

Biographical Sketch



Singwei Ling is a fifth-year architecture student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Growing up in Nashville, Tennessee, Singwei has been exposed to many distinct cultures. When he entered his first year at the University of Tennessee and had his first exposure to architecture, he grew more aware and noticed the lack of diverse topics within the academic community. Throughout his undergraduate career, Singwei has explored the relationship between urban design, architecture, and intersectionality, specifically his own identity as a queer, Asian, second-generation immigrant. This complex set of identities has led to rich discussion, self-exploration, and evolving growth of opinions as well as new perspectives on architecture.

Alongside this current proposal, Singwei has researched the history of San Francisco's & Atlanta's beginnings of Chinatowns through an independent study course. He has also served as a teaching assistant for introductory representation and architectural history for both

architecture and non-architecture students. In addition, he is currently serving as the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) President for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville College of Architecture and Design. Outside of design, Singwei enjoys visiting parks, spending time with friends, and cooking.

These opportunities and experiences have aided in the formulation of Singwei's Aydelott proposal. In the application writing process and reflection analysis of the final paper, the Aydelott Travel Award has been beneficial in developing research skills. With a view towards graduate school to further his research career in urban design, with a special focus on issues of diversity & ethnicity.

Student:

Singwei Ling

Faculty Mentor:

Dr. Katherine J. Wheeler

Buildings/Sites:

1. Sing Chong Building | Architect: T. Patternson Ross & A.W. Burgen

San Francisco, California, United States

2. Binondo Church | Architect: Domingo de la Cruz Gonzalez

Manila, Philippines

3. Termini Train Station | Architect: Various (Salvatore Bianche,
Leo Calini, Eugerio Montuori, Massimo Castellazzi, Vasici Fadigatti,
Achille Pintonello, Annibale Vitellozzi)

Rome, Italy

4. Kimlau War Memorial | Architect: Poy G. Lee

Manhattan, New York, United States

Institution:

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, College of Architecture + Design

Introduction



Fig.1. Street view adjacent to Old Saint Mary's Cathedral & the Sing Chong Building on Grant Avenue, facing North. | San Francisco, California, 2023

"I am from there. I am from here. I am not there and I am not here..." written by the poet Mahmoud Darwish, who references back to his homeland of Palestine.¹ Darwish's quote is the framework for the start of my thought process for the Aydelott Travel Award. In the process of colonization, assimilation, and gentrification, these recurring themes create the framework of the proposal.

Having the opportunity to visit Chinatowns intentionally gave insight into the recurring trends of immigration, assimilation, and colonization. Each building and site has a relationship within their interactions with the rest of their respective built environments

acting at various scales, representations of architectural elements, and urban layouts. For example, the Binondo Church in Manila reveals a complex background of Asian & European relations rooted in Spanish colonization.

One of the best parts of my Aydelott travels was meeting new and old friends while staying in hostels. This led to other connections whether it was suggestions from locals or introducing my research to other travelers, gaining different perspectives of their experiences in Chinatowns. I had a preconceived perception of Chinatowns since I had only been to the one major Chinatown in the South. Unless it's a Chinatown in a major city, most ethnic enclaves conform to the suburbia of America - assimilating in the built environment of highways, strip malls, and parking lots. The four buildings & areas selected were due to their historical context and complex relationship of race, assimilation, and immigration:

- Sing Chong Building | Theme: Public spaces, gentrification
Architect: T. Patternson Ross & A.W. Burgen | San Francisco, California, USA
- Binondo Church | Theme: Historical preservation, gentrification
Architect: Domingo de la Cruz Gonzalez | Manila, Philippines
- Termini Railway Station | Theme: Generational assimilation, gentrification

Architect: Various (Salvatore Bianche, Leo Calini, Eugerio Montuori, Massimo Castellazzi, Vasici Fadigatti, Achille Pintonello, Annibale Vitellozzi) | Rome, Italy

- Kimlau War Memorial | Theme: Regional sub-ethnic enclaves, gentrification

Architect: Poy G. Lee | Manhattan, New York, USA

Sing Chong Building | Chinatown, San Francisco, California

Founded in 1848, San Francisco's Chinatown was the first Chinatown established in the United States. Although San Francisco was one city where Chinese immigrants settled in America, it wasn't the most welcoming city to the Chinese. Anti-Chinese sentiment had been exacerbated by the Treaty of Burlingame, which established a formal trading relationship with China and lifted immigration restrictions to the United States. In response to the influx of Chinese immigrants, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed, restricting any working-class laborers from entering. Upper-class Chinese merchants, teachers, and foreign diplomats were still allowed. These immigrants built a thriving community in San Francisco. The 1906 Great Earthquake and the resulting fire destroyed most of the original Chinatown, including important buildings and the public records of the population. The process of rebuilding resulted in a new architecture typology of Chinese-American architecture, specifically the use of the pagoda and other Chinese elements, the first product being the Sing Chong Building.



Fig.1. Sing Chong Building | Chinatown, San Francisco, California, 2023

The Sing Chong Building was designed by T. Patternson Ross & A.W. Burgen, two, white, American architects. It became an icon within Chinatown's streetscape after the 1906 Earthquake. Originally designed to bring tourism to the ethnic enclave in its early days, it grew to be a representation and precedent for "Chinese" architecture across the country. A traditional pagoda sits atop the building, mirroring its twin across the street, the Sing Fat Building. These two architectural symbols marked an "official" beginning to San Francisco's iconic Chinatown. Not only were these buildings an interpretation of what the Americans viewed as exotic, mysterious, and different, but they were an opportunity for the local Chinese population to truly absorb their American custom and traditions. The Sing Chong and Sing Fat buildings became a catalyst for

the rest of the modern-day ethnic enclave and served as wayfinding points to other main streets, attractions, and restaurants.



Fig.2. Dragon Gates | San Francisco, California, 2023

Located just two blocks South on Grant Ave from the Sing Chong Building are the elegant Dragon Gates. Gifted by Taiwan in 1969, the gates have become a physical manifestation of entering Chinatown from the commercial district. I walked through these gates several times throughout my two-week stay, admiring the threshold into the oldest Chinatown in the United States. In comparison to other gates around the world, the Dragon Gate is special in that it is placed between two buildings instead of in an open space. As it fits perfectly between the buildings, the gate blends into the environment as well as serves an ornate focal point.

Trinket shops line Grant Avenue past the gates, hosting ornate jewelry, refrigerator magnets, and silk wear. While wandering about along Grant Avenue, I spoke to some of the shop owners about the current effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Further down Grant Avenue near the boundary of Little Italy, a tea shop worker spoke about the previous tourism seasons before the global pandemic. Businesses ranging from restaurants, tea shops, and commercial stores had to close down as they struggled to keep up with the expensive rents of the Bay Area.

The pandemic had economic implications that impacted all generations of Chinatown, particularly the elderly and younger generations. Public spaces that aligned with COVID-19-friendly policies were difficult to navigate.



Fig.3. Chinatown Community Youth Center, Jensen Architects, interior gathering space and bright yellow facade facing Waverly Place| San Francisco, California, 2023

The Chinatown office of the CYCSF served as the main gathering space for the locals. Located one block over from Grant Avenue on Waverly Place, the CYCSF stood out along the street. A fully white facade with a bright yellow main entrance, it invites anyone to visit the space.

Both the Center and the Willie "Woo Woo" Wong Playground behind it were recently renovated by Jensen Architect & CMG Landscape Architects. The interior gathering space is flexible, providing meetings for the community in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English, particularly attracting both ends of the age spectrum. When I first visited, there was a Tenants' Association meeting happening, while the next day I happened upon a youth-focused day with children and teenagers doing a skills-based activity. Being able to speak to the Programs Manager gave me more insight into what the Community Youth Center does. They spoke about how the Center addresses a need for meeting places as there is a lack of public space within Chinatown, isolating youth, in particular. This isolation delays the development of social skills to communicate properly.



Fig.4. Portsmouth Square, lower level of professional gambling| San Francisco, California, 2023

Three blocks east of the Community Center and two blocks north of my hostel is Portsmouth Square. The square is a major gathering space for the Chinese community. It is the biggest public space in Chinatown, taking a full block in comparison to the Willie "Woo Woo" Wong Playground. Here, the older generation inhabits the public space, most of them fixed on their different games of gambling from the sound of fast-paced swipes of cards. There is an intricate social hierarchy of gambling within circles. The more intense fast paced games are on a lower level, while the public seating area above alongside the playground is less intense. Some people just sat on the benches or side walls, watching matches or staring off into the sky. There were a few people in bright yellow vests,

who were community ambassadors by the local city government. I was able to sit down and have a quick chat with one community ambassador who gave me more details on the effects of the pandemic. The Community Ambassador position was a response by the city government to help the local community feel at ease and slow down urban decay. These ambassadors did day patrols, acted as points of information for whomever, and checked in with businesses/organizations daily. The ambassador noted that Portsmouth Square was a place for the elders of the community to come out from their tight apartments and SROs(Single Room Occupancies) and socialize. Usually, they come at dawn to set up, play throughout the day, and clean up after themselves at dusk.



Fig.5. Exterior perspective view of central Ping Yuen Residence with a brand new mural, San Francisco, California, 2023

One of the many properties owned by the Chinatown Community Development Center is the Ping Yuen Building. On the corner of Stockton Street and Pacific Avenue, the otherwise ordinary structure stands out with a beautifully painted mural of past, present, and future generations of Chinatown residents. While not explicitly a single-room occupancy housing development, the Ping Yuen was originally a landmark public development for Asian-American families. During the 1970s, residents went on a rent strike due to severe neglect of the existing housing projects. Upon acquiring the property and assignment, the CCDC (Chinatown Community Development Center) updated the building with much-needed fixes and improved some of its infrastructure. The Chinatown Community Development Center has helped improve neglected residences across many properties, a majority of them being SROs. Reflecting back on the tight conditions that the current residents live in, public spaces such as Portsmouth Square and the Willie “Woo Woo” Playground are clearly essential to helping people connect with one another and strengthen the Asian community.



Fig.6. Rose Park Station, exterior and interior progression to train platforms | San Francisco, California, 2023

Two blocks south on the corner of Stockholm and Washington Street is the brand-new Chinatown Rose Pak Station for the T-line MUNI public transit system. There is some irony in that initially Chinese immigrants wanted to expand beyond Chinatown, but now the local community is perfectly fine in staying within the boundaries. The opening of the Rose Pak station in January 2023 meant more opportunities to connect Chinatown to the rest of the city, at least that was the original plan. A local guide, Erika Gee, spoke about the project's timeline, construction impact, and perception of the local community on the new station. The opening of the station brought new fears among the local population with rent price spikes being the most common concern. The new station is pristinely clean, with only just me or another rider walking down the halls eerily alone. The ride to the Rose Pak station was clean, quiet, and again, nearly empty. After looking up some initial statistics, the T-Line has had a ridership of 200-300 people per day since its opening.²

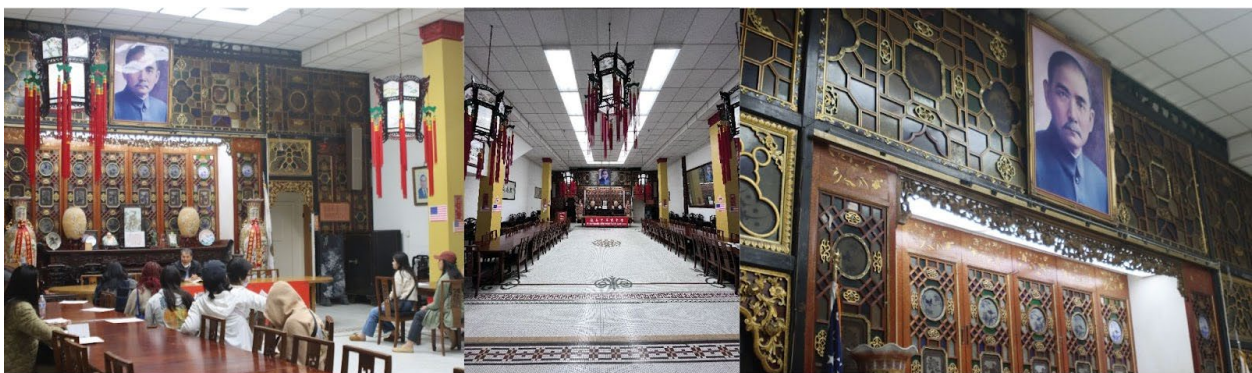


Fig.7. Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of America Headquarters, exterior & interior detailing | San Francisco, California, United States

One of the last locations I visited was the current and founding headquarters of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of America located one block south of the Rose Pak Station. This organization functioned as a parallel form of government within San Francisco's Chinatown. Being just as old, it provided Chinese immigrants with a range of services. including translation, relocation, and physical protection from assaults. It was amazing just looking at the detailed interiors of the headquarters, the antique Chinese screens, carvings, and other decorations stood out in the simplistic room.

Most of the current residents had never been in the headquarters and I was lucky enough to have the chance to access it with the assistance of a local businessman, David Wei. I was referred to Mr. Wei through the various museum staff I visited during the visit. The first time I met Mr. Wei at the Asian Art Museum, he gave me a personal tour of the exhibitions. Mr. Wei was giving another tour but this time alongside a group of high schoolers doing a mapping fellowship.



Fig.8. Early photo of Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of America Headquarters showing 1900s interior detailing which is still intact| San Francisco, California, United States

The figure above shows how eloquent the interior of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of America Headquarters is. With only some lighting fixture changes, the room relatively has barely changed in the past century. There is a clear organization in the placement of chairs and tables that gives the impression of a concise and hierarchical space. Simple in its layout, two long tables align along the left and right sides of the room. An antique screen that provides a special backdrop for photos. It has been slightly restored but has still the golden detailing in the panes. The head table has a bright red side of the organization's title both in English and Chinese. Even the chairs at the head table are intricately designed in an antique Chinese style. Those using the space are typically various officers from the Chinese Six "Companies" of San Francisco. Each company varies in their connection to provinces in China. Together, they collectively formed the CCBAA and acted as a form of local government for the Chinese immigrants.

Despite these difficulties, the Sing Chong, Sing Fat, Dragon Gate, and other architectural markers still define the area. As some of the first buildings that defined Americanized Chinese architecture, they remain important historical figures. As San Francisco tries to revitalize itself, Chinatown still lives as a breathing, beating organ within. Although the expensive living costs and ongoing gentrification, the efforts to keep the multitude of generations that have lived there are continuous.

Binondo Church | Manila, Philippines



Fig.1.Pasig River from Fort Santiago View | Manila, Philippines, 2023

Binondo is the historic center of Manila. It reflects the city's complex intersectional beginnings, including Spanish colonization and religious assimilation. The Spaniards first occupied the Philippines in the mid-1500s with Manila established in 1571. The district of Binondo was created in 1594 for Chinese Catholic converts inhabiting the island. Not too long after in 1596, Binondo Church was established by Dominican priests to convert indigenous Filipinos to the Catholic faith. "Intramuros" were the main settlements of the Spanish during their initial occupation in the 1500s. Translating from the Spanish "inside the walls", this historical area is now a museum of Spanish colonial architecture. Spanish colonizers first settled into "Intramuros" across the Pasig River in the Binondo area. A land grant for the area was given to Chinese merchants and traders by the Spanish to allow free trade

between the two groups. What evolved from colonization and trade led to a historic, multicultural space today - the world's oldest established Chinatown in 1594.

When I first walked into the area after getting off Manila's LRT (Light Rail Train) system, there was a familiar experience of chaos and busyness of traffic, with no clear hierarchy of both pedestrians and cars. It is a free-for-all in most South/Southeastern Asian countries, but unlike America, the riders are mostly on mopeds or motorcycles and will watch out for you. The first venture out was on a Sunday, which meant that the area was pretty empty in comparison to the rest of the week. Eventually, I made it to the "New" Binondo Chinatown Arch and made an immediate right to Quintin Paredes, another busy chaotic street with cars and jeepneys. After some exploring, I found the Binondo Church since it was the center point and oldest part of Manila's Chinatown.



Fig.2. Binondo Church from Plaza San Lorenzo | Manila, Philippines, 2023

The intricate lantern posts of Binondo emerge with golden dragons snaking around the post and the light coming out of their mouths. The lanterns adorned Quintin Paredes, inviting visitors to the central gathering point, Binondo Church. With its massive octagonal bell tower rising over the other businesses, Binondo Church stands out in a sea of Modernism. Fake windows are located on the face level of the bell tower, providing a footprint for the upper levels. The material of the building, granite, is darker than the rest of the surrounding structures, referencing the multiple rebuilds over decades due to bombardments and

natural disasters.³ The bell tower is the only part of the church that is original to the building.



Fig.3. Binondo Church exterior siding| Manila, Philippines, Domingo de la Cruz González, 2023

The exterior siding is covered with granite bricks with glass windows dividing the consistency of stone. Each protruded side of the granite marks the location of paired columns from the interior. The marking of the red trim denotes the height of the interior ceiling before the vaulting. Walking further down Norberto Ty Street and Ongpin Street, the location of the dome is clearly stated with the tallest windows on the nexus point of the church. Decorative statues of pure white stone adjourn each side with the columns still slightly protruding, providing a platform for the statues. The side face recesses faintly, creating a break of uniformity.



Fig.4. Binondo Church interior & ceiling detail | Manila, Philippines, Domingo de la Cruz González, 2023

When first walking into the Binondo Church, there is a smaller chamber for donations, candles, and a set of rules for visitors. Upon entering the main hall, your eye is drawn to a small replica of St. Peter's Basilica standing at the altar at the opposite end of the nave. Pews define a center aisle with the vaults above, the center is of which are painted with religious scenes.



Fig.5. Aerial views of Piazza Navona, Rome & Plaza Lorenzo Ruiz, Manila. Statue of the martyred Lorenzo Ruiz which faces towards Binondo Church, 2023

Adjacent to Binondo Church stands Plaza Lorenzo Ruiz with two fountains similar in placement to those at Piazza Navona, Rome, Italy. Both are voids in the urban fabric. Plaza Lorenzo Ruiz is, however, busy with traffic, and the "island" in the middle is the only respite. It is there that the statue of Lorenzo Ruiz stands tall in the middle of the plaza, facing in the direction of Binondo Church as an honor to the

memory of his dedication of faith. Lorenzo Ruiz is revered by the Filipino-Chinese community as the first Filipino-Chinese protomartyr who was executed in Japan during the 17th century. Many people use the plaza for various purposes such as a resting spot between food deliveries, dancing lessons, and tourists visiting monuments.



Fig.6. Conditions of 1910 & 2023 Plaza Cervantes, Manila, Philippines, 2023⁴

Headed south near the Pasig River and Chinatown gates, the Plaza Cervantes blends into the urban environment. Originally, I was curious about the name, since it was a “plaza”, meaning there had to be a gathering space of sorts. However, walking through it, there was little other than parking for cars and desolate abandoned buildings. Later, when speaking to locals, they brought up the disaster that made banks and governmental offices move from Binondo to other metro areas such as Makati, an hour south of Binondo. Plaza Cervantes had been a financial district before the disaster and subsequent modernization that I learned of the area. The fire of 2018 also destroyed national records. The financial organizations never moved back into their original buildings after the fire. Some buildings were completely torn down or left in disarray.



Fig.7. "New" Binondo Chinatown Gate| Manila, Philippines, 2023

At the entrance of Binondo after crossing Jones Bridge, the "New" Binondo Chinatown Gate stands tall and proud. Gifted and built by China in 2015, some in the local Filipino-Chinese community detest the landmark. Seen as an extension of China's international foreign influence over the past few decades, locals view it with distaste. The gate has many qualities of "Chineseness" with its bright red, gold, and greenish blue colors, intricate drawings of golden dragons and phoenixes, and mini-pagodas. While historically, China and the Philippines have had a solid relationship in trading, especially during the initial creation of Binondo, although after the South China Sea disputes through the 2000s and the Philippines' alignment with the United States after the American occupation in the Spanish-American war, the Philippines were caught between two economic powers.



Fig.8. Filipino-Chinese Friendship Gates along Ongpin Street | Manila, Philippines, 2023

Further up one block on Quintin Paredes, is the main Filipino-Chinese Friendship Archway, making these gates the first of a series of archways in total. The first archway is adjacent to Plaza Cervantes, Start at the entrance of Binondo, align with Ongpin Street, and follow the curved street over to Plaza Lacson. There are four archways in total, some delineating small breaks of the Estero de la Reina River. The gates have English, Tagalong, and Mandarin Chinese language, symbolizing the diverse ethnic community that's come together here over time. The gates were built in the 1970s to celebrate the creation of diplomatic relationships between the Philipines and China. The local community was consulted at every step of the process, hence the preference for calling them the "Friendship Arches" instead of the more recently built Binondo Chinatown Arch overtowering the Jones Bridge.



Fig.9. Street views with extensive electrical wiring and fruit stands, Ongpin Street| Manila, Philippines, 2023

Nearby, the main street of Binondo, Ongpin Street is full of bustling activity. The other three Filipino-Chinese Friendship archways line the points of separation between land and water, in the hope for a better future and relationship. The dragon lanterns primarily adorn Ongpin Street as an additional decorative element that guides the visitor. Fruit stalls line the sides of the streets and motorcycles zoom past. While the other streets of Binondo are dedicated to financial or commercial businesses, Ongpin Street is a combination of touristic trinket shops and restaurants/cafes that cater to both local & foreign foodies.



Fig.10. Street, alleyway, and interior view of the Lucky Chinatown Mall|Binondo, Manila, Philippines, 2023

Following north on Reina Regente Street from Binondo Church, the Lucky Chinatown Mall is one of Manila's efforts to revitalize the surrounding area. The mall bustles with activity, especially at night. The main street on the East side, Reina Regente Street, is full of taxi drivers, jeepney drivers, and motorcycle parking. There's even a hotel right next to the mall for visitors to fully experience the "new" Binondo. Some parts of the mall seemed to be newer, while other parts seemed desolate and closed with few stalls open. Parts of the ground floor were closed off for renovations with signs declaring an opening later in 2023. I came to the mall specifically for the Chinatown Museum, which was hidden at the top level of the mall next to a busy restaurant. The museum was opened in 2019 to showcase the visual story of Binondo's history to the current day. Various exhibitions range from historical religious figures, daily way of life, and timelines spanning from Spanish colonization.



Fig.11. Street views overlooking supermalls & the interior of older stall-based malls, Divisoria| Manila, Philippines, 2023

Adjacent to Binondo, the Divisoria district consists mostly of commercial supermalls and street stalls. Despite the less upscale facilities and sanitation in the street markets, Divisoria has been a stakeholder in Binondo's business since colonial times. Overlaying three separate districts, including Binondo, Divisoria provides access to cheaper goods, in tandem with supporting local vendors. As Binondo rapidly gentrifies with its skyscrapers and supermalls, the division of Recto Avenue puts into perspective the growing divide of wealth between the two areas. The luxury of central air conditioning and clean bathrooms of the newer shopping malls draws in mixed crowds of kids, adults, and the elderly. There are name-brand stores and food courts like the American shopping malls. While in the older locations, it is local booths selling off-brand goods. Visitors can bargain prices at the local stalls if they're brave enough to go back and forth. The spaces are tight with no room to really just stand and look; either you're in a stall or you keep on moving along the narrow aisleways.



Fig.12. Street views with material-specific production, Juan Luna Street, Soler Street| Manila, Philippines, 2023

While walking down the various streets of Binondo, the different types of products lay at the entrances of the buildings. Binondo is still also a semi-manufacturing area for different materials with whole streets seemingly dedicated to one specific product. For example, Juan Luna Street which intersects with Plaza Lorenzo Ruiz, manufactures plastic and styrofoam products. Anything from multi-colored styrofoam rolls to large sheets of plastic bubble wrap are visible inside shops ready to be shipped. Soler Street intersects Reina Regente Street, right next to the Lucky Chinatown Mall, slowly transforming from a manufacturing streetway into supermarket parking for visitors. On the other hand, Soler Street has more formal storefronts, primarily selling lighting fixtures and interior products such as faucets, sinks, etc.



Fig.13. Woman prays and lights incense at the Santos Cristos de Longos Shrine | Manila, Philippines, 2023

Located one block behind the Binondo Church and hidden on the corner of Ongpin Street and Thomas Pinpin Street, the Santos Cristos de Longos Shrine is one of the two street shrines dedicated to a deaf-mute Chinese man. The background behind the man was that during the 16th century, he was pulling water from the Barrio de Longos near the community of Sangley. Once he pulled out his bucket, he saw a black figure of Christ without the cross. Apparently after pulling the figurine out, the man's muteness was cured and word got around the locals about the discovery. The Santo Cristo figurine itself is attached to a cross and is located within the Binondo Church.

The Filipino-Chinese community has grown more favorable to this specific shrine instead to the first shrine in the San Nicholas district. In contrast to the San Nicholas Santo Cristos de Longos shrine, the shine in Binondo has no Corpus in the middle of the cross, a dark heart-figure is at the center in lieu. Encased into the existing building with brown marble, columns align the sides and protrude out. Covered by garlands, the golden cross receives prayers, while Buddhist incense sticks are lit. Noting the crossings of religious decorations from the golden cross from Christianity and incense from Buddhism showcases the diverse community of the Filipino-Chinese. The Sampaguinta garland that drapes around the golden cross symbolizes purity, fidelity, and hope to the Philippines.⁵

Before looking up the shrine on the map and finding its exact location, I tried to come across the shrine on my own, walking multiple times through Ongpin Street both ways from the church and Carriedo LRT Station. Distracted by the second archway of the Filipino-Chinese Friendship Arch, I never looked directly to my left side to see the shrine.

Overall, the district of Binondo has gone through many changes since the initial Spanish colonization. The people of the Philippines pride themselves as the first Indigenous people who overcame European conquest, and they celebrate their history and hospitality. Like the people of the Philippines, the Binondo Church has weathered multiple wars and ecological disasters, reemerging stronger every time. Binondo has an incredibly rich history that has evolved through religion, ethnicity, and modernization. The streets hold centuries of memories,

eventually to be remodeled and molded to fit the futuristic outlook of real estate developers.

Termini Railway Station | Roma, Italia



Fig.1. Termini Railway Station, Rome, Italy | Salvatore Bianche, Leo Calini, etc, via Marghera looking Southwest into the cross hallway, 2023

Now at the edge of Rome's Chinatown, Termini Railway Station is typically full of locals and tourists rushing to their destination. Today's station was built after World War II, as the earlier station had been demolished after the rise of Mussolini. First appearing in the 1883 Masterplan of Rome, Termini brought great economic prosperity to Rome. As a main hub, it provided a connection to the rest of Europe and gave merchants better access to trading networks. One of the major objectives of the 1883 Master Plan was to provide an extension from the center of Rome while still being sensitive to the city's historical center. Termini underwent multiple stages of renovations during the World Wars and under

the Fascist regime. Eventually, after the end of the Fascist regime and the fall of Mussolini, the ongoing works were canceled. In 1947, a second competition was held to complete additions to the station. It was in this phase that the iconic architectural feature of Termini's "wings" of the station was renovated, nearing a state of decay after multiple years of neglect. Since then, newer additions such as the Mercato Centrale recently opened in 2016 on the Southwestern side near Esquilino. The market is in an effort to highlight and capitalize on the best of Rome's food and agricultural produce, mirroring similar central markets across Italian cities.

Starting in the 1980s, Chinese immigrants started to arrive in the then-down-spiraling neighborhood, Esquilino. Known now as Rome's Chinatown and cultural melting pot, Esquilino has recently been gentrified since the Chinese assimilated within Roman society. Around the late 2000s, efforts were made to "take back" or keep Esquilino as Roman as possible, in light of the Chinese and other immigrants settling there. The city deterred the use of international signage by Chinese immigrant-owned businesses and tensions arose between the Chinese and Italians. It was not until the mid-2010s that the Romans allowed small amounts of Chinese street signage and decorative Chinese lanterns to be hung outside Chinese restaurants.

On my first visit to Rome in 2022, I had no initial idea that there even was a Chinatown, especially as close to the center of Rome. The only way to know was to see other people of color, some international signage, or smell the bare scent of international spices & medicine. There is no gate or distinct architectural threshold signifying that you

are entering Rome's Chinatown. The forced assimilation by Romans due to the nativism of Italian society & culture resulted in a barebones allowance of international signage. One could say that the primary "threshold" is the main hallway of Termini Station, headed Southwest from Via Marsala to Via Giovanni Gioletti, providing a visual line from one side to another.



Fig.2. Chinese lanterns hanging outside Hang Zhou da Sonia | Rome, Italy, 2022

One of the most popular Chinese restaurants with Romans is Hang Zhou da Sona, a Chinese immigrant-owned restaurant. Sonia herself, who is fully assimilated and is fully fluent in Italian. I was able to ask about her story as a Chinese restaurant owner in Esquilino. While waiting, I saw photographs of Sonia herself with various public figures and

Italian celebrities. There was even a movie poster with several appearances on local Italian TV shows.

Fenxia, Sonia's Chinese name, spoke honestly about the presence of international businesses in Esquilino. She highlighted that "It is right for us to do as the Romans do.". Despite being part of Italian society for over 20 plus years now, she spoke about the awkwardness that still exists between native Italians and assimilated immigrants. Fenxia still hopes that the second generation of Chinese-Italians can visit their homeland to reconnect with their native Chinese culture and values.

Nearby Fenxia's restaurant, Hang Zhou da Sonia, is Piazza Vittorio Emmanuelle II, since it was one of the few green spaces in the neighborhood. During the day, the park was full of people lying in the grass, taking a break during the intense heatwave that was ripping through the middle of Italy. A hidden oasis with nasoni flowing with cold fresh water near every entrance, the park comes alive after dusk. Recently overhauled by Rome's government, there are shows, concerts, and performances with people celebrating the night's cool breeze with a stroll. Cafes are busy with people chatting, drinking, and smoking. Initially, Esquilino was known to be a dangerous area and still is to some newer expats due to petty theft. However, this is a similar comparison to the beginnings of American Chinatowns like San Francisco.



Fig.3. Southwestern entrance to Giardino di Confucio | Rome, Italy, 2023

Giardino di Confucio

Previously having the opportunity to visit this garden, I came back to visit for more exploration and detailed analysis. The Giardino di Confucio holds a statue of Confucius at the north end. The building encasing the garden also houses the Department of Oriental Studies from La Sapienza Rome University. Students can also take foreign language certification exams for Mandarin Chinese, protected by the Confucius

Institute of Rome. The garden is adjacent to the Nuovo Mercato Esquilino Market, full of ethnic food, produce, and spices.

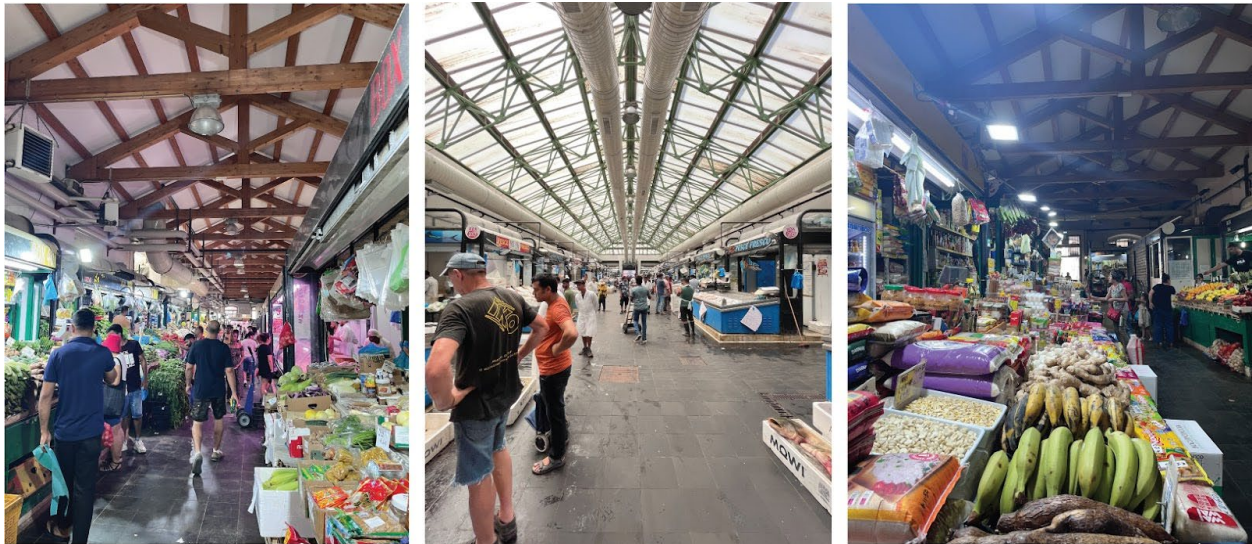


Fig.4. Different areas of Esquilino Ethnic Market | Rome, Italy |Nuovo Mercato Esquilino, 2023

The Nuovo Mercato Esquilino serves as a gathering point where all the immigrants come to buy their native produce. The market is divided into a wet area, dry area, and non-foods area. There are a variety of fresh fish, meat, produce, and spices available for sell. The general goods area is separate in another building adjacent to the produce and houses exotic clothing material and off brand accessories such as watches, hats, or shoes. The market was renamed and renovated from the Piazza Vittorio Market originally. Over the 2000s, more Italians have ventured into the market, discovering another world of culture they had never tasted.



Fig.5. Hua Yi Si Buddhist Temple, Via dell'Omo | Rome, Italy, 2023

There is another Chinatown of sorts in Rome, on the street of Via dell'Omo, an industrial area on the outskirts of Rome. The main focus was to find the Hua Yi Si Buddhist Temple, which was the only Buddhist temple that was still unchanged in Rome. Via dell'Omo is primarily separate warehouses of auto-repair shops, industrial Chinese retail, and some Chinese restaurants scattered about. Found with the help of a friend,

this mini-ethnic enclave was mostly an industrial warehouse area that had the most authentic Chinese food that Rome could offer. In the midst of the summer heatwave, I ventured out hydrated and with an umbrella to provide some temporary shade. From Termini, the journey was around a 1-hour ride by public transportation and included switching from a trolley to a public bus. Once I arrived in the area, Via dell'Omo felt isolated. There were few people around and nothing except the occasional driver on their way for deliveries, a man sitting outside his cafe in the shade, and more cars. It felt like I was back in the United States, given that I was walking along a mostly car-inhabited road. Trying to find some shade after exploring, I went about for lunch, except Google Maps wasn't the most accurate. I wondered for a while since the Italian and Chinese signage for businesses and restaurants wasn't too prevalent. Using the sounds of woks, I finally found the restaurant as the sounds got closer ironically. Most of the patrons inside were local business owners, one I had just seen when visiting their store. Some other customers were laborers just getting a quick meal before the afternoon shift. The restaurant itself was ordinary, with a small buffet bar for to-go orders and regular seating for dining in-house. The food was cheaper than any restaurant in Esquilino, to simply put, a simple big bowl of luscious noodles. The broth was the best part despite the 108 degrees outside.

The temple itself was on the southern end of the street, standing out amongst the modular warehouses. I was not able to see the interior due to COVID restrictions, but one could see a bit of the exterior still. The roof was a Chinese hip and gable style with curved ends on each corner. The courtyard itself is the only one that has any sort of greenery

in the area, with trees leading into a potential garden in the back of the temple.



Fig.6. Lunar New Year illuminated gate | Milan, Italy, 2022

While in Italy, I visited Milan for its “Quartiere Chinese” or their official Chinatown. I had been there briefly for the celebrations for the Lunar New Year and wanted to return, remembering the bright electrical “pai fung” or gateway. I initially came back intending to try and find this official indicator of a Chinatown in Italy. Compared to Rome, Milan’s Chinatown was more formalized with a dedicated area with restaurants, a new supermarket, and various Asian bakery cafes.

Via Paolo Sarpi is the main street within Milan's Chinatown. At one end of the street are the offices of Microsoft Italy and the other end is a few blocks away from the Arco della Pace. The area consists of walkable streets with greenery, parklets, and public seating. It is what American cities often strive for and urban design students study in school. The history of this seemingly "perfect" activated space and the events that transpired a little over a decade ago, however, point to a less idyllic relationship between the Chinese and Italians.

In the spring of 2007, the local police harassed a Chinese businesswoman who was setting up shop. They discouraged and fined her for the use of unloading from a cart in front of the shop "illegally". Meanwhile, further down Via Paolo Sarpi was illegally parked cars in front of an Italian butcher shop which were blocking traffic. The double standard was obvious and crowds began to form. The initial riots forming over the next few days injured 14 people and left overturned cars. There were plans to riot all the way down to the Duomo.



Fig.7. Via Paolo Sarpi during aperitivo on a Saturday evening | Milan, Italy, 2023

Nowadays, walking up and down Via Paolo Sarpi, the atmosphere seems more peaceful with no riots in sight. In fact, the locals consider the area an upscale part of the city for shopping and dining. Walking from the eastern entrance to the western end, the streets changed quickly within a few hours as people gathered. On a Saturday evening for aperitivo, the area was filled with people. It was not the usual organized outdoor seating of parklets, but the make-your-own table style using cheap colorful plastic stools. It reminded me of Asian night markets where there is no order or hierarchy of seating. Everybody is just a person enjoying a nice meal with their friends or family, hunched over with a bowl, or in this case, Aperol spritz and some snacks. The chatter of people as the sun sunk also made it feel like a night market, with most food shops setting up as food stalls instead of sit-in restaurants.

In addition to Milan, I was also able to stop in Venice for the Venice Biennale Architettura 2023, the Laboratory of the Future. Curated by Lesley Lokko, the sheer amount of exhibitions overwhelmed me a bit, but the notion of separate pavilions for each country stood out to me. In an effort over four days, I went to both campuses, amazed at the best of each country's efforts and design processes. Some that stood out to me were Canada and South Korea, both in their intent and delivery of messages. Canada's primary focus was on social activism, especially within the severe lack of housing in the country. Common themes such as unaffordability and homelessness are similar to the United States,

showcasing various activist architectural projects that provide solutions to solve homelessness and the lack of housing. South Korea on the other hand was a bit more ecologically focused on the future. The pavilion not only had a beautiful view of the sea but also a live-show gaming setup that measured ecological consequences based on the player's/visitors' responses. Each one of the National Pavilions provided an interesting insight into what they considered in their perspective toward a future of inclusivity for the professional field, where one has been so full of assimilation, colonization, and discrimination.

Kimlau War Memorial | Manhattan, New York, United States of America

The last stop of the trip was the most ethnically diverse site overall. New York includes three distinctive Chinatowns: Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Each one of the borough enclaves includes a variety of Chinese province diaspora as well as a mix of international immigrants from other countries like South Korea, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

Initially, very few Chinese immigrants came over to the East Coast due to the focus on the California Gold in the 1850s. However, those few immigrants came to New York before the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, paved the way for future immigrants to come. During the 1900s, industries of laundry and food became the immigrants' primary source of income. It was not until the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 that the Chinese population exploded in the United States with other diasporas from different provinces, due to economic turmoil back in China.⁶ Especially with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the immigrant quota was virtually eliminated, allowing influxes of immigrants to come into New York. The quota was around 150,000, before the neutralization of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the following years extended into the 300,000s.⁷ Waves of immigrants from Guangdong, Fuzhou, and Taiwan continued throughout the 1970s to the 1990s, growing exponentially every decade.⁸ When they first arrived in Manhattan, Fujianese and Taiwanese immigrants cited prejudice against their ethnic background in employment, rent, and language differences. Various concerns from Manhattan Chinese landlords were travel debt, lack of legal status, and the inability to speak Cantonese. The Fujianese and

Taiwanese immigrants later moved to Brooklyn along Sunset Avenue and Queens in Flushing to establish their own Chinatowns.



Fig.1. Kimlau War Memorial and Square, looking West on E Broadway | Manhattan, New York, United States, Poy G. Lee, 2023

The Kimlau War Memorial is a simple granite structure dedicated to World War II Chinese-American veterans. Standing nearly 19 feet tall and 16 feet wide, the memorial honors their sacrifice and memory, with text in both Mandarin Chinese and English. Just a few feet away stands the monument to Lin Zexu, a Fujianese politician and pioneer in the First Opium War in the 1840s. The statue faces directly down East Broadway in the direction of the Brooklyn Chinatown.

Located in Lower Manhattan, this square stands at the intersection of five streets (Oliver St., E. Broadway, St. James Place, Worth St., and The Bowery). The memorial also acts as a pseudo-gateway since NYC's Chinatowns do not have any archways or gates into the ethnic enclaves. Although not officially designated as a gate into the enclave, it is one of the few indicators of a threshold for Manhattan Chinatown. As the memorial is directly adjacent to East Broadway and has a long history of Chinese immigration. While the storefronts are plastered with traditional Mandarin characters, there have been more recent pop-ups of English signage as well. The area has a precarious balance with stores

and restaurants as they age out of the older generation's ownership. Some of their children are fighting active gentrification trends by taking over their family's stores.



Fig.2. Bayard Street looking towards Confucius Plaza Apartments & Elizabeth Street, Manhattan, New York, United States, 2023

On the Western side of Chinatown in Manhattan, newer brick facades stand out amongst the old, faded brick fronts. In the ongoing general battle for real estate, generational-run businesses struggle to afford rent and continue with their operations. Particularly during and after the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic, the East Coast saw the same effects of AAPI (Asian-American Pacific Islander) hate as in California directed toward residents. The streets of New York City's Chinatowns became ghost towns due to fear, stigma, and association with the COVID-19 virus with those

of Asian descent. Mom-and-pop shops owned by Chinese immigrants closed forever, and new owners that had no association with Chinatown moved in. In an effort to save Chinatown for future generations, the current generation of Asian residents have shared their insights into how the current building infrastructure and economy have impacted their newly minted ownerships. Older buildings with outdated structural, electrical, and piping systems are now showing issues as there are regularly a variety of incidents of electrical fires, blown water pipes, and deteriorating interiors. Some of the buildings in Manhattan range from the early 1900s with updates as needed, but the city government has fallen behind due to the surge of issues at once.⁹ However, the upcoming generation's tenacity and passion have focused their energy on the sacrifices of the past generations.



Fig.3. Confucious Plaza Apartments, ground perspective of Confucious Plaza Apartments, Manhattan, New York, United States, Horowitz & Chun 2023

Directly one block northwest of Kimlau Square stands the 44-story Confucious Plaza Apartments. Mostly made of brown brick, the building stands out in the surrounding skyline. Even standing at the intersections on Mott Street, I could catch a glimpse of the tower as I explored the surrounding area.

The apartments first opened in 1975 and became one of the first publicly-funded Chinese-American exclusive housing projects in the city. The building holds a long history of riots, protests, and calls for affordable safe housing for Chinese immigrants. Initially, during the construction of the structure, there were allegations of discriminatory hiring practices by the contracting company. Eventually, after several protests and construction site disruptions, the city government hired Chinese immigrants to aid in the construction. As construction continued, residents, visitors, and store owners were in awe at the looming, modern tower. When it was completed in 1975, the plaza included a public school, daycare center, and community center.



Fig.4. Dr. Sun Yat-Sun Plaza and Memorial within Columbus Park | Manhattan, New York, United States, 2023

Following northwest one block on Worth Street is Columbus Park, New York City's version of Portsmouth Square in San Francisco and a place where Chinese residents gather. Another public green space woven within the urban fabric, this park sits on the unofficial border of Manhattan's Chinatown. Dr. Sun Yat-Sun Plaza is the main gathering point in the northern central part of the park, while the southern portion includes basketball courts and sitting areas as well as the Columbus Park Pavilion, which functions as a node/landmark within the park. The Columbus Park Pavilion provides additional shade amongst the canopy of trees. While providing a physical divider between the plaza and Bayard Street, visitors are encouraged to enter the park from Baxter Street or Mulberry Street. Walking towards Worth Street, you have a direct view of the Kimlau Memorial in the near distance. Within Columbus Park, multiple groups of Chinese elders play various games, gamble, and smoke. The most advanced players seemed to gather behind the statue of Dr. Sun, while

others were scattered about on the other tables. The statue of Dr.Sun was commissioned and dedicated by the New York City Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of America organization in 2019.



Fig.5. Chinatown Night Market | Forsyth Plaza, New York, United States, 2023

At the border of Manhattan's Chinatown, the Chinatown Night Market was occurring at Forsyth Plaza on the first Saturday night of August. Originally, I had a preconceived notion of what a Night Market would be like in an area largely populated by Asian Americans. Surprisingly, the Night Market wasn't just an annual event, but a whole season dedicated over the summer in New York. At the entrance of the Night Market, various non-profit organizations and groups were available to help facilitate and provide any information or resources. There are multiple stalls set

up underneath the Manhattan Bridge, mostly of local pop-ups or restaurants, but some were also traditional artists showcasing their skills. For example, traditional calligraphers are nowadays more common, while “sugar” artists who create intricate designs are less common. With the first season of the Night Market in 2021, 2023 continues the goal of trying to maintain normalcy and provide a safe communal environment for Asian residents. One of the legacies of Manhattan’s Chinatown is manifested through the Kimlau Memorial. At the center point of the area, the monument reminds younger generations of what was sacrificed in their journey of acceptance in American society.



Fig.6. Streetscape of Sunset Avenue Chinatown | Brooklyn, New York, United States, 2023

Unlike Manhattan’s Chinatown, the Chinatown in Brooklyn, at the corner of Sunset Park and 8th Avenue, is more suburban with its endless blocks and low-rise buildings. The streets feel wider and are two way instead of one way. There are more pedestrians walking on the sidewalk, a majority of them walking home with groceries with children. Just walking around, I heard multiple dialects instead of Cantonese alone, especially Foochow/Hokkien. Brooklyn’s Chinatown is the first stop for

new Fujianese immigrants instead of the Manhattan Chinatown due to the larger concentration of Fujianese immigrants. Several residents have also moved into the nearby neighborhood of Bensonhurst, and have started businesses such as restaurants, salons, and bakeries.



Fig.7. Produce markets spilling onto the sidewalks, Sunset Avenue Chinatown | Brooklyn, New York, United States, 2023

Some grocery stores extended onto the sidewalk with blue tarps acting as canopies. Anything from fresh fruit to dried herbal Chinese medicine, and even seafood, cluster down 8th Avenue. Large boxes of produce also take up space from large shipments. Past the main street of 8th Avenue are residential and other commercial offices such as dentists and doctors. The atmosphere has less tourism in comparison to Manhattan's Chinatown, as most of the foot traffic is from locals. There

are more varieties of shops instead of just dim sum restaurants including Taiwanese-based bubble tea cafes and Korean skincare stores on the surrounding streets.

Although Brooklyn’s Chinatown is smaller in scale than that of Manhattan, it is vibrant with locally owned shops and businesses. The make-up of the residents varies slightly, but the main way to tell that this is a Chinatown is through the businesses. There were plans from Beijing to gift an official Chinatown gate, however the plans fell through in 2020. Speculations included the rising US-China political tensions during the COVID-19 pandemic and also trade relations.¹⁰ Government officials and local residents are discussing future steps to officially designate and mark Brooklyn’s Chinatown.



Fig.8. Surrounding streets of Flushing’s Chinatown | Queens, New York, United States

Although I was only able to visit Flushing’s Chinatown once during the trip, Main Street took me quite by surprise. It was full of pedestrians and was almost as busy as Times Square. The amount of all the people was claustrophobic. The streetscape consisted of mid-rises

with more hotels, multi-family units, and condos. In addition to the businesses on Main St., at the intersection of Roosevelt St. is the New World Mall. This massive department store holds multiple restaurants, retail stores, and an Asian food court. Considering Flushing's Chinatown has one public transit line, the 7, into central New York City, Main St. is a focal point of entry for the rest of Flushing. The surrounding streets were less congested and quieter than Main Street. Three blocks east of Main Street is the Weeping Bench Park, which is quiet and peaceful in contrast to Flushing's Main St. There were only a few people in the park, mostly the Asian elderly reading the newspaper or napping on benches under the shade. On the basketball court, there was a group reciting chants for a potential protest about Taiwan's sovereign rights. H-Mart, a Korean supermarket chain, sits on the corner of Roosevelt and Brown Street. Further into the neighborhood, the Korean signage and stores shift to catering to Korean residents. Flushing's Chinatown is a further evolution past Manhattan's Chinatown with more international communities integrated within.

In the end, I was only able to barely scratch the surface of New York's Chinatowns. There are multiple Chinese and Asian communities in other neighborhoods such as Bensonhurst, Murray Hill, Homecrest, and Elmhurst. Each one of these neighborhoods has sub-ethnic concentrations that denote into a further category such as Little Fuzhou or Little Hong Kong. While the overarching themes apply to other nationalities such as Little Tokyo, Little India, or Koreatown, certain areas have a congregation of specific ethnicities and

religions. The disputes over space and land led to certain prejudices against other regional ethnicities, hence the formulation of Sunset & 8th Ave and Flushing's Chinatown.

Returning to the Kimlau Memorial, even though the memorial itself was built only recently in 2021, the official landmark for Manhattan's Chinatown is a physical representation of the struggles of Chinese-American diasporas. In contrast to the division and disputes between the Chinese immigrant backgrounds in New York today, the memorial serves as a reminder of the collectivist values held by Eastern immigrants. Manhattan's Chinatown served as a catalyst for other Chinatowns to spread, not just regionally, but across the nation.

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