4 Chinatown Main Street District public space system – site plan
any new park needs a certain time period to allow possible adaptive uses by its patrons. It’s just like the way that a concrete pad underneath a freeway overpass in Beijing was transformed into a YangGe (a traditional Chinese dance) dancing pool over time (Hou 2010), only after a “test drive” can true issues be revealed and addressed in the newly designed Mary Soo Hoo Park.

Essex Street will be transformed into a green corridor that visually connects the Rose Kennedy Greenway and Boston Common while functionally improving the pedestrian experience through this transitional section of the overall public space network. In addition, new design improvements will help strengthen the community image along three edges of the Main Street District, namely Essex St, Washington St, and Kneeland St where new and higher intensity developments have chronically weakened the neighborhood identity.

Internally, pedestrian circulation and visual qualities along Harrison Avenue and Beach Street, two of the most prominent streets in the neighborhood, are improved with more street trees and sidewalk amenities. The new pocket park at the intersection of Essex Street and Harrison Avenue, also known as Phillip Square, provides additional recreational space within the neighborhood while at the same time enhancing the visual connection between Chinatown and Downtown. In addition to main corridor improvements, adaptive upgrades are recommended for
Tyler Street and Knapp Street to help address space needs generated by neighborhood activities

- **Park Improvements: Greenway Chinatown Park**

The Rose Kennedy Greenway Chinatown Park, designed to be a linear oasis with elements drawn from Asian culture has turned out to become an “unsafe place” to hang out, according to several interviewees, because of increasing drug dealing activities and presence of the homeless. The root of such problem, as identified in field reconnaissance, is the lack of recreational attractions and therefore the lack of regular visitation and activity by park users.

![Figure 7.5 120 Kingston Street new housing development](Image source: Draft Project Impact Report by Hudson Group North America LLC)

However, this situation is likely to be changed by a new housing development on 120 Kingston Street immediately adjacent to the park. A 26-story building with a total of 180 residential units, street-level retail and underground parking will be constructed on this site, with its ground-level public terrace directly connecting to the Greenway Chinatown Park (see Figure 7.5). Although pedestrian activities are
anticipated to grow significantly, which will drive away negative park uses, the long-term resulting impacts on the Chinatown Park were deemed “detrimental” during public interviews as people fear the new development will not only intangibly privatize the linear park but also weaken the cultural image of Chinatown’s gateway area.

To mitigate the potential impairing impacts, therefore, the redesign of the Greenway Chinatown Park should prioritize the enhancement of the park’s cultural traits through integrating more conspicuous cultural elements and features and introducing activities that have stronger cultural implications but also are engaging to diverse populations (see Figure 7.6).
Two of the most prominent Chinese cultural symbols, namely the Auspicious Cloud and the Chinese Knot – both of which symbolize joy and harmony – can be used to enrich the Greenway Chinatown Park. The delightful auspicious cloud pattern, if imprinted on existing surfaces and structures such as the red gate, will make the park a more attractive destination. The Chinese Knot, with its unique woven pattern, makes an ideal template for a backrest, which is partially what the park needs to improve the comfort and use of its linear benches. Additionally, improvements like adding wooden surface to the stone benches can be considered as well. Improved seating condition will bring back and better serve both active uses and passive activities such as enjoying the landscaping in this place.

Another feature that can introduce more active uses to the linear park space is a pebble path. Foot massage on pebbles has been considered to be of significant help to a healthy body in traditional Chinese medicine because the acupoints concentrated on soles receive beneficial stimulation from the pebble surface. Pebble paths are widely seen in community

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Figure 7.7 Auspicious Cloud (left) and Chinese Knot (right) Image source: http://www.nipic.com

Figure 7.8 People exercising on pebble path Image source: http://www.luoding.gov.cn/
parks in China, which usually attract many local residents, especially the elderly, to come and exercise. The installation of a pebble path in the Greenway Chinatown Park will offer an opportunity for increased use of the linear park space as people stroll across the corridor. It will not only bring health benefits to residents and promote healthy lifestyles, but also increase interpersonal communications among people sharing such lifestyle.

- **Park Improvements: Chinatown Plaza**
  
  As a more active part of the Greenway Chinatown Park, Chinatown Plaza has successfully hosted many daily recreational activities and seasonal events. The major issues unveiled during public outreach include lack of shade, inadequate seating, and a strong desire for a pavilion structure. The recommended improvement in the Chinatown Plaza is to install a long covered corridor in a traditional Chinese architectural style (see Figure 7.9).

  Such a structure, on one hand, will provide shade and shelter in summer and raining seasons, while on the other hand will serve as a pavilion with additional seating which is capable of accommodating activities that prefer more enclosed spaces, such as Chinese opera performances.
While the design intention of the covered corridor doesn’t have to deliberately favor authentic Chinese architecture, it is recommended to adopt a more traditional architectural style because that is what has received the highest degree of cultural and social identity among the public interviewees.

![Figure 7.9 Simulation of Chinatown Plaza with a long corridor](image)

Given that the plaza is the largest open space in the neighborhood that will still serve as the primary venue for seasonal celebrations, the covered corridor should be placed along the edge of the plaza rather than taking up the entire center. During special occasions when more shaded areas are desired in the center of the plaza, the covered corridor can provide structural support and allow the installation of temporary shade structures attached to it.
**Park Improvements: Chinatown Gate Area**

The area around the Chinatown Gate is the most visited place in the neighborhood. However a close observation indicated that other than people passing by, strolling around or visitors taking pictures in front of the Gate, there is barely any entertaining activity that draws people together in such an ample space.

Yet there’s actually an excellent opportunity for potential public engagement that has been overlooked. Right in front of the Chinatown Gate there is a section of pavement patterned after a traditional Chinese chessboard\(^3\). Despite the fact that this chessboard is meticulously designed to incorporate a square within a circle pattern that symbolizes heaven and earth in Chinese culture, and a “river” running...
across the board depicting a map of Boston focused on Chinatown, people observed to be hanging around here hardly have paid any attention to the gray and red pavement on the ground.

Therefore, the design improvement recommended for this section of the Chinatown Park is to “complete” and activate the chessboard with large, movable Chinese chess pieces (see Figure 7.10). As mentioned earlier in the site assessment analysis, playing Chinese chess is the most popular activity in the Chinatown Park. The placement of these large chess pieces on the empty chessboard offers a much bigger stage for those chess players enjoying the spotlight and attention, while at the same time engages more audiences inclusively, such as pedestrians and visitors. Furthermore, the active use of this area will likely make the meaningful design of the chessboard more widely appreciated and hence highlight the cultural implication and neighborhood history embodied in the design.

- **Park Improvements: Oxford Place Playground**

  In consideration of residents’ needs for more exercising space and facilities, Oxford Place, largely unused at present, should be installed with simple outdoor fitness equipment that are suitable for mild daily exercises. Additionally, a Ping-Pong table, which is said to be desired by many residents during the public interviews, can also be fit into the space (see Figure 7.11).

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4 More detail of the symbolism and meaning of the park's design at [http://www.crja.com/parks/chinatown.html](http://www.crja.com/parks/chinatown.html)
One thing to note is that Oxford Place is closely adjacent to residential units and is used as an entrance passage to those units. Any improvement, therefore, shouldn’t block residents’ way in and out of their homes. Reasonable time restrictions can also be applied to the use of the facilities to prevent noise disturbance to the nearby residents.

- **New Destination: Philip Square**

  The prior neighborhood evaluation indicated that while most of the public spaces cluster in the east side of the research area, in the middle of the Main Street District, especially where it intersects with the Midtown cultural district, there is a lack of place identity that has weakened the neighborhood image. Based on field reconnaissance, the author identified the intersection of Essex Street and Harrison Avenue, which is called Philip Square even though it is neither functioning nor
recognizable as a square, to be an ideal location for a new park destination. Traffic flow at the intersection needs to be reconfigured to remove the traffic island and extend the sidewalk eastward to provide sufficient open space (see Figure 7.12).

The vision for the new Philip Square is anchored by a big mature willow tree that adds greenery to the concrete surroundings and provides adequate shading to the open square (see Figure 7.13). The willow tree is deeply favored by the Asian population because of its lithe twigs and graceful posture. A delightful grown willow tree in the middle of a dense downtown neighborhood will serve as a powerful visual landmark and an explicit rendezvous place where people will refer to as “under the Philip willow”.5

Accompanying the willow tree, a simple pavilion structure can be installed to better define the open space while providing shelter and seating for people coming to enjoy the setting. Further down the square, an active fountain, whose design was

5 In downtown areas when the growing condition of willow trees might be constrained, other trees with similar appearances and visual attractiveness can be used as a replacement.
inspired by traditional blue and white porcelain, can bring a fresh sensation to the neighborhood. Flowing water echoes with the water feature in the Greenway Chinatown Park and invites people to come in and play with water spray during active seasons, while in winter time the fountain structures present themselves as a beautiful cultural display or sculpture group in the square that become another memorable sight spot in Chinatown.

The successful establishment of the new Philip Square will create a lively hinge block between Chinatown and the Midtown cultural district. It will also serve as an intermediate oasis on the connecting channel between the Rose Kennedy Greenway and Boston Common that offers people more diverse recreational choices.
Linear Corridor Upgrade: Essex Street Green Corridor

As the frontline where Chinatown Main Street District meets the rest of the downtown areas, as well as the direct pedestrian passage between Rose Kennedy Greenway and Boston Common, Essex Street’s role as a connecting ribbon should be enriched with increased greenery and bountiful cultural displays (see Figure 7.14).

By narrowing on-street parking spaces, the present right-of-way width along Essex Street would allow a widened sidewalk on the Chinatown side, which would mitigate the oppressive building frontage and greatly improve the pedestrian environment. Although constrained by sidewalk width, there is also room for street trees on both sides of Essex Street and maidenhair trees are recommended for use because of their popularity among Asian cultures and their natural compact shape which is ideal for narrow urban sidewalks. The changing color of maidenhair tree
leaves through different seasons will also create an appealing visual corridor year round.

New street lamps in traditional Chinese styles are recommended for Essex Street to not only improve the lighting condition along the corridor after dark but also territorially express the cultural attributes of the historic Chinatown neighborhood. These street lamps can also function as vehicles that support other cultural and art display, such as artistic posters, festival decorative lanterns, or hanging plants, etc.

- **Linear Corridor Upgrade: Enhancing the Edges**

Other edges of the Main Street District, including Washington Street that faces the downtown commercial area and Kneeland Street that faces Tufts Medical School district, can also be enhanced by new street lamps that are designed with cultural characteristics.

As shown in Figure 7.15, antique looking street lamps bring a cultural flavor which has gradually faded back to the streets, and invite people to explore the

Figure 7.15 Cultural “makeup” on Washington Street
neighborhood with curiosity. Art pieces generated through neighborhood events can be enjoyed by broader audiences when exhibited on the multifunctional lamp posts. Educational or other marketing materials can also be displayed using these street features to create a more immersive learning and communication experience. Additionally, planters can be hung from the street lamp posts to add more liveliness to the busy sidewalks.

- **Linear Corridor Upgrade: Harrison Avenue and Beach Street**

  Figure 7.16 Harrison Avenue with added pedestrian amenities

Harrison Avenue and Beach Street are the internal circulation arteries of the Main Street District, and site evaluation told us that there are substantial needs for more street amenities along these major pedestrian connections. For Harrison Avenue, willow trees should be planted on wide sidewalks to create a consistent
visual channel all the way to Philip Square while providing shaded sidewalks desired by pedestrians. Wooden benches need to be installed at different locations along both streets to offer people in need, such as the elderly, accessible resting places. At the intersection of Harrison Avenue and Beach Street where local residents regularly stop and catch up with each other, more benches can be installed to foster the formation of an informal gathering and spectating space in the center of the neighborhood and further stimulate social interactions among public space users.

- **Adaptive Street Spaces: Tyler Street and Knapp Street**

  The uniquely compact streetscape in the neighborhood’s historic streets such as Tyler Street makes it challenging for extensive improvements. However, the sidewalk can still be used innovatively to adapt to limited spaces and address people’s needs. For example, empty spaces in front of storefronts can be used for bike parking or newspaper stands. They are also suitable for installing benches for customers or restaurant workers (see Figure 7.17).

  Alleys like Knapp Street, on the other hand, should be upgraded to allow better uses by pedestrians because it currently serves as a pedestrian shortcut through
different sections of the Chinatown commercial district yet fails to provide a safe and walkable environment (see Figure 7.18). Possible upgrades include setting up navigation signs to provide better directions, and changing Knapp Street into a woonerf road with stamped pavement indicating shared space between pedestrian and vehicular uses. Other active uses such as farmer’s market or outdoor art exhibits can also be introduced in the alley space (see Figure 7.19).

Figure 7.18 Potential woonerf street in the alley

Figure 7.19 Unique pavement and creative activities suitable for alley space
Funding Resources

No matter how stunning the designs are, the fundamental question is always about how to finance the projects? Generally, there are two types of funds for parks and gardens: public funds from city, state, and federal sources and private funds from individual donors, public-private organizations, foundations, and businesses (Miller 2009). While public funding for many urban parks is on the decline, innovative solutions should be devised to help finance possible improvements in Chinatown’s public spaces.

For example, a Business Improvement District can be established for Chinatown's Main Street District in order to underwrite quality-of-life improvements in this area that are not being provided by the city government. Funding in this case will come from property owners in the district, as an assessment on the basis of square footage, and be used towards improvements that would in turn benefit the businesses and property owners.

Private funding, on the other hand, from individual donors or local foundations committed to the betterment of communities is another possible source of financial
supports. Many of the early residents in Chinatown who benefited from the transitional supports provided by the community can become potential donors, and most often their emotional and social connections to the neighborhood cause and validate their caring for the wellbeing of the community\textsuperscript{6}. There are many ways to reach out to those individual donors such as direct outreach, private meetings, neighborhood meetings, mailings, websites, newsletters and other social media, and special donor events. Various community organizations in Chinatown should play a major role in such processes with their social network and resources.

Another effective way to attract private funding is to offer naming opportunities because people love to put their names on buildings and other elements of the environment (Miller 2009). Items like plaques on benches, symbols of welcome, engraved paving stones or sculptures, etc. can be especially meaningful for donors.

This “naming” tactic can be applied at a much larger scale. The successful construction of the “Knowing the Spring” courtyard, a classic Chinese garden in Seattle’s Chinatown, used a $1.2 million donation from Seattle’s Chinese sister city Chongqing, whose contribution to the project was highly acknowledged\textsuperscript{7}. While China looks to promote its historic and cultural heritage worldwide today, there are great potential for Boston, a historic city well-known in China, to look for

\textsuperscript{6} Indicated by one interviewee who is a long term resident of Chinatown

\textsuperscript{7} More details at http://www.seattlechinesegarden.org/
international partnerships with major Chinese cities that would contribute similarly to the revitalization of its Chinatown.

When soliciting private funding, it is important to appeal to the imagination. Try to persuade potential donors with pictures of successes, for example documenting “before” snapshots of existing conditions in contrast with “after” images of what you hope to do with the place. People will have better sense of ownership if they see a tangible vision of what they are asked to provide support for.

Community Collaboration

An ongoing community involvement and collaboration is the key to realize any of the visions proposed in this research. First of all, to make this community grow and thrive, instead of being constantly encroached upon, it is crucial that people in the neighborhood come forward and play a significant role in the endeavor. Their contributions, which are not necessarily monetary, can come in the form of donated goods and services or volunteer labor (PPS 2000).

This is especially important when it comes to lowering the improvement costs and sustaining maintenance of the public spaces. Public landscapes cost money and must be maintained. Without ongoing care, new neighborhood parks will deteriorate and a restored one will revert to its previous condition, which will disappoint people and ultimately drive away hope for these places. However, a low-cost maintenance program can be achieved if the community can work out a collaboration plan with its
merchants, property owners, and corporations to increase their area of concern around their stores and buildings and to consciously maintain their extended “zone of benefit”.

Other the other hand, collaborations among the community, various non-profit organizations and the City should be further strengthened through creative partnerships (PPS). With careful planning and genuine interest in residents and community issues, these partnerships will turn public spaces into something more than beautiful landscaping. They will become the seeding grounds for the neighborhood where people come together to help each other and will truly achieve their potential as civic centers of the community.

**Cultural Competency**

During the thesis research, a critical issue caught the attention of the author. Although the Rose Kennedy Greenway Chinatown Park, as well as the newly renovated Mary Soo Hoo Park, have undergone extensive planning and design processes that involved tangible public outreach components, the design outcomes don’t always work toward the community’s vision. It is undeniable that the design of the Greenway Chinatown Parks strived to embody Chinese cultural elements in multiple ways, yet what the public interviews (for this thesis research) of people who use the parks revealed that many local residents with Chinese cultural background didn’t fully appreciate those abstract arts.
For example, it’s been mentioned a few times that the bamboo screen structures in the linear park space reminded people of scaffolds used in construction, which make people feel unsafe and the space look unfriendly (see Figure 8.1). Similar stories happened in New York City as well. Rues (Ruta graveolens) planted at the Conservatory Garden located in the Central Park were repeatedly stolen. Why? Because the nearby East Harlem community traditionally uses rue as a disinfectant to keep away evil spirits and it is much more powerful if stolen from someone else’s garden (Miller 2009).

Such phenomena raise the question: how could planners make decisions that can withstand the test of culture and traditions in minority communities? The answer lies within the issue of developing the cultural competency of planning professionals. Culture competency refers to the range of awareness, beliefs, knowledge, skills, behaviors, and professional practice that will assist in planning for, in, and with “multiple publics” (Agyeman and Erickson, 2012). Improved cultural competency allows planners to engage effectively with communities that possess unique cultural values and to detect subtle preferences out of those values that are not obvious but of significance to the community. It can also help achieve better
solutions in planning issues that span multiple communities in that planners are more capable of understanding cultural differences, working in cross-cultural situations, and facilitating intercultural dialogues (Young 1990, Agyeman and Ericson 2012).

In crafting culturally sensitive urban designs, urban designers must immerse themselves into a cultural milieu and make every attempt to understand and respect its nuances (Kumar 2004, p.6). To do this, planners and designers must be open-minded and inquisitive throughout the planning process and consciously use all available resources to explore planning outcomes. This should not be a single-pass process, but rather an iterative process with the community, with constant exchange of feedback. If we take such an approach for future planning and design, and seek to understand how land use relates to and affects people’s lives and the quality of their environment, we will hopefully change the ad-hoc, reactive and marginalized way in which public open spaces are often planned. We will be able to incorporate changes in a planned and proactive way that leads to a “greener” and more sustainable landscape – environmentally, socially and culturally.

~ end ~
### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Residency</th>
<th>1. How familiar and in what way do you know about Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood?</th>
<th>2. How often and for what kind of purpose do you use Chinatown’s public spaces, such as parks, plaza, street corners, and sidewalks?</th>
<th>3. What do you think about Chinatown’s public space system in terms of satisfying your needs and other users’ needs? (Or how much do you enjoy it or feel satisfied when using the public space?)</th>
<th>4. Do you think the existing public space system in Chinatown helps enhance the characteristics of Chinese culture and community cohesion in the neighborhood? Why or why not?</th>
<th>5. How do you think the public space system in Boston’s Chinatown should be improved?</th>
<th>6. Is there any other comment or thought that you would like to share?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62 and above</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Chinatown Plaza</td>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>I’ve been living in Chinatown for more than 30 years. I ended up working here after I came to the U.S. (from China). I know the neighborhood pretty well.</td>
<td>I spend some time almost every day in the parks. I like playing (Chinese) chess with others here. Sometimes I just came out for air. I always use the sidewalks to get around (in the neighborhood). I like walking around and visiting people I know.</td>
<td>The parks are okay. In the past we didn’t have table and chair to play chess, (so we played chess) on the ground. Now they put some (picnic) tables. But they are not comfortable, (the chairs are) empty on the back, (you) get tired sitting there shortly. In summer we don’t hang out here (because there is) nowhere to hide from the sun.</td>
<td>(The community is) much less &quot;Chinese&quot; now than it was in the past. It was a more comfortable place for neighbors to hang out. (But) now there are too many cars, (and) the ambience reminds people less about Chinese culture.</td>
<td>(Create) more comfortable places to sit. (Provide) more shaded areas where people can use in summers.</td>
<td>No.</td>
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<td>51 - 61</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Street, sitting on storefront steps</td>
<td>Near Chinatown</td>
<td>I work in the restaurant, and I live near here too. I think I know Chinatown well.</td>
<td>I go to the parks after work,(I have) a few friends who usually get together and chat, or watch people play chess. I speak little English (so I feel) more comfortable hanging out with other Chinese in the parks. I use the street a lot too, sometimes just to have a break, like right now.</td>
<td>(It’s) hard to say. (I heard) some of my friends complaining about the parks, (they said) the trees are too small to provide shade (and that) they can’t find good place to play chess and other games. I think the Chinatown park is too noisy (because of) the highway nearby. I like doing Tai Chi in the morning but it’s hard to find a quiet place (for it).</td>
<td>Not really. I mean the Chinatown Gate area looks like (China) but the rest (of the neighborhood) looks plain. I think during festivals (the neighborhood) feels more ethnic because there are more authentic cultural things.</td>
<td>Maybe (plant) some trees. It’ll be good to have places not too close to main traffics. People also need place to exercise, especially (people) at my age. I think (we should have) place to sit along the streets, I like to sit here because (this way) it’s easy to run into people I know and have a quick talk.</td>
<td>No.</td>
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<td>51 - 61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Chinatown Park</td>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>I know this place very well. I live here.</td>
<td>Sidewalks? I use them every day when going to supermarket or just taking a walk after each meal. I come to Chinatown Park too, but don't usually stay there long because sometimes I can't find place to sit and rest. I don't like sit on stones so I just walk around. I don't usually go to that part (the linear Greenway Park) because I heard that people use drugs there.</td>
<td>One thing (I need) is a place to exercise, I mean except walking around. Before I came to the U.S. I used to spend a lot time exercising at the outdoor community gym, (the ones that have) some simple exercising equipment. But here they don't have that. Also I like (traditional Chinese) fan dance, I know some other sisters living here also want to do that. But there's no ideal place for that. (Ask: What kind of place do you prefer?) You know places with some shielding and not too loud.</td>
<td>Oh I think except this area (pointing at the Chinatown Gate area), not too many things are really Chinese.</td>
<td>Have better places for women. The parks are always dominated by men, but we need place to relax too. I think we also need better seating, (the ones that are) not too cold to sit, maybe movable ones so we can sit together. Oh and maybe more things related to Chinese culture? I think many immigrants live here miss what they remembered in China, like me.</td>
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<td>62 and above</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Chinatown Plaza</td>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>I can't say I know a lot. I've lived here for 7 years though. I know a lot people here indeed.</td>
<td>(I used them) a lot, probably every day. I like to get out and walk around, but you know it's very dirty on the streets, so I usually try to spend more time in the parks. You know aged people need more exercise.</td>
<td>I think the streets are too dirty, (it makes people) feel unpleasant. And I always wonder why there are no trees. It's very hot to walk on the street in summer time (when there's no place) to hide from the sun. Also I think there should be more places to sit, (we have) many elderly people here, we need to take some rest when walking around. I think we also should have more interesting things to do for elderly people, for them to exercise and have fun. Sometimes I feel bored just sit here in the park.</td>
<td>I mean to some extent yes. The Chinatown Gate looks nice, a lot people hang out here. I think they also tried to do something there (pointing at Mary Soo Hoo Park). I don't know I like things that look historical; maybe we need more of those.</td>
<td>Plant some trees, (it will make) huge difference. Chinese people appreciate plants. And clean the streets and sidewalk maybe put some chairs here and there so we can sit.</td>
<td>No.</td>
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<td>18 - 28</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Street Near Chinatown</td>
<td>I'm pretty familiar with Chinatown. I live here, on the other side of the I use the streets the most, I usually walk to work. I don't come to parks that often. (Why?) I guess it's because Well it's hard to say. For me I play basketball occasionally, I mean we have a field here but I know it's hard to have more space for that.</td>
<td>I don't think the neighborhood has enough ethnic attributes. I think we are losing them quickly, that's what my parents told me Have better gathering place maybe? I mean for all kinds of people to enjoy the place. Also as we just talked</td>
<td>Have better gathering place maybe? I mean for all kinds of people to enjoy the place. Also as we just talked</td>
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<td>Turnpike. But I work in this area.</td>
<td>there's not many interesting things going on? I don't know, I feel like they are for tourist.</td>
<td>My friends sometimes complain about not being able to find good outdoor space to just hang out, talk and have fun. I think that's true too.</td>
<td>too. They emigrated here from China. The neighborhood now is getting more and more diverse, which isn't a bad thing in my opinion, but it's a shame for a community that bears another culture.</td>
<td>about, I think more cultural elements would definitely do the community good. People need things to remind them their roots. It's a cultural identity thing.</td>
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<td>29 - 39 F Street Other neighborhoods</td>
<td>I'm not really familiar with Chinatown. I come here for grocery shopping, sometimes go to restaurants with my family. You can't find better Chinese food elsewhere.</td>
<td>I usually would come here once a week to do some shopping. And I also like the restaurants here, I come with my family a few times a month. Sometimes we stop by the parks, but not for very long. The streets are very dirty, I usually would try to avoid walking too much, I mean we only stay here for a short time.</td>
<td>I don't know how to answer. My impression is that the streets need to be cleaned. I mean this is not what a Chinese city would look like, at least not where I came from. The place looks depressing with dirty roads, and (it has) too much concrete, not enough greenery. I can't imagine living here, I don't know how the residents feel about that.</td>
<td>Oh no. I tried to let my daughter learn more about Chinese culture when I brought her here, you know kids born here don't have enough contact with other cultures. But I found it difficult here, because there aren't many things related to Chinese culture. We went to other Chinatowns in other cities like New York and Seattle; they have a richer display of what Chinese culture really looks like.</td>
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<td>29 - 39 M Chinatown Park Other neighborhoods</td>
<td>I don't think I know Chinatown very well, I work nearby but I don't usually spend a lot time here.</td>
<td>I came to the restaurants here, so I guess I use the sidewalks. Sometimes I would hang out here in the park for a little bit, just to relax from my work, but normally I don't come here on weekends, I mean there's not a lot things for fun during weekends anyway.</td>
<td>I have a neutral feeling I guess, not particularly disappointed or really excited about it. I might have a different opinion if I live here or something.</td>
<td>Make it more ethnically and culturally rich I think, so it becomes more attractive.</td>
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<td>29 - 39 M Chinatown Park Other neighborhoods</td>
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<td>I came to the restaurants here, so I guess I use the sidewalks. Sometimes I would hang out here in the park for a little bit, just to relax from my work, but normally I don't come here on weekends, I mean there's not a lot things for fun during weekends anyway.</td>
<td>I have a neutral feeling I guess, not particularly disappointed or really excited about it. I might have a different opinion if I live here or something.</td>
<td>Well I haven't been to China and I don't know the real Chinese culture, though I guess things like the Chinatown Gate represent the traditional architectural forms in China. I like the ambience created by cultural symbols, like when you go to an Italian Town or a Korean Town. It offers a cultural break from your own social circles, which is good. I think Chinatown has that quality, but perhaps it can do better because the streets are</td>
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<td>29 - 39 M Chinatown Park Other neighborhoods</td>
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<td>I came to the restaurants here, so I guess I use the sidewalks. Sometimes I would hang out here in the park for a little bit, just to relax from my work, but normally I don't come here on weekends, I mean there's not a lot things for fun during weekends anyway.</td>
<td>I have a neutral feeling I guess, not particularly disappointed or really excited about it. I might have a different opinion if I live here or something.</td>
<td>I can't think of specific suggestions. I'd say maybe more activities or entertaining programs would invite more people to use the parks more?</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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<td>Familiarity</td>
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<td>40 - 50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mary Soo Hoo Park</td>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>(I know the community) pretty well. I moved here in 2006, (I've been living here) for a while.</td>
<td>I used to have a small business here, but I sold it. I used to walk every day, to my store or to the supermarkets. I had a car accident three years ago and (I'm) still recovering from it. I walk much less now because I get tired easily. Now I exercise a little bit in the parks, pretty much just walk around and talk to people.</td>
<td>Where I came from in China, the traditional buildings and decorative patterns are much more beautiful than here. I don't feel a strong &quot;China flavor&quot; here, though it's called Chinatown. More and more Chinese are moving out of here nowadays.</td>
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<td>29 - 39</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Chinatown Plaza</td>
<td>Other neighborhoods</td>
<td>Not very familiar. I come here occasionally.</td>
<td>Not very often I would say. I probably use the sidewalk more often; I mean we usually go to the restaurants here. My daughter sometimes wanted to go to the parks, but I didn't find it interesting for us (the parents). We do come here during spring festivals. I love the performances here.</td>
<td>Well, we felt satisfied with the food here! But I do not like the untidiness of the streets. And the parks look good, I really want to enjoy it more. But you know often we felt quite incompatible here, it's not saying people are not welcoming, but I just don't like standing or sitting here without doing or watching anything.</td>
<td>My husband went to China once, maybe he knows better. But to me I hope the neighborhood could exhibit more of its true color. I want my kids to learn about another country or another culture; I mean this could be a good opportunity.</td>
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<td>18 - 28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Street</td>
<td>Other neighborhoods</td>
<td>I know where to find good food, other than that I don't know a lot about this place. I come here with Sometimes we would stop by the Chinatown park to relax. I like watching people taking pictures in front of the Chinatown Gate. I use sidewalk too of course.</td>
<td>I think the parks are fine. But back in China, the parks are much more bustling with many interesting things. I always saw people doing fan dance or sword dance in groups, it's such a fun thing to do.</td>
<td>To some extent I think yes. I saw that they are trying to preserve buildings that have some traditional Chinese characters, and I think the Chinatown Gate is well preserved and exhibited. But</td>
<td>Introduce more programs and activities that will showcase the China spirit, I think that's what will attract more people to this place.</td>
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<td>29-39</td>
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<td>Mary Soo Hoo Park</td>
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<td>I lived here for about 8 years and I recently moved away, but I still work here. (I'm) quite familiar with this place.</td>
<td>i come to the parks all the time, (for example) after work, in the morning or evenings, and during weekends. I usually come here for relax or walk around for exercises; sometimes (I) play Chinese chess too. And when there are performances or outdoor movies I come here too.</td>
<td>Now I moved away, I miss this place a lot. I have many friends here. But when I was still living here, I remember we used to &quot;fight&quot; for chess tables, it's quite popular here. Also we heard people talking about building a pavilion in the Chinatown park, (I think) a lot people want that, because in summer time (it's) too hot to be in the plaza, (there is) nowhere to hide. No one knows when the pavilion will be built.</td>
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<td>Chinatown Plaza</td>
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<td>I don't know all about it, but I think I'm familiar with the place. I've lived here for a couple years.</td>
<td>(I come to the) parks about three to four times a week, I mean there is not many places to go in the neighborhood. I come here to meet some friends in the neighborhood; sometimes I'll watch them playing chess. I walk on sidewalks all the time.</td>
<td>It's okay. I normally enjoy myself when I'm outside with people. In the past I was not happy about the empty plaza, but they installed tables and chairs here in 2008, now (it looks) much better, though I don't think we have enough of that. Also I've been waiting to see when the pavilion is built, they've been talking about it in the neighborhood for a long time but nothing happened. A pavilion will Some of the things here help with that. Like the Chinatown Gate, some traditional buildings. They recently put this giant ink painting here as a promotion too. The bamboos in the Chinatown park also look good, but those red tubes look like scaffold a lot. I think they are) trying to increase the cultural representations of the park, but they did wrong. (Those I don't think I can answer this question. Many people are trying to improve this place but the streets are still dirty. I think we need some street trees, also those restaurants should be responsible to the cleanliness of their storefront.</td>
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<td>Age 40 - 50</td>
<td>Gender M</td>
<td>Neighborhood Street</td>
<td>I know little about this place. I work nearby.</td>
<td>Maybe once or twice a week? I came here for lunch sometimes, that's it, so I think I use the sidewalks.</td>
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<td>Well I don’t have a strong opinion on this place. But my impression is that the streets need to be cleaned, well I mean this is not unique, other Chinatowns have similar problems. I remember New York’s Chinatown has very dirty streets too. I won’t say I enjoy walking here that much, but sometimes when I walked by the parks and saw something fun I think I enjoyed that. But I don’t usually find things that are so attractive. I mean I just come and go.</td>
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<td>This is hard to say, I don’t really know this place that much, or know Chinese culture you know. Well, I hope this place really represents Chinese culture because people can always enjoy something new, something different in their lives. I agree that when I come here I feel good, you know the feeling of immersed in something you’re not familiar with, and it can be exciting.</td>
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<td>Clean the streets? And perhaps introduce something that can involve more people. I know I would be happy to hang out a little more after eating at the restaurant if there are things that attract me.</td>
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