LANDSCAPE, HOME, & NATION:
CHINATOWN IDENTITIES IN URBAN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Existing research on Chinatowns have focused largely on the development of the ethnic community, and racial and ethnic discourses in the context of urban spatialities in the form of enclaves, as well as economic networks. Migration and issues related to transnationalism and the Chinese diaspora are accompanying themes. More significantly, the majority of studies on Chinatowns have been situated in the 'Western Hemisphere', notably in North America and Europe. The purpose of this dissertation is to stimulate conversation on Chinatowns in Southeast Asia. It also proposes to explore the idea of Chinatown vis-a-vis concepts of heritage landscapes, diaspora and home, and national identities. Focusing on the cities of Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore, this dissertation draws on theories of place to consider three themes and objectives.

First, the research explores the processes that shape the urban and imaginative landscapes of Chinatown and the functions that Chinatown plays in the city. This theme examines the idea of Chinatown and its sources, investigating images drawn from concepts of heritage to produce a recognisable space. Second, in conjunction with the concept of diaspora, it explores the potential inherent in the idea of Chinatown as home to the Chinese population and a place of the Chinese diaspora. It also considers the multiple homes that diasporic and migrant communities tend to sustain. The third objective of the study examines the role and place of Chinatown in the context of the nation, and how particularly ethnic and multicultural identities are negotiated in this space. At the same time, this theme explores the complex globalities that Chinatowns involve with the nation and the city. Using a postcolonial framework to address these themes, the research analyses the negotiation of place and identity in its interaction with concepts of orientalism.

This research shows that Chinatown identities are produced in and through their landscapes which are shaped by imaginations of diasporic Chinese heritage. It also reveals that these diasporic identities help produce global impacts on their national contexts. It is at the intersection of these themes that Chinatown identities are realised as complex and plural, not arising simply from connections between China and present places of settlement, but also from the networks comprising other Chinatowns.

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Chinatown – the term is a combination of *nation* and the *urban*. Popularly conceived of as an urban bastion of difference and culture, the idea of Chinatown invokes an imagination of sensual encounters, simultaneously exotic and mundane. It is precisely this combination of the familiarity and the strangeness found in Chinatown that makes it a subject of almost unmanageable complexity. Existing research on Chinatowns ranges extensively in theme, topic, and theory. Race and ethnicity are some of the more popular concepts through which Chinatown research is approached. In geographical literature, the prevailing text is Anderson's (1991) theoretical racial discourse that constructs Vancouver's Chinatown. In recent years the focus of Chinatown literature has begun to evolve (see Luk, 2005, for *Geojournal* special issue, vol. 64:1), exploring "new" Chinatowns, such as suburban ethnic enclaves and related spatial issues. Notably, most contemporary literature about Chinatowns has been situated in North America, Europe, and Australia.

This dissertation addresses the gap in the regional lacuna in Chinatown research. The geographical context of the research is four cities in Southeast Asia. The reason for this regional selection of research locations is to address the way Chinatowns have been studied overwhelmingly in the Western hemisphere,[1] to the point where changes in the

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[1] I borrow the terms 'Western' and 'Eastern' hemisphere from journalist Gwen Kinkead in her piece on New York's Chinatown (1992: 3) to emphasise the pronounced difference in quantity of research literature produced between the two geographical sections of the world. I use the terms in much the same way 'Oriental' and 'Occidental' may be used, reflecting not only their socially constructed natures, but also the subjectivities with which each hemisphere is not homogeneous, for example Australia in the Eastern hemisphere, which in this context shares more characteristics with the Western hemisphere.

morphology of these European and North American Chinatowns can be tracked; while the Chinatowns in the Eastern hemisphere have largely been ignored and neglected. For the most part, ethnic studies and research on ethnic landscapes have been popular in contemporary research in the Eastern hemisphere. While landscapes of ethnic minorities have been studied in Southeast Asian research (see Clarke, 2001), much of it focuses on issues of conflict, borderlands, and are sited in non-urban areas (see, for example, Grundy-Warr & Yin, 2002). Comprehensive research has been published focussing on the issues of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world (see below, also Chapter Two); however, there has been much less focus on the urban landscapes – the Chinatowns – of the ethnic Chinese in the region. In light of the wide range of research that has and can be done on Chinatown, four points are important:

Firstly, Chinatowns are not all the same. Certainly this is obvious from the case studies built on individual Chinatowns such as Vancouver (Anderson, 1991), New York (Zhou, 1992; Lin, 1998), and San Francisco (Laguerre, 2000). I will agree here that despite their global presence (and categorisation by region – see, for example, Benton & Pieke (1998), Christiansen (2003)), Chinatowns are heavily influenced by their specific localities. Chinatowns may appear as extensively similar landscape replicated across space, particularly as they are, at their core, urban ethnic neighbourhoods based upon the congregation of immigrants. However, they are all different in ways particularly related to their geographical and historical contexts.

Second, the Chinese in Southeast Asia comprise a deeply complex topic that goes beyond the general field of the Chinese overseas (see, for example, Wang, 1991, 2000;

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Sinn, 1998; Pan, 1999). Many aspects of this field have been researched – Wang (1959, 1999) and Suryadinata (1989, 1997) for example, have taken social approaches to the topic; and the history of the Overseas Chinese has been concisely catalogued (Reid, 1996; Pan, 1998). The histories of Chinese migration in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world is further developed and discussed in Chapter Two. The presence of ethnic Chinese peoples globally is not a simple field, much less within the region, as the wealth of research themes and issues associated with the ethnic Chinese illustrate. Victor Purcell, for example, was a notable scholar who published profusely about the Chinese in Southeast Asia (1950, 1951), and mostly in Malaya (1948, 1956), quite anthropologically by recording ethnic (racial) characteristics and activities. GW Skinner (1959) discussed the social history of the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and explores four issues: the economic role of the Chinese migrants; the education of their children; citizenships and nationalisms; and their political integration. Widodo (2004) further credits the Chinese diaspora with the development of present-day multi-cultural urban communities and cities in coastal Southeast Asia. Yet all these studies about the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia do not exhaust an analysis of Chinatowns in Southeast Asia.

Thirdly, there are preconceptions about Chinatown that people appear to know "intuitively". As elucidated by Anderson,

> *Popular wisdom* has it that the colourful Chinese quarters of Canadian, American, and Australian cities owe their existence to the generations of Chinese immigrants who have made their lives in the cities of the West. The restaurants, pagodas, neon lights, and recessed balconies – the *Oriental streetscapes* – seem to exist through a natural connection between the Chinese and their immigrant experience in the West (1991: 3, emphases mine).

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That there exists "popular wisdom" regarding the various assumptions and conceptions about Chinatown suggests that there is an idea or imagination about the place that is not necessarily accurate. The roots of these assumptions beg exploration. What gives rise to these assumptions and preconceptions? Not only that, how, and why, are these imaginations created? In building a knowledge base about the things that identify Chinatown, it is important to consider the sources and perpetuations of these wisdoms. . Further, Anderson, in using the term "Oriental streetscapes", refers to the imagined and exoticised depiction of non-Western cultures from the perspective of Western cultures (see Said, 1979). The continuation of such imagined landscapes contributes to the identity of the space, constructing a landscape that is defined largely by external conceptions of culture, place and ethnicity. As such, popular assumptions of Chinatown and the Chinese community overseas should be resisted, and challenged. Also, the landscape of the study area has been shaped by the processes of colonialism. The spectacle of the Chinatown streetscape conceals the complex and heterogeneous lives, perspectives, and experiences that constitute it.

Fourthly, and finally, there are many facets and elements to the experience of Chinatown. As mentioned earlier, Chinatowns, even when studied in a limited region, or within four urban centres, are complex intersections of people and places. A wealth of knowledges comprise Chinatown; multiple layers of experiences and understandings made up of a wide range of histories and heritages have touched the space. I do not set out to write comprehensively about Chinatown. While I do attempt to be aware of all the various themes and issues that can be encountered in my study of four Chinatowns in

Southeast Asia, I am still limited – by my limited perceptions, experiences, time, and knowledge.

With this in mind, the purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to Chinatown literature in geography by examining ethno-cultural relations with urban space. I look specifically at the locations demarcated as Chinatown in four cities in Southeast Asia – Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore – to do this. I argue that Chinatowns and their specific Chinatown identities are constructed and shaped by diasporic social processes. These diasporic social processes have roots in the interactions between the Chinatown communities with their localities, as well as in the personal and collective identities of the overseas Chinese. At the same time, the identities of these overseas Chinese have come to inform and to be informed by the place of Chinatown. In writing this dissertation, I set out to fulfil a number of aims.

First, this research is written to address the gap in literature on Chinatowns in Southeast Asia. Understanding already that Chinatowns are not all the same, I do not set out to structure a model of Southeast Asian Chinatowns. While the similarities of the research sites are important (for example, regional propinquity; historical relationships with colonialism, and contemporary negotiations with postcolonialism; proximity to China; comparably diverse population and demographic characteristics, just to name a few), it is equally important to realise that Southeast Asia is essentially heterogeneous. The Southeast Asian region is classified by virtue of nations that are clustered together by geographic location more than any other identifiable trait (Reid, 1993). Yet there is significance to the region's geography. With this dissertation my intention is not only to

initiate discussion on Chinatowns in regions outside of the Western hemisphere but also
to shed light on the complex issues not explored in the existing literature, and which are
significant and possibly specific to the region.

My second objective for this research is to explore the urban setting of
Chinatown. Much has been discussed from a sociological approach to Chinatown, in
terms of race, anthropology, and migration. However, not as much has been studied about
its urban setting, with the exception of a number of studies done in terms of heritage
conservation in Singapore. With a background of the Southeast Asian city as established
by McGee (1967), Bunnell, *et. al.* (2002), Chia (2003), and Rimmer and Dick (2009),
among others, I will ground the idea of Chinatown in the city. I will explore the processes
that influence and help to create the urban landscape of Chinatown and the functions that
Chinatown plays in the city.

Third, I consider the meanings that Chinatown can represent for this portion of the
Chinese diaspora. I explore the potential inherent in the idea of Chinatown as home to the
Southeast Asian Chinese population. Home in geographical literature (see Blunt &
Dowling, 2006) is a complex concept that spans a multitude of meanings. As such, for
this objective I examine the several layers of meaning that home can represent to the
overseas Chinese community. I ask what constitutes home, and how multiple layers of
home(s) are related to each other. This objective explores the ways that Chinatown is and
can be home, and the significance of home for the diaspora.

Going beyond the city, the fourth objective of this study examines Chinatown on a
larger scale – that of the nation-state. I seek to uncover the functions and roles that

Chinatown performs, and explore the meanings that the presence of Chinatown represents to/for the nation. Situating Chinatown within the context of the nation, I analyse how personal and collective identities are negotiated in places of strong cultural heritage (Chinatowns), yet also where ethnicity does not coincide with nationality (Chinese in Southeast Asia). Nations and nationalisms (see Smith, 1991; McClintock, 1995) draw and maintain borders and boundaries; yet Chinatowns tend to be transnational entities. I explore the possibility of Chinatown as a global space within national boundaries. I consider the ways the ethnic and cultural bastions of Chinatown negotiates national identities.

To complement these aims, I consider a number of specific questions that provoked me to undertake this study. Firstly, what is the function of Chinatown? By this, I mean to question the perpetuation and continuation of this particular urban ethnic landscape. Li (2005) notes the thriving endurance of inner-city Chinatowns in North America. What purpose do these Chinatowns serve? In a location such as Singapore, where the ethnic Chinese constitute the large majority of the population, the presence of a Chinatown is an oddity. Secondly, what does Chinatown reference? Is landscape a representation of China, or is it symbolic of something else? Baudrillard (1994) argues that much of reality and meaning has been replaced with symbols and signs that, in representing the thing, appears to simulate it. Is Chinatown a simulation of China, or of some kind of overseas Chinese culture? What is being represented? Third, how are Chinatowns global and local at the same time? How do they represent an intensely local spatial experience while alluding to a separate, discrete nation (China)? What does the

presence of a space heavily associated and related with China do to, and for, the identity of its host nation? With this dissertation I offer discussions that address these questions.

Research Notes

Fieldsites

In order to carry out the research to explores the questions, I chose four cities. The selection of the cities was not predetermined in any specific way. In order to bring Southeast Asia into the general Chinatown research field, the choice of cities mattered less than the coverage of fieldsites. It was decided that four major cities would be sufficient to begin the conversation on Southeast Asian Chinatowns. More would have been desirable, but for the limitations of the project, funding and time. This project's coverage of cities, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore, provides a fairly varied set of geographies within the region. Each city and their respective countries had similarities (for example colonisation, significant migrant and diverse populations), but are also marked by their differences (for example coloniser, extent of colonisation, present-day governance systems, economic progress). To have taken any other major Southeast Asian city would have resulted in an unvarying list of similarities and differences. The selection of cities eventually boiled down to individual preference.

Singapore was chosen because it is the city I have spent the most time in, and am more familiar with its history and contexts than any other in the region. The ideas and themes that helped to shape the study were mostly formed from my initial perceptions of Singapore's Chinatown, and as such, made it a desirable place from which to begin the

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study.

The choice of Bangkok was made largely for my personal interest in Thailand. The city is also relatively close to Singapore, and it is not only a popular tourist destination, but Bangkok's Chinatown, like Singapore's, also features significantly in tourist media (*Lonely Planet* guide books are a popular example, see Bush, 2011).

Ho Chi Minh City was selected as I had become familiar with engaging research that had been carried on Vietnam's urban spaces (see Drummond, 2000), and I chose Ho Chi Minh City over Hanoi for its economic clout as well as the presence of a comparatively large and physically conspicuous Chinatown area.

Burma and Rangoon seemed under-researched relative to other Southeast Asian countries in urban and cultural geography. Also, popular knowledge about Rangoon's urban and ethnic space appeared rather sparse. As one of the objectives of this research is to fill the gaps in academic literature, I chose to study Rangoon in order to further the field of knowledge on the city.

I began this project by defining Chinatown as the space within a city that is popularly understood and identified as Chinatown by the people, communities, and authorities. The boundaries of Chinatowns may be in dispute. Authorities, such as the state, may designate specific boundaries that are subsequently contested by residents, for example, people who live or run business outside of these formalised boundaries but who consider themselves a part of the Chinatown community. The official delineation of neighbourhoods or areas as Chinatowns intentionally exclude neighbouring areas, and also serves to preserve the identities of the other areas, hiding the shifting of boundaries

as residents and inhabitants of the spaces move across borders. Chinatowns need not be officially recognised, however. Some Chinatowns may be casually named by people as a description of the population who inhabit the space. As my research progressed, I began to understand Chinatowns as spaces that can be named officially or not, and by inhabitants or observers of the space. I also began to recognise Chinatowns as more than simply urban locations, but also as communities of people who identified with particular Chineseness.

Research Subjects

As discussed in the previous section, pinning a definition of Chineseness and China is a futile activity. However, as the objective of the project is to explore concepts of landscape, home, and nation from the perspective of Chinese people who live in Chinatowns in Southeast Asia, a working definition to help identify interview respondents is necessary.

As such, when I publicised my call for interview respondents through word of mouth and snowballing methods (respondents referred personal contacts, and through social networks), I specified people who were "Chinese" and who lived or worked in Chinatown. The "Chinese" specification allowed respondents to decide for themselves whether they were suitable for the study. In the study, this resulted in respondents who claimed Chineseness through kinship and blood ties, and there was no clarification if I meant people of Chinese nationality (I did not). I established that I was seeking long-term residents of Southeast Asia – people who claimed the nationality of one of the Southeast

Asian countries in which this study was carried out. Given the boundaries of this project, it was necessary to limit respondent to these specific characteristics. I included dual-citizens, and there was only one such respondent.

A special consideration was made in Ho Chi Minh City, where the Chinese Affairs Department of the Peoples' Committee of Ho Chi Minh City selected the majority of respondents for me. In this case, they made their decisions based on the respondents' Chinese lineage.

Allowing self-definition is important, as identity is a key theme in this dissertation, and exploring the perceptions of these Chinatown identities from the "inside", as it were (see theoretical framework, below), is the objective of the dissertation.

Chinatown Literature

Studies of Chinatown have ranged from the cultural, to the urban, and the economic. As I have noted, two trends in the existing literature are pertinent to geographical scholarship. The first is that much of the literature approaches Chinatowns from a racial and/or ethnic perspective – frequently in the context of migration; and the second is that almost all of it focuses on Chinatowns in the Western Hemisphere. A handful of case studies of Southeast Asian Chinatowns exist, most notably that of Singapore's in Yeoh and Kong (1994, 1996a, 1996b). There have also been a number of studies on the urban development, often either in terms of gentrification or tourism (Lee, 1996; Henderson, 2000; Li, 2007) and economics of Chinatown, generally concerning business relations

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and Sino-global networks (Benton & Gomez, 2001). However, there is ample literature regarding the Chinese, their migration, the diaspora, and their identities in Southeast Asia, as I will discuss in Chapter Two.

Much has been written about ethnic enclaves in general, especially Chinatown in Western cities, from the point of view of racial discourse (Anderson, 1987, 1988, 1991); issues of transnationalism and Chinese diaspora (Benton & Gomez, 1998; Benton & Pieke, 1998; Ma & Cartier, 2003); urban spaces and city planning (Anderson, 1990; Rodriguez, 2000); as well as an example of an urban ethnic enclave that promotes economic networks facilitating the social mobility of immigrants in a foreign society (Zhou, 1992; Lin, 1998; Smith, 2001), just to name a few examples. Much less has been said about Chinatown as an ethnic enclave in the Eastern hemisphere, the 'Orient' (where concepts and identities have often been formed through the perspective of the Western hemisphere), in the form of leftover bordered racial communities in once colonised, post-colonial cities such as those in East and Southeast Asia. Most of the existing literature in the Asian context focused on the Chinese diaspora (Sinn, 1998; Charney et. al., 2003); and Yeoh & Kong (1994, 1996a, 1996b) have situated studies on Chinatown in Singapore on the topic of landscape and landscape meanings, demonstrating that spaces of difference in Asian societies are uniquely constructed and maintained. This indicates a shortage of literature on Chinatowns in Southeast Asia. From a cultural approach, Mitchell (1999) explains that most of the research on "ethnictowns" like Chinatown, Koreatown, and Japantown have studied either the development of the ethnic community itself, or the "structural forces of racism and European hegemony that shaped [these

communities]" (1999: 671), focussing on the factors and histories leading to the creation and growth of the enclave, and grappling with the transnational effects on culture and how urban centres deal with the beginnings of multi-ethnicity.

Both Lai's work, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (1989), and Anderson's seminal text, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (1991), brought geographical research on Chinatowns into the forefront of ethnic urban spaces. Kwong's *The New Chinatown* (1988), Zhou's *Chinatown: the socioeconomic potential of an urban enclave* (1992), and Lin's *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change* (1998) all use New York's Chinatown as case studies, and Benton and Pieke's edited book *The Chinese in Europe* (1998) is also a fundamental text to the study of Chinatowns. The situation of these studies in North America and Europe indicates conspicuously the lack of Chinatown-related studies outside of the Western Hemisphere.

Lai's (1989) research emphasised the physical urban development of the Chinatown landscape in Canada. The Chinatown's four-stage development is shown to be linked to historical Canadian immigration policy. The uniqueness of Lai's work is his focus on the significance of place and the symbolic meanings for its diverse social groups within the landscape. The value of a geographical perspective is evident as Lai's analysis of spatial distributions of people and places ties together the economic, political, and demographic factors that influence and shape the urban landscape as well as bring about social change.

Anderson's (1991) text provides a critical analysis of the state's role in creating

and perpetuating racial categories (particularly the Chinese) in the city. Anderson outlines a historical context for the current state of subtle and constructed delineations of space (Chinatown) and race (the Chinese). She suggests that the social (race ideology), the political (public policy), and the economic (development) influence the formation and development of space, place, and specific localities (Chinatown). These specific localities in turn produce an effect on social forces and structure, for example by reinforcing the racial category of "Chineseness". Anderson's case study is important because it has contextualised Chinatowns within, as she notes, "more 'global' themes concerning power and racial discourse, the social construction of identity and place, the relation between ideology and institutional practice, and the transformation of conceptual structures into material forms" (1991: 250). These themes show that Chinatowns and Chinatown studies involve more than just racial discourses, but also present salient issues that deal with personal and lived experiences that create a sense of place and strengthen peoples' identity with their habitat, as well as influence the way belief systems and culture are converted into structured realities.

Kwong's (1988) work addresses Chinatown in a different light. Rather than building on the racial discourses of the landscape, he presents an updated version of the field that addresses the internal struggles of the migrant Chinese, between the polarised 'downtown Chinese' and the 'uptown Chinese'. Class conflicts and increasing polarisation between these two groups are the main problems in Chinatown today, rather than the racial struggles of the predecessors. The introduction of this division is the basis for studying new types of Chinatowns – not the ones that are commonly imagined

(severely congested inner-city neighbourhoods occupied by the poor migrant Chinese),
but affluent, uptown, suburban areas populated by the prosperous, well-educated and –
adjusted Chinese.

Zhou's (1992) text provides an example of an urban ethnic enclave that promotes
economic networks facilitating the social mobility of immigrants in a foreign society. She
explores in particular the Chinatown in New York as an urban community evolving with
the changing American immigration policies, as an ethnic enclave created by the push
and pull factors of migration, as an assimilation of cultures determined by an ethnically
stratified system, and as a socioeconomic enclave. Zhou addresses the economic factors
that led not only to the initial migration of the Chinese overseas, but also the current and
continual influx of Chinese into North America. By presenting Chinatown as a bridging
device spanning and adjoining two very different regions of the world, Zhou recognises
that the overseas Chinese are two things. Firstly, rather than being isolated and segregated
as a result of race as prior studies have imagined them to be, they are peoples of plural
cultures and multi-identities struggling to integrate in a way that does not obliterate their
own unique selves. Secondly, they are part of networks that contribute to a mutual
understanding of the multiple but disparate communities of which they are a part.

Lin (1998) provides a contemporary exploration of New York's Chinatown,
addressing the globalising forces that make it such a unique landscape. He challenges the
popular imagery of Chinatown as a backward, traditionalist society caught in the grips of
"negative mental constructions" (1998: ix) of far-Eastern culture. He investigates the
politics, class inequality and internal social conflict that plague Chinatown society, as

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well as the social, economic, and physical changes that are occurring in the area. Lin also considers how Chinatown is an important place of "cultural significance and a community of symbolic and sentimental attachment" (1998: ix). This indicates the importance of racial, cultural, and national identity to the Chinese in a foreign city.

Benton and Pieke's (1998) edited volume concerns the spread of Chinese communities over several European countries. This text demonstrates that the Chinese are one of Europe's oldest, largest and economically most powerful ethnic communities. The Chinese presence in Europe is outlined by region, and many of the chapters deal with the economic prowess as well as the cultural identity of the Chinese migrants in European society. The Chinese community is presented as an integrated community networking together in a foreign region, as well as disparate groups of independent peoples separated by local, national, or regional points of origin. Benton and Pieke suggest that the issue of a socially and geographically segmented overseas Chinese community is an important one and should not be ignored. The value of this text is twofold, firstly, as an introduction to Chinatowns in Europe (most of the research in the field pertains to North American Chinatowns), and secondly, as an indication that the overseas Chinese are not always a unified group banded together against a common 'other' (see also Anderson, 2000). This provides an insight into the inner workings of the Chinese culture and the understanding that there exists more than one type of grouping within the Chinese ethnicity, and further introduces a separate set of dynamics involved with the workings of the culture, demographics, and economics.

This overview of six key texts presents a wide range of concepts and ideas that are

relevant to the field of Chinatown. These six represent a small proportion of literature available on Chinatowns. There have been several other notable texts, again, mostly sited in the Western (North) American context, such as Nee & Nee (1973), Fong (1994), Chin (1996, on crime in New York's Chinatown), Laguerre (1999), Christiansen (2003, on European Chinatowns), and most recently, Li (2005), among several others. From the relevant literature, the roots of the Chinatown scholarship have included concepts and ideas such as race, migration, significance of place and meaning, class conflicts and political struggles, the persistence of culture and identity, and urban and economic development.

As shown, the existing literature on the field of Chinatown is extensive and varied. However, as noted earlier, the majority of studies have been carried out upon Chinatowns in the West, with few case studies situated in the East. The scholarship on Chinatowns specifically is relatively recent. However, the themes addressed by the existing literature such as race, migration, orientalism and postcolonialism, as well as geographical imaginations and urban development (and their economic, social and cultural consequences) are well-established issues. The Chinatown studies are an important contribution to the literature on these issues. There has been notable development of these concepts in the field. Recent texts are self-reflexive and conscious of the fact that Chinatowns, and the Chinese, are not homogeneous. This is important because it recognises that the Chinatowns (and the Chinese) over the world are all different, influenced and shaped by the local forces of the cities where they have settled.

In the course of reviewing the existing literature, I have observed that the few case

studies that have been situated in Asia (particularly those in Singapore) have focussed

largely on the problems of preservation and representation of culture and heritage while

neglecting themes and concepts popular to the studies on the Western Chinatowns, such

as issues of race, segregation and assimilation, and diaspora. The distinct separation of

focus between issues concerning Chinatowns in the Eastern and the Western hemisphere

is significant. Certainly the lack of studies on Chinatowns in the Eastern hemisphere has

contributed to this. Yet the issues listed above are not unique to either hemisphere – all

Chinatowns are subject to similar concerns, even if not in equal proportion. These issues

are important and should be addressed. As such, with this dissertation I bridge the

geographical divide in thematic matter in this field of Chinatown studies. Additionally,

this project helps to rectify the dearth of research in both hemispheres involving the

interactions and relationships between Chinese identities and Chinese-themed landscapes.

Theoretical Framework

The themes I focus on in this dissertation are informed by a number of theories that

together help to form a conceptualisation around Chinatowns. The key theme

underpinning this research is place, and a significant aspect of place is landscape;

"Chinatown", at its most basic, refers specifically to an urban landscape. The themes that

follow relate strongly to concepts of place. Diasporas spring from emotional attachments

to places, as well as geographical imaginations of particular landscapes of home.

Nationalisms are strongly linked to ideas of place, and identities are drawn in negotiation

with place. I discuss each of these in this section, and turn to considering postcolonialism

in the context of this research.

Place

Theories of place are crucial to the discipline of geography. Differentiated from *space* in many ways, place is seen to constitute more than simply positivist, cartesian space, but sites of "intersecting social relations, meanings and collective memory" (Johnston, *et. al.*, 2000: 582). Place is space invested with meaning, and, as Massey (2005) notes, is highly particular and personal, seen in relation to the self. Further, it derives definition not only from individually constituted meanings, but these meanings are, importantly, filtered through one's identity and social relations (1994). Place is also not simply literally experienced, but also imagined, experienced indirectly, through other, non-tangible means, such as travel writing (see Gregory, 1995, as an example of this). Here, Gregory's *Geographical Imaginations* (1994) supports the understanding that perceptions of place are informed by discrete, intersecting knowledges of and about space.

The main concept of place here springs from the humanistic geography literature, in which individuals' perspective of place is related to their experiences with it and their feelings for it. This is particularly noted in the concept of "sense of place", in which relations with a particular space – be they social, emotional, or physical, and even imaginative, create the meanings that constitute place. Tuan (1977) notes that experiential perspectives of space are also influenced by representations of their dominant functions (also see Lefebvre, 1991). Spatial meanings and representations of space affect the way space is experienced and perceived. These dominant meanings are often dictated through

power relations in space (see Eyles, 1988), but resistances to this domination are encouraged (see, for example, hooks, 1990) – individuals and societies need to locate themselves, and their meanings, in relation to other meanings, perspectives and narratives. As such, conflicting meanings in space and ideas of place are inevitable. The struggle for place meanings and representations is quite keenly exemplified in aspects of postcolonialism, as well as concepts of orientalism.

Meanings in space are regularly negotiated and resisted, particularly by those who are perceived to belong to the space. Orientalism in the construction of spatial meanings, as Said (1979) notes, privileges western knowledges and perspectives in defining landscapes and places. Sauer (1963) has described the relationship between landscape and place by explaining that landscape is created as the result of human-environment interrelation. This means that landscapes are not only seen and interpreted through cultural lenses, but are produced through cultural interactions. As such, all landscape is cultural landscape, and tends to transmit ideas about the dominant cultures in the space. Cosgrove (1998) later argues that landscapes are a 'way of reading', wherein the interpretation of iconographies within the landscape (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988) denotes what is being seen, questioning the representations of landscapes, which are, yet again, predisposed to dominant interpretations of signs and symbols. The resistances in redefining these landscapes and places, then, in this context, support the need for a postcolonial framework, which I will explain later in this chapter. In asserting alternative meanings and ideas about place, dominant definitions of places are challenged.

At this point, I note that overt representations of space, in terms of Baudrillard's

simulacra and simulation (1994), suggest a disneyfication of landscape. Where the signs and symbols overwhelm the landscape to the point at which the landscape is regarded for its icons – the signs and the symbols – it has become a simulacra of the thing it represents. As such, the landscape, being defined and identified through and by knowledge of the signs it is represented by, conceals and alters the actual meanings of the space. The significance of individual interpretations of place thus is heightened as these signs and symbols are read differently; original meanings may be lost, and a multiplicity of interpretations comes to define the place.

Placelessness is also a key aspect of place. Relph (1976) notes that experiences of place encompass feelings of "insideness" and "ousideness", as well as ranges of "authenticity", wherein the observer of a space experiences varying degrees of comfort and belonging with a place. Ideas about authenticity and inauthenticity relate to experiences of place – if one's experience coincides with the dominant meanings and understandings of place, then there is an affirmation of authenticity. If meaning conflicts with experience, then the place is seen as inauthentic. Further, the concept of "insideness" deals with authentic experiences of place. Personal understandings of place contribute to an individual's feelings of identification with and belonging in that particular place. As one identifies with space, that space becomes full of significance and includes a "multifaceted phenomenon of experience" (1976: 29). To experience "outsideness" is to not have personal experience with a space. The concept of insideness and outsideness is useful as multiple levels of being "inside" or "outside" a place is played out in a person's experience. Massey (1997) also notes that individual and societal perceptions of space

play into these feelings. Place is political, the deliberate manipulation of spatial meanings affect who belongs and does not belong in a place.

I conclude this section with a thought on place-based communities – an essential theme of place, particularly in the context of this study. Place-based communities dominate the meaning of a particular space. The communities are also dominated by the meaning of the space. Places not only derive their identities from their users, but their users, and notably, their inhabitants, derive identities from the place. The meaning of the space functions as a text with which the community can be read, interpreted, and understood. The signs that represent the landscape also represent the community of the landscape. In cases where communities are defined by the places they inhabit (and this is more common than not, particularly in geography where nationalisms and border issues are sovereign) spatial representations are rife with meaning that bestow identities. Place is inseparable from identity.

Diasporas and Place

The significance of diaspora to Chinatown can be seen in the relation between an idea of "homeland" (China, or a particular place of origin) and the general dispersal of Chinatowns and their communities over the world. What is also important about diaspora is the way these scattered communities identify with "homeland" and place of origin, as well as, crucially, with other places and communities around the world, like other Chinatowns and other Chinatown communities. There is a wide-ranging and varied corpus of literature available on the subject of diaspora. In this section I tease out from

selected pertinent texts concepts and ideas that are of significance to mapping the potential of conceptualising space as diasporan. Cohen (1997) provides an introduction to the topic in his text, and has provided a listing of nine common features of a diaspora. Johnston, *et al.* (2000) define the term as the scattering of a peoples over the face of the earth, emphasising the idea of movement away from a centre. This can be seen in the scattering of peoples of Chinese descent over the world, as well as the proliferation of Chinatowns in such diverse places. Lavie and Swedenburg also refer to diaspora as the dual loyalties and relationships that migrants, exiles and refugees have with their origins and places they currently occupy (1996: 14). As such, one of the defining features of diasporas is the negotiation of homeland with new home. Additionally, concepts of nostalgia, longing, displacement, and attachment are key in understanding the significance of diaspora, as opposed to simply another term for migration. "Emotional sites may be in geographically distanced places, so that people live a kind of polycentredness..." notes Ley; "such polycentredness may be read from the landscapes of every major city today" (2004: 155), illustrating connections to hybridity, multiplicity, and plural conceptions of "here" and "home". Ley further adds that with the transfer and reproduction of objects that recall home: "[h]ome, the most localized of geographical scales, became global". The reach and complexity of diasporas transcends conceptions of nation and nation-states.

Clifford's (1994) exposition on the discourse of diaspora depicts the term as a travelling one, constantly negotiating changing global conditions. He notes that diasporas are communities that exemplify transnationalism, being communities of people who

define themselves by crossing borders and living on bordered and liminal spaces, and further, usually developing troubled and complex relationships not only with host societies, but also with societies on either side of them. Diasporas also have the power to transform landscapes – they "connect multiple communities of a dispersed population"; and some diasporas are even "not so much oriented to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations" (1994: 306). The creation by diasporic communities of homes away from "home" constructs a transference of "nationality", "country", or even a new separate cultural identity that was formally linked to a separate place, further enhancing Hannerz's (1996) idea that cultures are irrepressibly mobile and transnational, perhaps inclined to diasporas themselves. Separate places become a single community through circuits of people, money, goods and information (Clifford, 1994: 303). This is reflected in Flusty's (2004) concept of the nonlocal, in which related and similar events occur simultaneously in different locations.

Chow's *Writing Diaspora* (1993) is primarily focussed on the potential for culture to essentialise itself based on relational and oppositional ideologies. Taking the positionality of a post-colonialist, she suggests that diasporas (in her text, the Chinese diaspora) have a tendency to reflect upon themselves imaginations and identities created by the effects of Western imperialism and cultural hegemony. Chow's text brings to the forefront the situated and politicised nature of diaspora: host societies construct identities that subsequently are negotiated by the diasporic community in order to create their own identities. We are thus made aware of the asymmetrical power dynamics negotiated by those who would identify a diaspora, and those who would be identified – or resist

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identification. McKeown, on the other hand, conceptualises (particularly Chinese) diasporas from the approach of mobility and dispersion, citing networks and global connections as formative of transnational social organisations and "identities that cross national and cultural boundaries" (1999: 307). He takes the position of understanding diaspora as a perspective that directs the analysis of geographically dispersed institutions, identities, links, and flows.

McKeown's case study of the Chinese diaspora provides a broad view of how diaspora, in so many forms, and through an extended history, is able to suggest the existence of "a coherent unit of geographically dispersed people, bound by sentiment, culture and history" (1999: 311). This recognition has the tendency to encourage the essentialisation of a group of people as a holistic entity. What McKeown aims to do, however, is not to simplify the culture of the Chinese dispersion, but rather to focus on the connections, institutions and discourses that dispute a clear, direct link to purely local and national frameworks. He argues that the transnationalism of the Chinese culture (and diaspora) is more complex than that. The construction of their hybridised and separate identities depends heavily on their interaction and relationship with host societies.

"'Diaspora' refers to the doubled relationship or dual loyalty that migrants, exiles, and refugees have to places – their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with 'back home'" (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996: 14). This dual identity is key to the conception of diasporas. They are more than simply migrants moving from place to place; they internalise the places that they have been in their identities. Pieterse (1995) introduces the idea of structural hybridization – migration

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movements which make up demographic globalisation can engender absentee patriotism and long-distance nationalism. That diasporans encounter and occupy more than a singular cultural space means more than just the dispersal of peoples to more than one locality away from their "home". It also suggests that the spaces they actually occupy are given dual (or more!) identities, a kind of "here" as well as "there", creating a complex politics of location. Diasporans create an "imaginary homeland" (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996, citing Rushdie, 1991) and as such begin to occupy a "third space" (see Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1996). In these places, there is a continual shifting of meaning and (hybridised) identity. The fluidity of meaning and identity thus denotes that diasporans are not limited to simply a duality between two cultural heritages ("home" and "host") but become a sort of hybrid that tends to refuse grounding in particular spaces and locations. Yet the importance of *place* to *diaspora* is critical as distance and movement are also implicated in the above-mentioned politics of location. Place (space given meaning) is continually created via the changing meanings, connections, and identities that communities, diasporic and otherwise, bestow upon it.

Nationalisms and Identity

> When we use the concept identity we inevitably invoke a classification that
> places and positions an individual within a social space by virtue of his or
> her various identities (Isin & Wood, 1999: 19).

Here, the politics of space draw attention to the issues of power over space. Keith and Pile (1993) argue that space is invested with politics and ideology. Following Soja (1989), they suggest that relations of power and discipline are an undeniable part of the

spatiality of social life. Spaces are produced from the social and political interactions between space and society, and the social entity that has power over a space defines and classifies that particular space. Spaces are also consumed by individuals and groups, requiring that we pay attention to these acts of consumption and experiences of space.

The significance of the nation is, as Anderson (1991) notes, in the way it connects a community of people through projected relationships attributed to connections to space – the nation-state, in particular – or to a specific culture, and to relations by virtue of difference in the conceptualising of Others. The *nation* is an overwhelmingly powerful entity that dictates identities and belongings, and further, lays claim to territories not only physical – cartographically and geographically – but also in terms of people. Social communities within boundaries are given identity and citizenship (or not!) by participation in said nation. Clearly, this is a highly contested issue that provokes resistances by peoples and places not amenable to such definition.

Nation is a contentious and loaded term. It is at once abstract and concrete: abstract in the sense that it is conceptualised (and contested) by people and communities, and yet concrete because it is often taken as a given, in such ways as national borders and boundaries, which can restrict the movement of people and communities, and even separate them. I understand nation as a "community of people whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity rooted in an historic attachment to a homeland and a common culture, and by a consciousness of being different from other nations" (Johnston, *et. al.*, 2000: 532). In discussing nations in this dissertation I show that communities and places like Chinatowns have such characteristics: a community of

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people who identify with each other through a sense of commonness and similarity in historical background and in relation to other communities.

At the same time, in the context of East Asia (China) and Southeast Asia (the geographic situation of this research), nations and nationalism are problematic. According to Smith (1983, 1991), as well as Gellner (2008), nationalism and nation-states are modern concepts. Even further, Dirlik has argued that nationalism "tends to project itself over both space and time, homogenizing all differences across the territory occupied by the nation..." (1996: 106), rendering the concept an instrument of historical and geographical erasure and revision.

Nationalism is a key concept here, wherein feelings of belonging to a specific nation, as well as a concurrence of ideology (see Johnston, *et al.*, 2000) reinforces the nation. A device used in nation-building, or the strengthening of national identities, nationalism is important to help assert sovereignty, as well as to maintain autonomy of the nation-state. Nationalisms also assert place through the production of space via representation, and by giving the territories within the political boundaries of the nation-state particular identity. An example of this is through place names, where, given a specific name, an entire territory, in spite of physical geography, is given one homogeneous identity. Hobsbawm (1990) also notes the significance of nation in mobilising community based on loyalty, allegiance, and feeling. The idea of a shared history and meaning entails a community of like-mindedness. The creation of "tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992) adds to but also complicates the concept, as practice becomes convention and routine, and eventually becomes a socially constructed idea of

"norm". Yet these social constructions of custom and tradition tend to strengthen national identities through the employment of symbols in practice and ritual.

If identities may be based upon concepts of nationalism, or the nation-state, then identity is inherently geographical, because nations tend to be so fiercely geographical. The idea of culture as a signifier of difference produces identities – because identities represent difference. Space (and geography) becomes important because it is through space that societies, or civilisations, if you will, clash, and meet, and form identities. The intersection of spatiality and identity is important in order to understand what Chinatown meant – and still means – to the Chinese in its myriad forms. In the context of this research, Chinatown first references the nation of China (I discuss the issue of the Chinese nation below), which endows the place of Chinatown with a kind of Chinese national identity. Secondly, Chinatown asserts the fact that it is *not* in China (generally, Chinatowns tend to be located in regions settled by Chinese migrants), which implicates yet another national identity – that of the settled nation. Chinatown, as such, implies a dual nationalism, or a dual identity, in which ethnicity denoted by nation of origin clashes, and mixes with nationality bestowed by nation of settlement. This hybridised identity problematises the neat categorisation of national identities, which seeks to provide a community of people with a homogeneous identity. While the multiple notions of Chinese identities help to create and continue to maintain the place of Chinatown, the place itself informs and reasserts that identity. Chinatown is more than simply a site of social exclusion (as previously argued by Anderson, 1998, and others); plural ethnic identities of the community necessitate a multiplicity of meaning and purpose for

Chinatown.

The Chinese identity (in its many forms and interpretations) is influenced through the grounding of culture in discrete spaces and localised communities. During the colonial period, these urban ethnic enclaves greatly influenced the formation of ethnic identities. However, much as each nation in the region is vastly different, having been *created* and *changed* as these national spaces themselves have developed and grown through the years, the landscapes also differ, as a result of their diverse histories. As such, the national context of each Chinatown matters.

An additional problematic to the concepts of nation and national identity is that it is not only the nations and the national identities of the four research locations that matter. The idea of a Chinese nation (China, as it were) not only influences concepts of Chinese identities (or concepts of "Chineseness"), but also concepts of Chinatown identities. Lodén (1996) examined the changing understandings of Chinese identity over time, as varying concepts of *nation* affected the identity and influenced the idea of the Chinese empire. According to Lodén, there has been a dominant Western discourse of China. This has been the culturalism-to-nationalism thesis in which imperial China was considered a cultural entity (based on Confucian ideals of high culture – essentially, to be *Chinese* was to be considered civilised, or *cultured*), and the eventual separation of the concept of "China" and "Chinese culture" only occurred following encounters with major European powers and with Japan in the nineteenth century (1996: 271). Clearly, if the concept of "Chineseness" follows from an adherence to a definitive idea of "Chinese culture", then overseas Chineseness, and Chinese places and their identities (Chinatowns)

are influenced by "Chinese culture", whatever this may be.

As such, what constitutes Chinese nationalism (and, by association, Chinese identity!) is difficult to define succinctly. Duara (1993) has noted that the provincial nature of China has played a big part in the formation of individual and communal identities in, and outside of the region – certainly many of the overseas Chinese networks, particularly Chinese associations, are organised by province of origin. Following this, Chinese identities tend to refer to more than just nationalisms, but also specific *regionalisms*. Dirlik (1996) has also argued that nationalism, together with cultural essentialism, has become a tool to help define and reinforce the boundaries of sovereign territories. The significance, then, of "Chinese nationalism" is how it reaches into "Chinese identity", whether overseas or not.

To define China is no small undertaking. The myriad forms of nation that China has moved through are complex, although Wang (2009) provides a quick history. In this project, the working understanding of China is its most superficial: that of the country. While talking with interview respondents, I did not attempt to define what China meant; in Mandarin conversations, I used 中国 (*zhongguo*), and did not clarify which iteration of China was being referred to. My justification for not using a specific definition of China (for example, the People's Republic of China (PRC), or a particular era) was to allow the interview respondents to decide for themselves what China meant, what it included and excluded. I acknowledge the possibility that defining China as solely the PRC would alter the results of interview responses. People who self-identify as Chinese may identify with a specific China that excludes the PRC. The China that some overseas Chinese relate to

may be the China of their ancestors or their memories, something that may not exist in the present. Pan notes that the Shanghainese she identifies with are not the ones who are there presently, but the "ones who lived before the 1949 revolution" (2009: 218). In this sense there are plural understandings of China that co-exist. As such, when talking about China I made no assumptions that respondents referred to contemporary (PRC) China. An interesting observation regarding the usage of the term from the respondents is that the term China was never used to include Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Macao. If these territories ever came up in conversation, they were always referred to by name, and not as a part of China.

Chineseness is a problematic term, but one that needs to be used in this dissertation, and I do not use it uncritically. Its meaning has not only changed over time, but refers to different things in different contexts. The special issue *Chineseness Unbound* (Reid, 2009) tackled the term. It is recognised that there are many definitions for "Chineseness" and even "Chinese". In this project, I embrace them all. Yao (2009) found through a simple, anecdotal exercise that one can be Chinese in three ways: through ancestry (being of Chinese descent, a racial definition), through practice (doing Chinese things, or participating in particularly Chinese activities), and through governmental definition where the state officialises race or ethnicity. Furthermore, Chineseness can be seen in relative terms, where one is "more Chinese" than another through the application of a measurement, such as language ability, or place of birth or residence, for example when comparing a Mandarin speaker to a non-Mandarin speaker, or someone who was born in China to someone who was not. It is often also seen as unequivocally objective,

particularly when the label "Chinese" is being placed upon a person or a thing to define

and describe it. Reid (2009) also notes that at the very basic level, there are two types of

Chineseness: a state-sanctioned Chineseness, one that exists as part of the Chinese state

(or China, in whichever form it takes), and a global Chineseness that has been separated

from the Chinese state.

While embracing all possible permutations of Chineseness, the definition I began

this project with closely follows what Wang calls "kinship ties" (2009: 210). The

respondents I gathered to interview self-identified as Chinese, and expressed Chineseness

through their ancestry. For example, many of them, particularly in Bangkok, Ho Chi

Minh City, and Rangoon considered themselves Chinese because one or more of their

parents or grandparents were Chinese or from China. In Singapore, however, there is an

added layer to the definition of Chineseness or being Chinese. This is a particular state-

sanctioned Chineseness that is also outside of the Chinese state. Chua and Quah both in

Reid's special issue (2009) discuss the way in which Chineseness is thrust upon the

"ethnic Chinese" in Singapore as part of its multiracial policy. The terms 华人 (*huaren*,

Chinese person) and 中国人 (*zhongguoren*, China-person, or Chinese citizen) make a

simple distinction between global Chineseness and Chinese-state Chineseness, or a

Chinese nationality.

On another note, post-colonialism is particularly crucial to the idea of the nation,

especially in the Southeast Asian region, where the concept of nation is implicated in the

process of colonisation (see, for example, Winichakul, 1997), and further, resistances to

colonialism strengthened the idea of the nation. In the wake of colonialism, the newly

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independent nations of Southeast Asian commenced their struggle for self-definition and self-identification. As a reaction to being colonial subjects, and a part of the national identity of the European colonisers, independence and autonomy meant the opportunity to redefine the self, and to create place meanings with no overt relation to the coloniser.

Postcolonial Geography and Place

Postcolonial geographies are a key part in the framing of this research. Notwithstanding the postcolonial state of the research sites that I am studying, postcolonialism also provides a concept through which the study can be framed. The study is essentially a spatial one, rooted in the built, urban spaces of Chinatown. As I have explained earlier, the meanings endowed in space constitute an understanding of place as it is experienced. Ideas about Chinatown and the Chinese community associated with it are derived from the place meanings we draw about these specific spaces.

Blunt and McEwan's edited volume, *Postcolonial Geographies* (2002), encapsulates the significance of postcolonialism as a discourse with which to investigate "the intersections of place, politics and identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts" (2002: 1). Meanings in space are negotiated through the politics and the identities that are constantly performed upon it. To employ a postcolonial discourse in the implementation of this research is to realise that meanings of space are fluid and are being produced not only by the people who inhabit it or use it, but also by people who exert power over it. The same applies to communities of people who struggle for self-identification and definition. As the colonising of space necessitates the implementation of definitions,

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structures, and ideals upon it, postcolonialism comprises the resistances that challenge these implementations of meanings, seeking instead to assert alternatives.

The colonial discourse upon which much of geography is founded appeared in the form of regional geography. European geographical imaginations sought to categorise the world constructing cartographical regionalities separated (or grouped) by difference (see Gregory, 1998). The spatial construction of the "East", along with the cultural construction of the "Orient" (see Lewis and Wigen, 1997) was mapped by such efforts to label and map the world. As already noted, Said (1979) criticises this practice of orientalism. The attempt to create meaning over parts of the world by homogenising regions into easily comprehendible categories is a homogenising practice that ignores that matrix of diversity and differentiation that cannot be marked by arbitrary borders and boundaries, as delineated by cartography.

Approaching this study through a postcolonial geography is significant. At the very root, spatial meanings that contribute to place are dominated by political geographies that exert definitions over it. To uncover culturally specific perspectives and meanings of such spaces requires that alternative voices be heard, and that resistances and challenges to meaning are constantly negotiating and renegotiating spatial identities – particularly because these identities affect the communities that use the space, or are perceived to belong to that space.

This theoretical framework broadly guides this discussion about four Chinatowns in Southeast Asia. As spaces defined, at least initially, by a culture of difference, Chinatowns are "Chinese" spaces within "non-Chinese" spaces. This distinction between

spaces is decidedly not objective, but viewed through an interpretive lens that compares the "Chineseness" of a thing against another. This manifests in a number of ways. First, in examining four Chinatowns in Southeast Asia, there are comparisons in the way these *places* are seen as different. How do the Chinatown landscapes compare, physically and otherwise, with each other? Questions like these will seek answers in an investigation of what is considered "Chinese" in the landscape. There are also comparisons of the diasporic expressions of the communities, for example, how "Chinese" are the communities; how are they tied to "China", and, more importantly, which or what China do they feel they are attached to? And how is the comparison made between "here" and "home"? Comparisons of nationhood are also discussed. How "Chinese" are the Chinatowns, or are they more their own places, and less a China-related place?

Second, what are Chinatowns in relation in China? This is alluded to in exploring the diaspora and ideas of home. It is also seen in Chinatown landscapes, that appear to reference a kind of Chineseness. And what kind of nationhoods do Chinatowns present? Far from simply being a "little China" in a non-Chinese city (except, perhaps, for Singapore), Chinatowns throw into question ideas of nation.

Third, in researching Southeast Asian Chinatowns, I present a body of work that can be held up as a comparison to the Chinatowns in the Western hemisphere. How are "Western Chinatowns" different from "Eastern Chinatowns"? This question is outside of the scope of this project. However, Chinatowns appear superficially homogeneous, exhibiting similar physical landscapes and ethnic and demographic characteristics, and further observation reveals their heterogeneity.

As mentioned on page 2, Chinatowns are not all the same. Yet they do have similarities that allow for a basis for comparison: they are Chinatowns. As described earlier, they are marked as spaces of difference within the city, and labelled for the population that inhabits the space (at least initially, Chinatowns appeared to support a migrant community that also appears superficially homogeneous), this dissertation provides a better understanding of the things that make the difference between places.

Dissertation Organisation

This dissertation contains seven chapters. In this current chapter I have introduced the research, reviewed the existing literature on Chinatowns, and outlined the concepts that are critical to this study. As the historical context of Chinatowns is important, the second chapter, "Situating Chinatowns in Four Cities", provides an overview of Chinese migration overseas – generally, and within Southeast Asia. After this I examine the Chinese in Southeast Asia in terms of colonialism. Following this, I provide a geographical context of the research sites, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore.

In Chapter Three, "Chinatown: The Field", I explain and describe the methods I employed in the field in order to obtain data. I also discuss my approach to the field, considering my position *in* the field. The chapter closes with a reflection on my experiences in the field.

Chapter Four, "Chinatown in the City: Landscapes of Heritage", details the four urban landscapes of this study and the way in which these spaces have been identified as

Chinatown. I explore the tropes in the landscape that create and subsequently endow the space with a "Chinatown identity".

Identity is often linked to places people call home, and a major characteristic of diasporas is in the way homes tend to be multiple and complex. In Chapter Five, "Chinatown: Home", I explore the idea of Chinatown as part of a geography of diaspora. I consider the ways in which the Chinatown community considers Chinatown and other additional places as home.

The presence of diasporas contributes an element of ethnic difference to nations. Chapter Six, "Chinatown Navigates the Nationscape", examines the concept of nationhood in the context of Chinatown and the Chinese community. I discuss how the landscape and the community negotiate the identity-building aspirations of the Southeast Asian nations. I also draw on concepts of globalities to consider the idea of Chinatown as a global entity.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I conclude the dissertation by summarising the main points of the research. I also raise some issues and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2
SITUATING CHINATOWNS IN FOUR SOUTHEAST ASIAN CITIES

> ... *when* the Chinese left home and *where* they went to played extremely
> important parts in shaping the communities they formed outside China.
> (Wang Gungwu, 1999: 11)

Writing about the Chinese in Southeast Asia is an undertaking of infinite proportions;

nevertheless it has been done, in several ways, by several scholars in the field (see, for

example, Suryadinata, 1995, 1997; Reid, 1996; Pan, 1999; Wang, 2000, among many).

The goal of this chapter is to situate the Chinese and the Chinatowns in Bangkok, Ho Chi

Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore within this dissertation (see Figure 2.1 for a situation

of the four cities within Southeast Asia), and to provide a cohesive historical and

geographical context through which the subject matter of Chinatowns in these four

particular cities can be discussed. As Wang, above, notes, the *when* (history) and the

where (geography) of the Chinese migration and settlement in Southeast Asia matters.

The history of the settlement and the location of the community provide a context in

which the concepts of heritage and identity, home and diaspora, and nationscapes can be

analysed. As Pan (1999) notes, emigration from China into Southeast Asia followed

several chronological waves, what she terms "frameworks", and were driven by different

impetuses. According to Pan, there were six main frameworks, from the earliest, China's

maritime and commercial development, to the most recent, domestic instability in China.

These are separated by almost a millennium of various situations, beginning with the

increasing interaction of China with the Southeast Asian region, the increase and

expansion of China's population, the development of western military might in

conjunction with industrial growth, and European involvement in China and Southeast

Asia.

The Chinatowns and the urban Chinese communities I research in this project

were formed or had their roots during these periods, and were influenced by these

circumstances. My aim here is not to furnish a complete and exhaustive account of

Chinese immigration and settlement in Southeast Asia, but to unpack the history behind

the clustering of Chinese migrants in these specific urban areas that eventually lead to the

formation of Chinatowns. Thus in this chapter I focus on the backgrounds of the four

cities, rather than the countries in which they are located, and on the Chinatowns in

particular, as opposed to the entire Chinese populations.
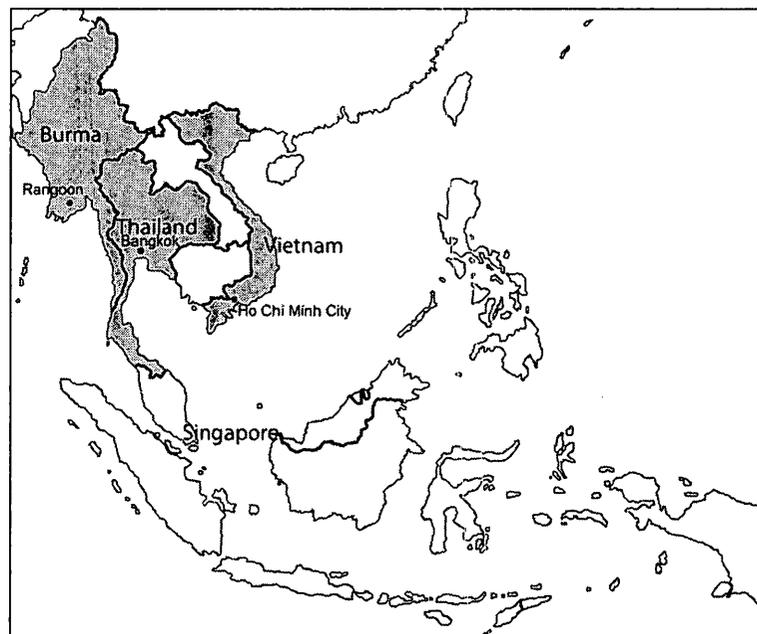
Figure 2.1: Map of Southeast Asia showing Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore

In the next section I provide an overview of the Chinese overseas, noting the key

literature in this field. I follow that section with a brief history of the Chinese in

Southeast Asia, focusing on the movement of the Chinese through the region, and the

period of settlement and circumstances under which emigration from China into the region occurred. The following section teases out the nuances of the colonial process in Southeast Asia and its influences on the cities as they relate to the Chinese communities. In the last section I outline in detail the establishment of Chinatown and the Chinese community in, and the significant urban developments of, each of the four cities.

The Chinese overseas are not, have never been, and never will be, a homogeneous group. Perhaps the only thing they will ever have in common is their habitation outside of, and the ability to trace their ancestry to an origin in, China. Owing to the separate waves of emigration from China, as well as the circumstances under which settlement was gained in their host countries (and cities), the ethnic Chinese overseas exhibit a diverse range of cultures, heritage, social norms, and identities. This heterogeneity is mirrored in the various Chinatowns existent in the world. They were established for different reasons, at different times, under different circumstances, and are all influenced by their particular localities.

The Chinese Overseas

Lynn Pan's *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (1999) provides in great detail a history of Chinese migration to the rest of the world. The overseas Chinese are not only analysed by the six frameworks of their emigration from China (as noted earlier), but also by categorisation into three main groups – the first including the majority of the Chinese (80%) who live outside of China, but nearby, in the East Asian and Southeast Asian regions; the second comprising the communities of Chinese who live in Latin America,

Africa, and other parts of Asia; and the third, a growing group, incorporating the Chinese who live in "the West". The first section of the book explores China as a place of origin. It explains the populating of the regions from which many of the first wave migrants came, and provides a regional background for the various Chinese cultures in the country. The second section looks at patterns of migration, outlining the main reasons for emigrating and the sources of the diaspora. An exploration of Chinese institutions, from the family unit to business organisations, is given in the third section, providing a context upon which overseas Chinese communities are based. The fourth section deals with relationships, exploring China's attitudes towards the overseas Chinese, feelings of nationalism among the overseas Chinese, as well as global relations between the Chinese and the rest of the world. The final section addresses the many communities of the Chinese overseas, by region, beginning with Southeast Asia, and concluding with India and Africa. Each region is broken down into many of the core countries where the Chinese have settled overseas, providing an exhaustive summary of the background of the community in each nation.

The purpose of summarising Pan's text here is to show that the Chinese overseas is a large, intensely complex group. They can be categorised and broken down in several ways, each categorisation overlapping with others. Even the arbitrary frameworks and groups outlined above have their exceptions, and tend to be general, rather than specific. Still, these groupings provide an insight into the Chinese diaspora, as well as a basic guide to understanding Chinese migration overseas. The complexity of the overseas Chinese experience is significant to the concept of Chinatown as it demonstrates the

multiplicity of histories and backgrounds that make up the community and the neighbourhood. As far as it is comprised of several different groups of Chinese peoples of several different generations of migration, including those who do not consider themselves completely Chinese anymore, Chinatowns and their communities are as multi-layered and heterogeneous as the overseas Chinese themselves.

Many instances of emigration from China began as sojourn, in which migrants leave China with the intention of returning. Their duration overseas varies, but many of the original sojourners end up migrating, never returning, or returning only to visit. This is an important concept in the terming of the Overseas Chinese (*huaqiao* in Mandarin), as members of the nation who travel away from China were imagined to be sojourners, and therefore maintain their Chinese nationality, enabling them to return home. The term has, as Wang (1996) notes, highly political implications, particularly when considered in terms of nationalisms. Further, China has, for much of the past ten centuries, prohibited overseas travel to Chinese citizens. Access to the coastal areas and maritime activities were restricted during the Ming dynasty (1364 to 1644) for the purpose of curbing piracy. This caused hardships for coastal dwellers, as well as for legitimate maritime traders. However, this had the effect of inciting rebellions and promoting overseas migration as many Chinese sought to escape this difficulty. Also, for much of the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1912), the Chinese were forbidden to leave China. Particularly in the mid-twentieth century, the overseas Chinese were viewed by the Chinese state with suspicion as capitalists who valued connections to their host nations more than to China, and further were opposed to the communist regime of that time. Later in the century, however, this

attitude was transformed as international relationships came to be seen as beneficial for the nation.

Most accounts of Chinese emigration date their beginnings in the tenth century. As mentioned, the earliest wave of migration was driven by trade, and this was encouraged by developments in maritime technology – through an intense network of inland canals, as well as superior seafaring vessels (as compared with the Europeans'). Through commercial trade with Korea, parts of Japan, and much of Southeast Asia, China's merchants and traders, as well as its navy, were able to expand and settle into the main ports of these regions. Mention is also made of overland trade into eastern Europe and Russia, however the majority of travels resulting in eventual settlement occurred in East and Southeast Asia. Chinese fleets on treasure-hunting missions also reached India and parts of Africa in the early fifteenth century, led by the famous Admiral Cheng Ho (Zheng He) under the aegis of the Ming dynasty. Yet at the same time, throughout these centuries of great expansion and sojourn into other parts of the world, barricades to travel and trade, caused by the presence of piracy and smuggling, were alternately raised and lowered as different emperors sought control of the maritime economy. In spite of the several bans on travel and emigration, large numbers of Chinese continued to do so defying these laws.

The second framework of emigration involved China's relations with the various kingdoms and communities in Southeast Asia. A more specific outline of the more recent interactions will be given in the next section. Associations, agreements, and tributes with most of mainland Southeast Asia (today's Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Malaysia,

and Thailand in particular, as well as parts of Indonesia) were in effect from the thirteenth century onwards. Many of these were overland relationships, dealing with the Champa, Angkor, Pagan, Java, and then later, the Sukhothai and Majapahit empires. The tribute missions fostered relationships with these, and other, Kingdoms, and precipitated trade in wood and spices in particular, as well as the development of distribution networks, entrepôts, and manufacturing centres. Agreements between many of the major port cities led to diplomatic relations, which further encouraged emigration from China, to settle in the growing Southeast Asian cities. The expanding Chinese migration into this region coincided with the urban and economic development of a number of Southeast Asian ports, and fostered an ongoing relationship between China and Southeast Asia that remains to this day. In the latter part of the millennium, the states in the Archipelago were much more open to trade than those of mainland Southeast Asia which fostered an attractive environment for the continual migration of Chinese labourers, miners, and traders to the ports of Singapore, Brunei, parts of Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Pan's third framework brings into context the demographic changes in China. The steady increase in Chinese population over the centuries saw it become the largest empire by the seventeenth century, surpassing even that of the European nations combined. Despite the expansion of the empire into neighbouring lands, the rapid increase in population caused many to leave China for other countries in search of more and better opportunities. China's agricultural land was insufficient to produce an adequate livelihood for many, and precipitated the migration of those who would offer their labour overseas.

The fourth framework, western military development and industrial growth, relates to developments in the world at large. As the European nations developed their industrial economies, significant advancements in technology not only allowed for easier, faster, and more affordable travel, but also drove the need for global labour markets. It is in this stage that the Chinese emigrants ventured further into the rest of the world – particularly to Europe and the Americas. At this stage, China was not the only source of the Chinese migrants, many also came from East and Southeast Asia. This is noted as the period within which the Chinese diaspora was born. Not only were migration numbers increasing as a result of increased trade due to the rapid globalisation at the time, and the rising demand for goods, but also for labour as lucrative jobs were to be found elsewhere because of the industrial revolution. This framework also marked the beginning of European colonisation in many other parts of the world.

European involvement and colonisation marks the next, the fifth, framework. As the West "expanded" into China and Southeast Asia and began appropriating the sea routes, the Chinese in Southeast Asia became intermediaries in the sea trade between this region of Asia and the rest of the world. Colonisation of much of Southeast Asia saw the heavy development of coastal cities into entrepôts. Port cities in Southeast Asia such as Singapore and Malacca rose in eminence, enticing more Chinese migrants to settle and do business in the places. Cities such as Macao, and later, Hong Kong, flourished in these times and internal migration saw a sudden population growth as the British and the Portuguese turned them into major trading stations. The arrival of the Dutch in Taiwan and Indonesia, as well as the Spanish in the Philippines also encouraged Chinese

migration to these shores. Together with the increasing population density in China and the rapid development of these coastal destinations in Southeast Asia and parts of the East Asia, the motivation for the Chinese to migrate was strong.

The last, though likely not the final, framework is the political instability in China. Domestic unrest in China came to a head in the mid-nineteenth century beginning with the Opium Wars (the first from 1839 to 1842, the second from 1856 to 1860), and including popular rebellions and uprisings from the countryside. This is not to say that the China region was always peaceful prior to relations with the rest of the world. Internal conflict had been consistent in the past millennium through the conquest of the earlier dynasties by the Mongol Empire (led by Kublai Khan), the collapse of which resulted in the Ming dynasty (the final dynasty to be ruled by the ethnic Han Chinese), which was subsequently replaced by the Qing dynasty, founded by a Manchu clan from what is today Northeastern China. The Chinese had already been fleeing the empire (many overland into what is today Vietnam, and other parts of mainland Southeast Asia) throughout this contentious period. However, it was the Opium Wars and the various internal uprisings and movements that launched this wave of emigration. Rebels and refugees alike fled China for neighbouring countries. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion sought to oppose foreign imperialism and influence in the nation. This later brought to the fore impulses regarding Chinese nationalism, which then evolved into the Chinese Civil War (1927 to 1936, then 1946 to 1950) between the *Kuomintang* (Chinese Nationalist Party) and the Communist Party of China. Again, this conflict resulted in much emigration from China. Other significant instabilities included the Japanese invasion in 1937. The

Communist victory in 1949 was also cause for emigration.

This is but one means of categorising the movements of the Chinese away from China. Wang Gungwu (1991), though understanding also that "Chinese migration" is an extremely broad term, presents an alternate series of easily identifiable patterns, limited to the past two centuries. The first of these he terms *huashang* (Chinese trader), the "trader" pattern, dominant in most parts of East and Southeast Asia, in which merchants and artisans travelled (or were sent abroad). These traders not only established businesses at ports, mines, and trading cities, but also set up networks which brought in more people (usually relatives) to run or expand their operations. Many of these traders and their partners would eventually settle in their place of business. The second pattern, *huagong* (literally, Chinese work) is the "coolie" pattern. The term coolie, possibly derived from the Mandarin term, *kuli* (literally, bitter strength, a term for hard, physical labour), is used for the large numbers of contract labourers, generally peasants, labourers, or the urban poor, who provided much of the physical labour required in other countries. Many migrated to Australia and North America, drawn by the gold rush, as well as the abundance of work available in the developing industrial economies, particularly in building the railway systems. Many also migrated to the growing ports and cities of Southeast Asia, providing the manual labour needed to build and develop these urban centres and their economies. The third "Sojourner", *huaqiao* (Chinese emigrant or sojourner) pattern describes mainly Chinese intellectuals who followed the footsteps of the earlier migrants in order to provide support and a link back to China. These were, according to Wang, teachers, journalists and other professionals who helped to maintain

an awareness of Chinese culture and China's national needs. They carried ideologies from China to the overseas communities. Dr Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party, was one of these, and he was among those who maintained that the Chinese overseas were still part of China. Among the legacies of the sojourners can be counted the emphasis on providing and supporting Chinese language education abroad, as well as the maintenance of culture and heritage. The fourth pattern is the *huayi* (Chinese descendent) "Descent" or "Re-migrant" pattern. This pattern largely comprises foreign-born people of Chinese descent.

Most Chinese who left China, however, have by no means abandoned the country. The Chinese overseas tend to retain and maintain networks and connections, not only with China, but also with other Chinese communities all over the world. At this point, Chinese emigration has been occurring for centuries, and much of the scholarly literature is turning to the changing patterns of Chinese international migration. Chinese global movement is not limited to emigration from China, but now, increasingly, between other countries as well. The large exodus from Hong Kong prior to 1997 is an example of this. Emigration of the Chinese from many of the politically unstable Southeast Asian nations to Europe and North America in the latter part of the twentieth century is yet another example. Additionally, the Chinese overseas are not limited in mobility. There is not only a large amount of movement back and forth (between countries of origin and settlement), but also everywhere else – countries related to neither home nor host. Scholars such as Pan (in 1990) and Ang (in 2001) have eloquently described experiences as ethnic Chinese born outside of China, traversing through and settling in much of the world while still

feeling a connection to China. While these experiences and feelings are not universal to the ethnic Chinese outside of China, they provide an insight to their complex migration patterns.

The heterogeneity and variety of the Chinese overseas has been noted by Skeldon (2003), who reminds us that while the term diaspora, which tends to a uniformity of migrant experience, is used to describe the dispersal of the Chinese overseas, it masks its complexity and diversity. The terminology used to describe the overseas Chinese experience, like "Chinese overseas", "overseas Chinese", or "Chinese diaspora" all have this homogenising problem. Much migration literature grapples with the complexity of processes surrounding the global movement of such groups. Indeed, the bulk of literature on the Chinese diaspora (see, for example, Skeldon, 1994; Benton & Pieke, 1998; Sinn, 1998; Wang & Wang, 1998; Pan, 1999) documents the changing migration patterns of the Chinese overseas.

Pan (1990) notes that the clan association was key in maintaining the networks of Chinese communities all over the world. Not only do the associations provide a place to gather, a "home away from home" in a new, strange land, and function as a support and welfare network for new immigrants, the associations also helped to maintain a sense of heritage, culture and history. In a sense, emigrating Chinese who had left their country did not have to abandon their identities, but rather were able to reaffirm them through a culturally complementary community. As clan associations were sorted by regional origins, as well as dialect and surname (family) ties, they helped to maintain heritage and lineage. Pan further mentions a significant role of the clan associations – that they

"*looked* Chinese" (1990: 113). In many places, the clan association buildings and structures were often built or furnished in the style of the region and dialect of their origin. The sight of the building alone would claim a familiarity and provide a sense of place for the newcomer.

It is likely that Chinatowns perform a similar and expanded function. Although not created for benevolent purposes as the clan associations were (Carstens, 1975; Sinn 1997), Chinatowns do provide a place for the Chinese overseas to gather and reaffirm their cultural identities. Further, Chinatowns are also diasporic spaces that physically represent the presence of the Chinese overseas in these places despite their varying circumstances. Institutions like the clan associations, and urban ethnic neighbourhoods like Chinatowns provide a place of cultural communion and connection regardless of the different reasons for being overseas.

The mixed reactions that host cities have towards the migrant population play a part in the creation and maintenance of overseas Chinese spaces, particularly that of Chinatowns. In many North American cities (see Anderson, 1991; Li, 1998; Lin, 1998, for example) ethnic neighbourhoods – notably, Chinatowns – are formed as products of social and racial differentiation, and some segregation. Over time, these spaces of difference have become part of the urban landscape that make up a representation of the overseas Chinese all over the world.

Notes on the Chinese in Southeast Asia

In the middle of the nineteenth century a number of changes facilitated mass Chinese migration all around the Pacific. The opening in the 1840s of Hong

Kong, Guangzhou (Canton), Xiamen (Amoy), and later Shantou (Swatow) to free trade and migration provided unprecedented opportunities for the Chinese to leave, and the advent of the steamship made their travel over great distances both faster and cheaper... (Reid, 2008: xvi)

The Chinese in Southeast Asia can be better understood as minority groups who happen to be Chinese rather than as Chinese who happen to be living outside of China (Hirschman, 1988: 30).

The narrative of Chinese emigration into the Southeast Asia region is a long one. While the Chinese had been slowly expanding the territory of the Chinese empire by moving outward for centuries, mass emigration in large numbers, as Reid notes above, did not occur until the nineteenth century. As a result, historical accounts of the presence of the Chinese in Southeast Asia tend to separate Chinese migration into two main stages – the first stage constituting the period prior to the expanding role of Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Xiamen, and Shantou as major trading cities, as per Reid, above, and then the next stage, generally coinciding with colonial dominance in the region. The main issue surrounding Chinese migration in Southeast Asia (as a field separate from global Chinese migration) might be the way the Chinese immigrants have integrated into their host societies in the region. Mackie (1976) notes, in conjunction with Skinner (1963), that the Chinese interaction (and including assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation) with their respective Southeast Asian societies is a phenomenon quite unmatched in other parts of the world, or with other societies. The Chinese form a not insignificant ethnic minority in the region (as Hirschman mentions, above), and have been, and continue to be highly influential in matters of politics, commerce, and society. At the same time, as Rigg has argued, the Chinese communities have presented a problem, "the Chinese problem" (2003: 97), from nationalist perspectives in many Southeast Asian nations.

Scholarship on Chinese migrants typically characterises them in the role of sojourners from China (Wang, 1981; Reid, 1996; Suryadinata, 1995, 1997, 2004). Initially identified as "overseas Chinese" loyal to China and their national lineage, political and social pressures later changed this identity and made their allegiance appropriate to the Southeast Asian country in which they lived. Many of the Chinese who sojourned to Southeast Asia came primarily as merchants and labourers who followed the "great Chinese naval expeditions to the Nanyang, or South Seas" (Mackie, 1996: xix). Many did not intend to stay, as mentioned earlier, but had planned to remain working in the region until they had earned enough money to return home, and were thus labelled "sojourner". However, at certain points, many of the migrant Chinese chose to remain and settle in their adoptive countries. They did so in part at the behest of the colonial governments through encouragement to adopt dual nationalities, from desire to establish and expand their businesses, or because there were few to no employment and work prospects back in China. In addition, many had become attached to the countries they had settled in and had increasingly identified themselves with the ethnic indigenous and state nationalities (Mackie, 1996). In many cases, those who remained overseas were also joined by family, relatives, and others from the same hometowns, either drawn by the lure of gainful employment overseas, or driven from home by averse situations (for example, political instability, or the lack of land in China).

The two main types of migrations from China – over land, and by sea, are also key in the literature here. Reid (2008) notes that the earliest expansion of the Chinese in the region was fueled by China's colonisation of its continental hinterland. Reid's text,

The Chinese Diaspora in the Pacific (2008), begins with an introduction that succinctly relates the movement of the Chinese into the neighbouring areas of Southeast Asia and the rest of the Pacific region. He argues that despite the extension of ruling power into its continental regions over land, the empire was not as active in its support for its conquests by sea. With the exception of the large maritime expeditions led by the Admiral Cheng Ho, imperial expansion into the parts of Southeast Asia other than the mainland region was generally limited. This is not to say that there were no seafaring population among the Chinese – it is simply that they were not supported by the Chinese empire.

Prior to the nineteenth century, Chinese seafarers originated mainly from the southern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. Reid (2008) argues that these southern Chinese were speakers of dialects (Hokkien; Cantonese) vastly different from those spoken in the capital, and saw themselves as associated primarily with their dialect groups rather than with the Chinese empire, or even as 'Chinese'. Their propensity for travelling by sea was fueled by their proximity to the South China Sea; their penchant for emigration encouraged by the fact that their maritime traverses were considered to be contemptuous of the empire – as such, they bore no great loyalty to the emperor.

Further, the seafaring Chinese migrants had, over time, consolidated their position as intermediaries in the seaports of Southeast Asia (see Kuhn, 2008). As intermediaries between the locals and the foreign traders, they not only filled a much-needed role in the trading ports of the region, but also provided a viable trading network that extended back to China. Even as the Chinese empire ignored much of the maritime activity developing in Southeast Asia at the time, the rulers of the disparate region relied on maritime trade

for revenue, and the southern Chinese traders were available to support this.

It has already been established that the leading impetus for Chinese emigration to the Southeast Asian region is primarily economic. McKeown (1999) has argued that the emergence of the modern Chinese diaspora as well as increased flows of people overseas was shaped by capitalism. The role of the Chinese émigré became more significant as the European traders, and later colonialists, sought to control the trade of resources from the region. As European influence expanded into the area, particularly as Malacca came under Portuguese rule in the sixteenth century, and then the establishment of Manila as a trading-port by the Spaniards following soon after that, the Chinese saw an increased market for their services. As the port cities of Southeast Asia began to draw more merchants looking to trade in spices, the Portuguese traders also started to push further into Chinese regions through Macao. Chinese products such as silk and porcelain were sought after, and the empire would trade for silver. This development solidified the position of the Chinese traders and merchants in the Southeast Asian region as intermediaries between China and the rest of the world. The commercial interests of southern China increased and expanded, and with this followed the burgeoning ranks of sojourning Chinese merchants plying trade routes, as well as labourers seeking employment in the growing port cities.

As the cities developed and began to play a significant part in regional and international trade, so did the role of the Chinese migrants. From merchants and labourers (coolies), they expanded into occupational niches and specialisations. McKeown (1999) also outlines the general patterns formed by the diasporic Chinese – namely the effects of

increased labour opportunities in the region (and beyond – Chinese emigration *from* Southeast Asia also occurred around this period). Kuhn (2008) provides a brief summary of the occupational categories that the Chinese dialect groups tend to dominate. As an example, the Henghua immigrants in then Malaya and Batavia dominated the bicycle business (Cheng, 1985). Occupational specialisation not only kept the Chinese migrants in power over their commercial niches, but also provided a means through which businesses would be kept "in the family", as well as employment opportunities for migrants from similar backgrounds. Successive generations of migrants had the opportunity to find employment through networks with family members, fellow villagers, and dialect groups.

It is in this manner that the Chinese migrants forged a community for themselves. By taking up occupational specialisation they were not only able to provide employment for themselves, but also for others they chose to support. The next pattern McKeown (1999) notes is that of networks, in which familial connections, friendships, and such social connections were drawn upon to create and provide opportunities for increased emigration. It is also through these networks that strong communities were formed, and subsequently maintained with the help of the various associations and guilds established in destination cities. Dominating occupational niches further emphasised their significant roles in the economies of these growing cities. The migrant Chinese who settled in these places established their cultures and forms of society there, in particularly physical ways, such as architecture (in such forms as temples, associations and clubs) and also through the highly visible festivals and parades celebrating their cultural traditions, such as the

lunar new year. Additionally, the Chinese presence further embedded itself into Southeast Asian society as they began forming alliances with the local population through marriage. The large majority of early migrants were men who left family in China while sojourning to Southeast Asia. Many married local women and started new, often second families in their destination cities.

The hybrid offspring of the Chinese migrants and the local people further helped to entrench the sojourning Chinese in the Southeast Asia communities. Carrying traits, cultures, and traditions of both ethnic groups, they continued ethnic Chinese legacies and heritages through vehicles such as surnames (always patrilineal), and language. This was common enough in the region, particularly in Malaya, that the term "Peranakan" (meaning "local born" in Bahasa Melayu) was coined for the use in labelling people of combined Malay-Chinese ethnicity. This hybrid community never became a majority population, however. While their presence is felt, and noted, in much of Southeast Asia, these people of Sino-local mix are a representation of the ease with which the Chinese migrants are able to assimilate, or acculturate, with the people in Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, the earliest Chinese migrants, *người Minh Hương* (literally, people of the Ming dynasty; descendants of Chinese who emigrated during the Ming dynasty, around the fourteenth century), readily assimilated with the local Vietnamese *kinh* majority, particularly as many of the migrants were men, and intermarriage was common (Tran Khanh,1997). Conversely, in other parts of Southeast Asia, for example Thailand, the mixed Chinese and local hybrid population never acquired a formal, separate categorisation. Awareness and knowledge of ethnic differences remain, but owing to a

long history of Chinese settlement in these places, assimilation occurred readily so that there was no need for a separate term for those who claimed Chinese ethnic heritage.

Chinese communities in Southeast Asia were by and large self-governed, particularly before, and during, the colonial periods. As they were often not considered locals, or 'natives' of the region, and most retained national affiliation to China, they tended to be an autonomous group that nevertheless still wielded a considerable amount of – particularly economic – power in the major cities. Often, this economic power bestowed entry into political power. Having so much control over the trade and import/export activity of the cities they inhabited, the Chinese community as a large commercial group was often able to sway regulatory policy and influence administration as well.

Despite evidence of their relatively easy assimilation and incorporation into many Southeast Asian nations and cities, it is also clear that the participation and involvement of the Chinese in local society was (and in a number of cases, still is) problematic and fraught with challenges. As a powerful autonomous group that maintained elite status – in many local communities, they were landowners, business owners, functioned as overseers in mines and plantations, as well as recruiters of labour who employed growing amounts of migrant labour, usually from China and their home town – the Chinese were also perceived to be imperial outsiders that held too much power in places where they were not considered citizens. While Southeast Asian locals were employed in the development of the growing economies, it is not surprising that many felt displaced by the Chinese (Kuhn, 2008).

During Dutch rule of Indonesia, the Chinese, as intermediaries between the colonisers and the locals, acted as tax collectors on local-owned rural land, as well as controlling the market of imported goods. According to Furnivall (1944), the economic power of the Chinese community far surpassed that of both the Dutch and the Indonesians. The consequences of this uneven distribution of power still resonate today in the form of race riots. In Indonesia, this arguably began with the 1740 Batavia massacre, and then most recently with the May 1998 riots in Indonesia. Both instances of the riots saw mass violence that resulted in the death of thousands of Chinese. The May 1998 riots in particular were incited by the economic downtown, compounded by worsening unemployment rates, and instigators of the violence saw the largely Chinese upper class as the cause of their problems.

Race riots have also occurred in Singapore and Malaysia, among the Malays and Chinese, most violently and notably in 1964 and 1969. Again, the perception of the hugely uneven proportion of wealth, power, and property held in Chinese hands was the leading cause of unrest in these instances. In Singapore, the cause was largely political and nationalist, spillovers from the unrest in Indonesia and Malaysia (Lai, 2004).

Clearly, part of the "Chinese problem", culminating particularly in the twentieth century, lay in the seemingly questionable loyalties of the ethnic Chinese. In many cases it was largely unclear whether they retained allegiance to China (as "overseas Chinese" who still considered themselves a part of the Chinese empire), or whether they were subjects of their host nations (as part of the minority group of "ethnic Chinese" that now considered the Southeast Asian nation their home). Exacerbating this uncertainty was the

fact that many of the Chinese, particularly business owners and intermediaries between the colonisers and the local Southeast Asian markets, also gained European citizenships through naturalisation (see Wang, 1998a and 1998b). In the early twentieth century, warring ideologies of communism and nationalism in China were building up into the Chinese Civil War. This began a series of effects in the rest of Southeast Asia where political leaders such as Sun Yat-sen campaigned, and party loyalties and support were sought from the large and influential Chinese communities in the region. Fearing communist uprisings as well as secondary effects from the war in their own homeland, the leaders and populations of the Southeast Asian nations began to resist the presence of the Chinese in their own communities.

At the same time, and notably in the post-war and post-colonisation period, nation-building was in full force. National identities were being created and realised, and citizenships and loyalties were in question. One could not credibly claim to be simultaneously Thai and Chinese or Vietnamese and Chinese, for example (see Suryadinata, 2004). In some places, Chineseness could only be maintained as a race or ethnicity, or a claim to a minority group, as opposed to a nationality. This, along with the threat of potential political instability due to circumstances in China, created an atmosphere that was hostile to the Chinese community. The main result of this in the region is that many of the ethnic Chinese chose either to leave the troubled cities or to assimilate completely, taking on native names (in Thailand and Indonesia, for example) and downplaying their Chinese heritage.

Racial tensions between those who considered themselves natives, for example

the Malays, or the *kinh* Vietnamese, and the ethnic Chinese continue to persist in parts of

Southeast Asia. Despite the claim of the ethnic Chinese as natives and as citizens of the

nations in this region, many Southeast Asians still perceive them to be outsiders. In some

places, citizenship by ethnicity is classed – for example in Malaysia, the implementation

of a *Bumiputera* (literally, "sons of the soil", or indigenous Malay) class in the 1970s,

following the race riots in 1969, was a move that created more opportunities for the local

indigenous population. Economic and social policies favouring the *Bumiputera* gave

Malays a significant advantage in the fields of commerce, aid, and education, among

other areas. The policy was also designed to give the Malays an opportunity to compete

in a more even playing field, particularly in economic activities already dominated by the

Chinese – a small, but powerful minority in the nation. Policies such as these helped to

mitigate some of the causes of racial tension.

The role of the Chinese is received and treated quite differently across Southeast

Asia. The Malaysian state, for example, in stark contrast with Indonesia, called on the

Chinese community in the country to aid the *Bumiputera* businesses, in order to help

rebuild the economy in the wake of the 1997 regional economic downtown (see Cartier,

2003). The Chinese responded by helping the *Bumiputera* to establish transnational

networks and linkages, as well as by supporting their businesses. Such active calls for an

entire ethnic community to assist and support the economy is unmatched in the region,

much less the rest of the world. It indicates an acknowledgement that the Chinese

commercial community is crucial to the economy of that particular nation.

As such, it is clear that the position of the Chinese in Southeast Asia is an uneasy

one. With the exception of Singapore, where they make up the majority of the population, the ethnic Chinese form a economically significant minority. They also wield a considerable amount of political power (endowed largely by their commercial clout and economic presence). Some nations, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have settled into a relatively amicable alliance with the community after a long period of trying to reduce the Chinese population; others, as in Indonesia, have seen continually contentious relationships. Socially, the merging and assimilation of the Chinese with the local community have been a mixed process. Patterns may be seen in the chronological and geographical mixing of the migrants with the host society. Very generally, in the pre-colonial era, the Chinese migrants adapted and assimilated easily with many of the Southeast Asian regions in the rural areas. During colonisation, where the focus of the Chinese migrant society shifted into the urban areas of the region, the Chinese community began to separate from the local communities – particularly in the upper classes (where the bourgeoisie more closely aligned with the European colonisers), and with the compradors. Post-colonisation, the position of the Chinese started to destabilise as nations and nationalisms began to be realised. This was a crucial phase in which assimilation was political and formalised. In the present, much of the afore-mentioned racial tensions have subsided. The relationship of the Chinese communities in the nations of Southeast Asia now range from efforts at mutually beneficial and amicable cooperation to an uneasy truce, although there are more examples of the former than the latter, and these situations are liable to change anytime. The relationships between home and host communities are dynamic ones as discrete communities act and react differently to

various circumstances.

The complexity of the history of Chinese migration in and through Southeast Asia cannot be understated. In noting the major concerns and issues linked with their movement into the region I have left out many other experiences and histories that have yet to be recorded. There are more heterogeneous knowledges and perspectives than can be noted in this one section of one chapter. At every scale, be it regional (as in Southeast Asia), national (individual countries), or even at the scale of local communities and villages, the experience of the ethnic Chinese – who may, or may not still consider themselves to be overseas Chinese – is complex and subject to individual, and intensely local situations.

Colonialism and the Chinese in Southeast Asia

The colonisation of most of Southeast Asia was a significantly influential part of the region's development – and some would say, modernisation. The presence of the European traders and merchants increased exponentially with the official colonisation of many of the coastal areas of the region. Although it was arguably the Portuguese who, in the sixteenth century, initiated and propagated mass trade between Asia and the European economies, it was the establishment of corporations like the Dutch East India Company that brought Southeast Asia into the forefront as a supply site of resources for the rest of the world.

The significance of colonialism to Southeast Asia, particularly in the influence on the urban environment, is illustrated by McGee (1967), who argues that Southeast Asian

cities are landscapes filled with representations of their various histories. Quite tangibly, for example, they reflect a myriad of streetscapes presenting a range of architecture that reflects their traditional, ethnic, cultural, and colonial legacies, in addition to their modern urban structures (this is also discussed in Askew & Logan, 1994; McGee & Robinson, 1995; Kusno, 2000; Bunnell, *et. al.*, 2002; Chia, 2003, Kong & Law, 2002). Yeoh (1996) illuminates three approaches to the urban structure of the colonial city as reflective of the dynamic between the (European) colonial state and the Southeast Asian community. The first approach is that the colonial city marks a transition between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' Southeast Asian city, in which the European colony is the catalyst that transforms the city into a modernised space and marks a development in its economy. The second is that the colonial city is a spatial expression of hybridity brought about by the meeting and mixing of two (or more) separate cultures (that is, the European, and the Southeast Asian). In this case, the urban environment of the city is a contact zone produced by cultural interaction. The third approach sees the colonial city as a product of the political economy, in which urban processes and development are brought about by the increasing reach of the global economy and capitalism. While Yeoh's critique of these approaches is that they rarely treat the colonial city on its own terms and consider the perspectives and experiences of the actual inhabitants of the city, these approaches are evidence of the vast impact of the colonial regime on the Southeast Asian landscape.

European colonialism not only affected the development of urban environments in the region, but also the trajectory of the economy and the population of the cities. The legacies of colonialism are also seen in the ultimate nations, nationalisms, and national

borders that the Europeans left behind. Purcell (1956), a report on colonialism in

Southeast Asia, explains that concepts of nationalism and the struggle for autonomy and

independence grew out of a reaction to European colonialism. At this stage, Purcell also

notes that in Singapore, where the majority of the population was Chinese and

proletarian, the strong influence of ideas from "communist China" incited movements

which eventually led to firm ideas about nationalism in country. Clearly, this had effects

on the rest of Southeast Asia; while the Chinese communities in other parts of the region

were by no means the majority population, they were influential and present in critical

mass to provoke change and challenge colonialism.

For the Chinese in Southeast Asia, colonial rule simultaneously saw the Chinese

population as and not as colonial subjects. Certainly there were those who had already

been naturalised and considered as locals of the particular region, but there were many

who were still regarded as overseas Chinese, still owing allegiance to China, and thus not

completely subject to the limitations and regulations of European colonial rule. As their

activities were generally not restricted by either local governments or the colonial

administration, the ambiguous position of the ethnic Chinese allowed them to take work

and take up residence in most parts of the region. Kuhn (2008) notes that the Chinese

settled in both urban and rural places all over Southeast Asia. In the urban areas, their

capitalist interests and occupations lent them powerful roles; in the rural areas, large

communities of Chinese labourers who responded to the demand for labour in the

growing trade economy, particularly as miners, loggers, and plantation workers, formed

local orders in reaction to these weakly governed areas. They also required armed defense

as they often developed antagonistic relationships with the local communities in these areas. As such, local mining and labour organisations and associations were formed, creating a de facto form of governance for these outlying groups of immigrants. As such, the expanding reach of the global market for Southeast Asian resources, facilitated by colonial enterprises, encouraged Chinese migration into areas where self-governance was required.

While the Chinese communities were largely autonomous and self-governed in the cities of Southeast Asia (although they were still subject to the laws of the colonial administration, as illustrated in Yeoh (1996), in which the ethnic Chinese population exhibited both compliance *and* resistance to the public health regulations put in place by the colonial government in Singapore), the colonisation (and subsequent decolonisation) of most of the region played a large part in their eventual development and evolution. Most importantly, it was colonialism and its economic effects that encouraged the exponential migration of Chinese to Southeast Asia. The rapidly developing port cities and the growth of trade and shipping in the region led in large part by the colonial Europeans encouraged the Chinese to leave China in such large numbers.

Colonialism was – and in many places, still is – a large influence in the position of the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. The Chinese played a significant role as intermediaries in the commercial trade and economic development of the port cities in the region. It also installed them in powerful political positions (for example, as *kapitans* in Batavia) over the indigeneous groups. The Chinese were also given the liberty to be tax farmers in many parts of Southeast Asia – renting districts of land in the colonies and

taxing the local farmers and plantations.

The consequence of such autonomy in much of Southeast Asia is revealed in the decolonising era of the region. Even as the nations contested and resisted the European colonial regime, the Chinese, a perceived wealthy group from having profited from the local land and labour, were also seen as imperialists. The anti-Chinese movements that came about in this period were not only influenced by their capitalistic tendencies, but also linked to the unrest in China, and the Chinese were seen as the cause for some of the growing instability in the nations themselves. This was in addition to the position of the Chinese who had also been perceived as "Other" even during the colonial period as they were not completely allied with the colonial administration, and also distanced from the local population. Their often fractious inter-association conflicts boiled over into gang warfare, and their reputation for promoting opium and gambling, and other vice activities in these growing port cities soured their relationship with the local communities. The "Chinese problem" came to a head in the wake of decolonisation, as newly-independent nations struggled to build identities and institute citizenship. This period in the history of Southeast Asia saw much of the Chinese community assimilating completely, or leaving en-masse.

The Chinese in Southeast Asia are as much affected by colonialism as the rest of the region has been. Their relationship and interaction with colonialism have impacted their communities and influenced the social structures, as well as the urban structures, of these communities. The Chinese have been and continue to be a significant part of the region.

Chinatown

Bangkok
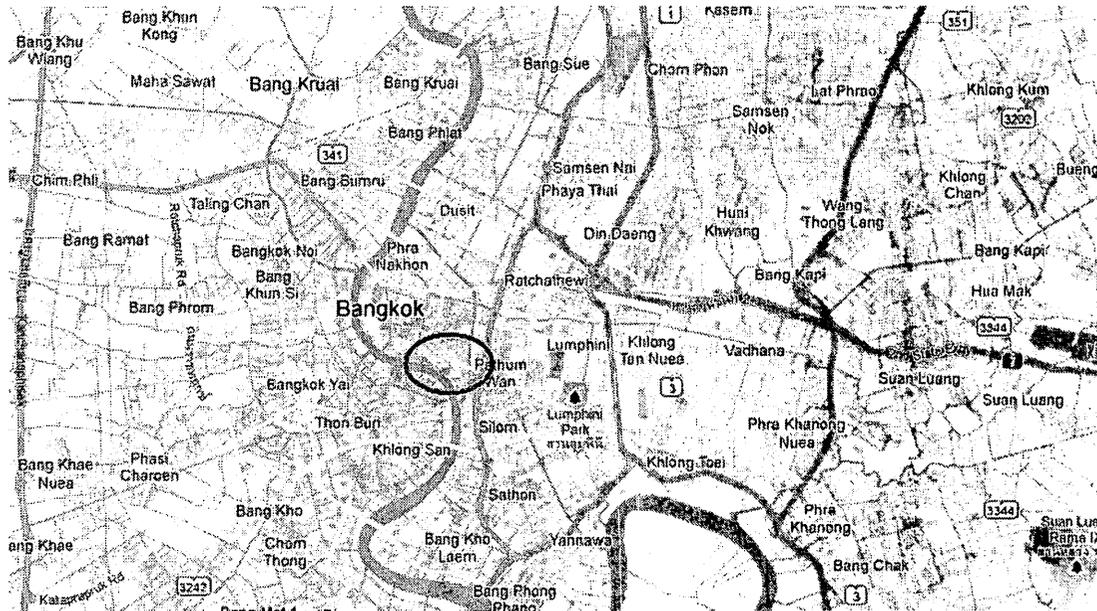
Figure 2.2: Location of Chinatown within Bangkok; Source: Google Maps, 2012, with edits

Thailand is the only nation in Southeast Asia that was not formally colonised, although it

cannot be said that it was untouched by colonialism. Thailand, also called Siam during

parts of the twentieth century, came under heavy influence, particularly by the French

(generally from its northern and eastern boundaries, flanked on that side by the French

Indochina) and the British (through Burma and parts of Malaysia, from the west and the

south). In a recent publication, Harrison and Jackson (2010) call the particularly unique

discourse of colonialism around Thailand "semicolonialism", noting the need for a

critical approach to Thailand's position relative to the "West" (to use Jackson's

terminology). Also, as Winichakul (1994) has shown, the European colonials were a

factor in the determination of the nation and its borders.

Chinatown in Bangkok is located in the Samphanthawong district in Rattanakosin

on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, east of the Phra Nakhon district, its historic centre (Figure 2.2). Contemporarily referred to in the colloquial as *Yaowarat* or *Charoen Krung*, the two main thoroughfares serving the neighbourhood from end to end, Bangkok's Chinatown is also known as *Sampeng*, the original alley that served the community in earlier times. This Chinatown was established when the Chinese were removed from the Phra Nakhon district in order for the Grand Palace to be built. The Chinese community settled to the east of the external walls of the Palace. The physical landscape of Chinatown here overtly displays a kind of Chineseness; Chinese-style décor and signs proclaiming the neighbourhood as a Chinese one are abundant in the landscape. This, together with prominent gates, such as the "Chinatown Arch" at the Odeon Circle, and the slightly less elaborate Sun Yat-sen Gate at the mouth of Sampeng Lane, are plain signs of a mutually amicable and beneficial relationship between the Chinese community (represented spatially by Chinatown as a whole) and Thailand. Yet this apparent friendship between the two cultures conceals a history of antagonism.

The kingdom of Thailand went through alternating periods of rejecting and accepting the migrant Chinese who had settled there. The Chinese were the largest migrant group residing in Bangkok in the late nineteenth century (see Ouyyanont & Yoshihiro, 2001), and constituted an important role in the economy and commercial development of the city at that time. Not only did they own and run many of the trading houses and mercantile businesses, there was also a reliance on the migrant Chinese to supply a large part of the manual labour (corvée, or coolie labour) in the city. Even more importantly, the Thai kingdom had a long history of collaboration with the Chinese, and

many Chinese merchants and traders held elevated status and power, influencing the decisions of officials and politics in Siam (see Skinner, 1957; Watson, 1976). Many members of the Thai royalty were part Chinese – the father of Taksin, the King of Siam 1768-1782, was a Chinese immigrant; his mother was Thai. The migrant Chinese were heavily integrated into the Thai community, and intermarriage between the communities was extensive. The unchallenged co-existence and acceptance between the Chinese and Thai eventually faltered and declined under a combination of factors in the late nineteenth century. The conjunction of increasing Thai nationalism and growing Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century (which resulted in riots, increased gang warfare, and general instability within many of the overseas Chinese communities led by groups loyal to different political parties in China), together with the sentiment that the Chinese were dominating too large a part of commerce and the economy in the country, which involved trade monopolies, eventually led to a rejection of the migrant Chinese in the nation. Further, the involvement of the Chinese community in such occupations as opium smuggling and gambling dens, as well as the rise of secret societies, resulted in resistance against a perceived amoral Chinese presence in the city. The consequent popular resentment of the overseas Chinese in Thailand led to measures that encouraged assimilation in order to diffuse tensions within the nation. Legislation by King Rama VI (1910-1925) required the adoption of Thai surnames by the Chinese – a move that enforced a demonstration of national allegiance and the abandonment of dual-nationhood. Chinese schools were increasingly limited in the years following a restriction on curriculum that emphasised the instruction of the Thai language over the Chinese ones, as

well as moderating the nationalist teachings of the Kuomintang Chinese (see Watson, 1976). In the 1930s, efforts to develop a cohesive Thai nationalism required that education in the country be standardised, and the presence of Chinese schools opposed this directive. As a result, the schools were eventually closed. It was also during this period that commodities commonly traded by the Chinese, such as rice and tobacco, were taken over by the state, and discrimination against Chinese businesses emerged in the form of heavy taxes and restrictions.

In present-day Bangkok, the largest and most commercial city in Thailand, the Chinese community is muted, but its presence is keenly felt. With proclamations of amicable cooperation and recognition of their significance in the local community, widespread acceptance of the ethnic Chinese returned in the late twentieth century. While the Thai-Chinese (*luk-chin*) have assimilated into local Thai nationality and identity, they are generally free to express their ethnic Chineseness with minimal prejudice or consequence. This is also reflected in the city's Chinatown landscape.

Ho Chi Minh City

In Ho Chi Minh City, Chinatown is commonly known as *Chợ Lớn*, and is comprised of Districts 5 and 6, and parts of Districts 10 and 11. It lies to the west of District 1, the commercial and administrative centre of the city (Figure 2.3). *Chợ Lớn* literally translates to "big market" in Vietnamese, likely referring to the main economic activity in the area, and then later in conjunction with the landmark *Bình Tây* market in District 6. *Chợ Lớn* was also previously termed *Tai Ngon* ("embankment" in Cantonese) by the Chinese

population, referring to the situation of the neighbourhood, built upon the embankment of the Saigon River. The main roads of *Chợ Lớn* are Nguyen Trai and Tran Hung Dao Streets.
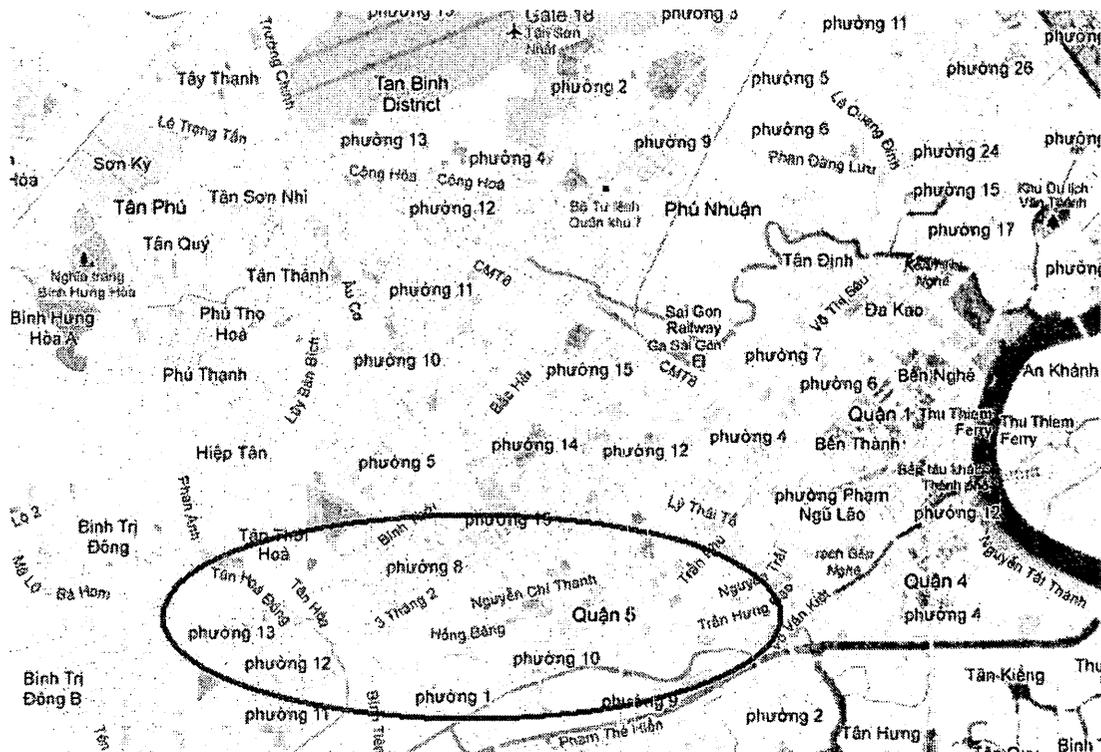
Figure 2.3: Location of Chinatown within Ho Chi Minh City; Source: Google Maps, 2012, with edits

Chợ Lớn preceded the existence of the more famous Saigon, which eventually developed to the east of the market town, at the mouth of the Saigon River. Both urban centres grew and, particularly *Chợ Lớn*, expanded their borders until they merged. The amalgamation became solely Saigon in 1956. The once-city is now a major part of Ho Chi Minh City, occupying four large districts in the urban area. The major commercial activity of *Chợ Lớn*, particularly during the French colonial period, was in the rice trade, encompassing both foreign and local markets. The control of major businesses in the commercial activities of the country was a source of antagonism between the Vietnamese

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and the Chinese, particularly those of a different class – specifically the wealthy

businessmen, rich merchants, and compradors, those who were a part of the Chinese

Chamber of Commerce, and who held some power in managing and governing the

Chinese community (Engelbert, 2008). In the middle of the twentieth century, the period

immediately following de-colonisation from the French, the government of the Republic

of Vietnam (1954 onwards) attempted to break the monopoly that the Chinese held over

the rice trade. This was done through policies favouring and privileging local Vietnamese

businesses and corporations, as well as through implementing regulations and limitations

on the "foreign" businesses (Tran Khanh, 1993). Chinese-run businesses were classed as

foreign. During the late 1970s, following the reunification in 1975 that brought

communism to Southern Vietnam, there was a large-scale expulsion of the Chinese from

Vietnam. Some interpret this event as the result of racial conflict (see Porter, 1980), as an

anti-capitalist communism stance and rising resentments towards the Chinese community

as a privileged minority, as well as fears of national destabilisation caused by latent

loyalties to China, overcame efforts to portray the ethnic Chinese as a cooperative

community committed to the anti-imperialist struggles of the nation.

Stern (1985), however, argues that in the wake of this instability and the exile of

the Chinese, the performance of the Vietnamese economy dropped sharply. In response to

this, new economic guidelines were made, and policies revised. The resulting private

commercial activities of the ethnic Chinese were revived, and helped to revitalise the

nation's economy. Mac Duong (1994) notes that during this period of revitalisation, the

Chinese community in Vietnam turned to assimilation through claiming citizenship.

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Further recognition of this citizenship helped establish the position of the Chinese-owned and -run businesses, as well as their networks.

In the context of Vietnam, there has been a recent emphasis on the recognition of the various minority groups in the country, celebrating the diverse range of peoples who constitute the nation. The existence of the Chinese Division of the Peoples' Committee in Ho Chi Minh City points to the significance of the Chinese community in the city, and represents an acknowledgement of that particular ethnic group. The "Traditional Revolution House of the Chinese" in District 6 is a memorial to the ethnic Chinese who were involved in the revolution and liberation of Vietnam, an indication of a level of cooperation and partnership between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. The representatives of the Peoples' Committee declare with pride the number of minority groups included within the Vietnamese nation, demonstrating a keen interest in the inclusion of diversity and non-ethnic citizenship in the country. This includes the ethnic Chinese.

Rangoon

In downtown Rangoon, Chinatown is situated west of the Sule Pagoda, along the Rangoon River. It stretches westwards from the western border of the Little India neighbourhood, at Shwe Dagon Pagoda Road (Figure 2.4). Its main thoroughfare is Mahabandoola Road. The area was also called *Tayote Tan*, the Chinese circle, or Chinese quarters during the colonial period. During the colonial period, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda Road was known as China Street, a label that reflected the primary population living in

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that area. The ethnic Chinese in Rangoon were not confined to this Chinatown area, but

also occupied much of the rural land around the city.
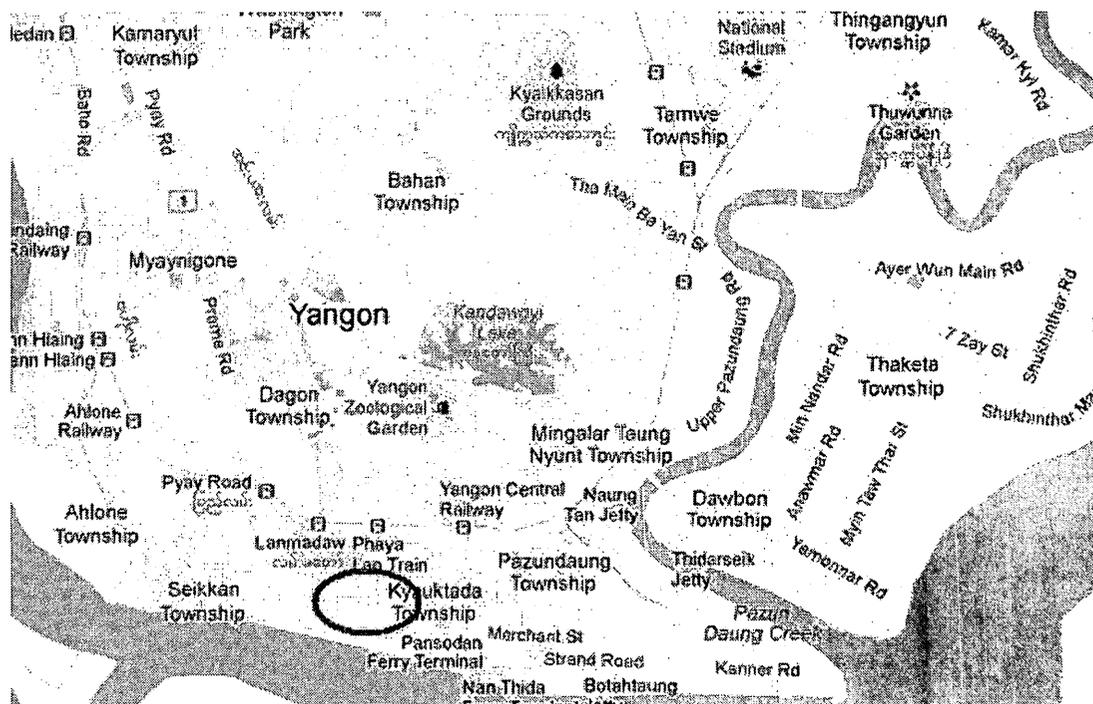
Figure 2.4: Location of Chinatown within Rangoon; Source: Google Maps, 2012, with edits

As in the rest of Southeast Asia, the migrant Chinese presence in Burma had been

notable in the centuries prior to colonialism, and then increased considerably during the

period of British colonisation. Mya Than (1997: 117) dates overland Chinese immigration

into the Burmese region from the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, 906-1279, 1271-1386,

and 1368-1744, respectively. During British colonisation, immigration rates rose as the

Chinese arrived via maritime routes. The effects of the overseas Chinese community on

economic and urban development in Rangoon at this time was on a much smaller scale

than in other parts of Southeast Asia, however, as the proportion of Chinese in lower

Burma was relatively small. The economic position of the Chinese in Burma during the

colonial period was less significant than in other countries, behind that of the British and the Indians. Burma also had a lot of major ethnic groups within its boundaries, but the British tended to isolate them from the core Burmese (Bamar) people, particularly from the urban areas. As Furnivall (1956) has noted, Burma had a relatively multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, even pre-colonisation. In the wake of post-Independence nationalism, the formation of the Union (see Steinberg, 1982) united the disparate ethnic groups within the nation, but excluded the Chinese, who were considered to have been exploiting the indigenous people, along with the British and the Indians. As the Chinese community was perceived of as wealthy, a signifier of imperialism, the state restricted their economic power by regulating their trade and business (particularly by controlling trade in rice, and through high taxation on shipping), and also limited the community by restricting Chinese education.

After 1967, at the beginning of Burmese nationalism, and in response to anti-Chinese riots stemming from the Cultural Revolution in China, Chinese schools and associations were banned and forced to close. Chinese businesses were also shut down. Many Chinese fled the country, returning to China, or assimilated into the local population. This would be important as the 1974 Constitution created stratified citizenships based on parentage. Later, the 1982 Citizenship Law created further layers in the citizenry by classifying people of mixed parentage and recent immigration as less equal, not "full citizens" as the indigenous ethnic groups were (Mya Than, 1997). As such, the Chinese community found itself with fewer rights and privileges than other groups in the nation.

At the height of nation-building and nationalism in Burma, the ethnic Chinese, as

mixed-blood citizens, were not considered full citizens in the nation. Ne Win, Head of

State from 1962, alienated the Chinese and their descendants, even those who had

assimilated through marriage to the local Burmese population. He held that, by virtue of

their mixed parentage, they could not be trusted because they were exposed to foreign

economic and political interests (Mya Than, 1997). Further, these "alien" groups –

including the British and the Indian – tended to dominate the local economy, working

against the best interests of the nation. Than further shows that assimilation was popular

prior to Burmese Independence, particularly outside of the city. Within the city, although

inter-marriage was common, the identity of the ethnic Chinese community was

maintained, particularly through institutions such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce,

the temples, associations, and the Chinese schools in Rangoon. The presence of such

formal establishments in the city helped to cultivate a sense of a Chinese identity,

particularly where they were concentrated in the Chinatown (Chinese circle) area.

The citizenship ruling affected the assimilation and participation of the Chinese

community in ways different from the rest of Southeast Asia. The ethnic Chinese who

remained in the country maintained a low profile so as not to draw attention to their

difference and foreign identity, but they stayed because of the familial ties they had

formed in Burma, and the previously high level of integration they had enjoyed. Clearly,

during the period of heightened nationalism, anybody who was not indigenous to the

nation was considered a foreigner, and this meant that the Chinese in Rangoon were

excluded from state nationalism, even though they were formally naturalised citizens.

During this time, there was no question about the presence of the Chinese community on the nation's identity. The Chinese were there, and were included as citizens, but were also seen as foreigners, with no real ability to be involved with the development of the nation.

Today, the presence of the Chinese in Rangoon is not overtly conspicuous, unlike the open displays of cultural artefacts in Bangkok's urban landscape, for example. It is more akin to the landscape in *Chợ Lớn*, where their presence is muted, but undeniable. This reflects the state of the Chinese community, which neither hides its ethnic heritage and culture nor flaunts it, but blends into the local culture and national identity.

Singapore

Chinatown in Singapore is located on the western edges of the Central Business District, and includes the Telok Ayer, Bukit Pasoh and Kreta Ayer neighbourhoods within its boundaries (Figure 2.5). Major road arteries in the area include Eu Tong Sen Street, and New Bridge Road and South Bridge Road, both of which lead from the Singapore River. Much more has been written about Singapore's Chinatown than any of the other three locations. Two names of particular note in relation to the urban landscape of Chinatown are Henderson (2000), who has studied the effects of urban conservation and tourism promotion in Singapore's Chinatown, and Yeoh and Kong (1994), who noted the intersection of landscape conservation in Singapore's Chinatown with the lived experiences of the neighbourhood's residents.

Singapore's Chinatown, out of the four cities, perhaps bears most prominently the marks of active heritage conservation and promotion. Singapore is the only nation in

Southeast Asia that has a majority ethnic Chinese population – a large majority of approximately 75 percent. Much like the rest of the region, however, the major increase of Chinese migrants to Singapore coincided with its establishment as a British trading post in 1819. Eager to promote the trading post, it was established as a free port, and traders were encouraged to settle on the island. Due to the lack of trade restrictions and its welcoming environment, the port grew exponentially, with many Chinese traders and merchants seeking to establish new trading points and markets for their goods. The Jackson Plan of 1822, drafted under the aegis of Sir Stamford Raffles (popularly known as the founder of Singapore), also known as "Plan of the Town of Singapore", was drawn up in response to the rapid settlement and messy expansion of the once-quiet village (Yeoh & Kong, 1994; Henderson, 2000). It was this plan that zoned the city by ethnicity (or race) – creating enclaves that separated the city into ethnic residential areas. The four main zones outlined in this plan were the European Town, which commandeered the centre of the town; the Chinese Kampong – today's Chinatown, to the west of the Europeans; Chulia Kampong, the Indian (primarily Tamil) quarters on the northern boundary of the Chinese Kampong; and Kampong Glam, on the east side of the town, for the Muslim community, which was comprised of the indigenous Malays, as well as the migrant Arabs and the Bugis from Indonesia. Today, only Kampong Glam and the Chinese Kampong remain, the latter now more popularly known as Chinatown. The Chulia Kampong area is now part of Chinatown – the Chinese population increased beyond the boundaries of the Chinese Kampong, encroaching on the already crowded Chulia Kampong. The Tamil community moved out and settled along Serangoon River,

today's Little India.
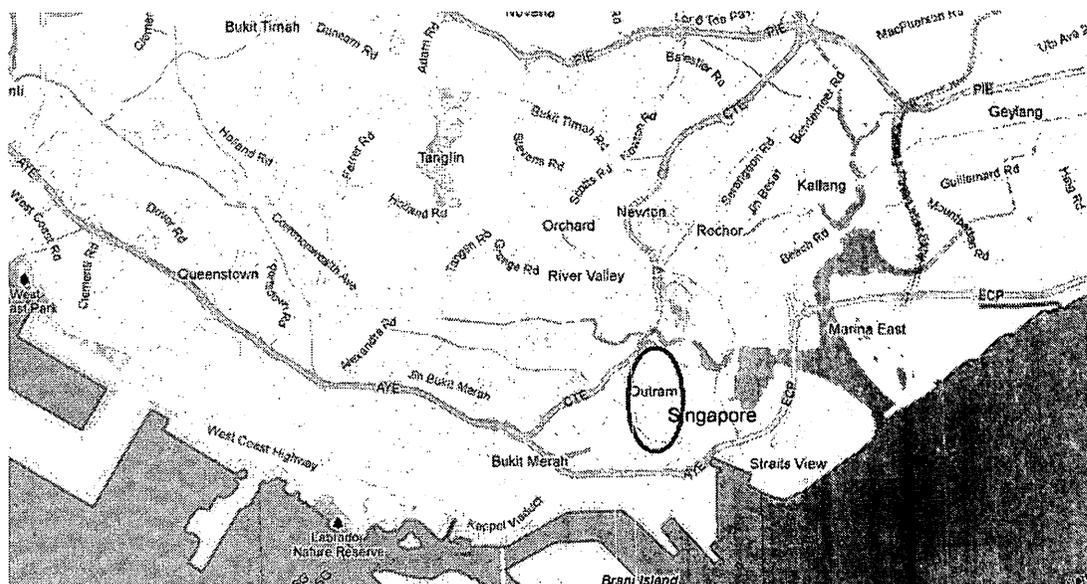
Figure 2.5: Location of Chinatown within Singapore; Source: Google Maps, 2012, with edits

Singapore's majority Chinese population has meant that little assimilation was

required on the part of the Chinese community. Rather, the nation, in adopting a multi-

cultural national policy, or "cultural pluralism" (to use Suryadinata's term, 2004), sought

to foster a sense of belonging and harmony based on national identity rather than ethnic

identity. One of the ways this multiculturalism has been fostered is the implementation of

four national languages – English, Malay (Bahasa Melayu), Chinese (Mandarin), and

Tamil, prioritising none of the ethnicities. Also, unlike any of the other nations in the

region and the cities mentioned above, the Chinese in Singapore never faced the threat of

exile. While it cannot be claimed that Singapore's brand of harmonious multiculturalism

is perfect, contentious racial incidents are generally rare. In Singapore's history, two race

riots are recorded, both in 1964 while Singapore was still a state of Malaysia. Motivations

for the riots are unclear, although links to political factions have been suggested

(Clutterbuck, 1985).

Singapore's Chinatown has, as noted above, enjoyed a rare degree of urban conservation, particularly in the light of the nation's rapidly developing urban landscape. As the rest of the island urbanised, many moved out of the densely-populated downtown area. Further, as urban density heightened in land-scarce Singapore, older neighbourhoods were being demolished in favour of erecting newer, more modern, and more high-density structures. Conservation became a key theme in the preservation of the neighbourhood. For the purposes of heritage retention, as well as tourism promotion, initiatives to retain the character and history of Chinatown were implemented. Both private and public sectors worked together to restore the environment of the neighbourhood, particularly its architecture. Also, as part of several tourism development plans, the installation of ethnic-based activities that contributed to the "original culture" of the neighbourhood was encouraged. Initiatives such as locating cultural-based performing arts groups, markets, and street-food stalls in the area foster an ambience that emulates the Chinatown of old. Further, museums and heritage centres have been established to record and monumentalise Chinatown's history in Singapore. Singapore's Chinatown is today a conscious effort in celebration of Chinese history and heritage in the nation.

Conclusion

The Chinese in Southeast Asia are a diverse group. As I have mentioned, possibly the only aspect they all share is the claim to a heritage that has its roots in the nation of

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China. Each has a diverse relationship with their current nation of citizenship. Whether they have only just migrated to Southeast Asia, or their ancestors fled the Chinese empire centuries ago, they are always considered ethnic Chinese. They are referred to by myriad terms, all bearing separate connotations – from simply the ethnic Chinese (bearing Chinese ancestry) to the overseas Chinese (in which the concept of sojourn, along with sentiments of loyalty, and a relationship to China is implied).

The Chinese in many parts of Southeast Asia experienced much of the histories that the nations in the regions underwent. Their trading initiatives and their commercial exploits accompany the region's economic development. The Chinese communities were also part of the colonial dynamics and relationships that occurred here. Chinatowns, as well, are a crucial part of the Southeast Asian cityscape. They developed along with (and in the case of Ho Chi Minh City, alongside) these major cities and contribute, socially, culturally, economically and politically to the nations.

Chinatowns, like the Chinese communities, maintain relationships with the cities of Southeast Asia. As tangible and readable forms of culture in the city, their appearances tend to reflect the nature of their communities' interaction with the host community. In some cities, they are celebrated, and highly identifiable; in others, less so. Yet they are there; their presence an urban representation that hints at the social composition of the city. Chinatowns are the physical, urban manifestations of the kinds of communities the Chinese formed outside of China.

Chapter 3
CHINATOWN: THE FIELD

Fieldwork is mediated and messy.

(Jennifer Hyndman, 2001: 265)

Research is a convoluted process. The multiple methods I employed in order to explore

the field were simultaneously exciting and difficult. The challenges I faced in using these

methods were myriad, as well. Not only are the analyses of raw data subject to

representation, and the methods of data collection open to translation, but data was often

hard to obtain, and access to sources were sometimes limited. In this chapter, I discuss

the methods I utilised to gain an understanding of the pertinent concepts surrounding

Chinatowns in Southeast Asia in terms of heritage and the urban structure, home and

diaspora, and nationalism and identities. Although not a primary topic of this thesis, I also

approach this research from a postcolonial perspective. I do this for several reasons. One

of these is the history of colonialism experienced in the region; another is that

knowledges are rarely, if ever, complete. The objective of this thesis is not to provide an

exhaustive description and analysis of issues in Chinatowns in Southeast Asia, but rather

to explore the perspective of individuals within a particular group of people in a specific

locality (ethnic Chinese Southeast Asians living or working in the Chinatown areas of the

four cities), as well as to uncover and probe myriad representations of this group of

people.

In this field, a self-reflexive humanist and feminist geographic methodology is

required. Any research that requires an insight into the nature of a community requires a

positioning of oneself and one's own awareness of where one stands in the context of the

research. Furthermore, there is a need to *understand* that every individual has a different perception of place, precisely because every individual experiences space from a different perspective (Tuan, 1977). The nature of this research field entails the implementation of different methods. No one method is free from criticism, nor is any by itself wholly appropriate for the research at hand. In light of this, any study within this field should employ a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Further, any research of this scope and the complexity of the research questions require that several different methods as well as critical consideration of methodologies and approaches are employed. This chapter addresses the several research techniques I utilised to obtain data, and the rationale behind each method.

Here I also note that it is not the intention of this research to make comparative studies between the four field locations. A consideration here is the impossibility of "complete" data across the four sites. Due to the inconsistency of many sources, particularly in the archival section, comparative data are generally unobtainable.

In the following section I discuss the postcolonial approach. The next section describes in detail a record of the actual fieldwork process. After that I explain the various mixed methods used in this research. I follow this with an account of my expectations and actual experiences in negotiating the field, and finally I conclude this chapter by reflecting on my positionality, and other interesting observations of being in the field.

The Postcolonial Approach

I turn, quite 'nurturedly' (as opposed to 'naturally'), to the postcolonial approach, as an acknowledgement of the context in which my various knowledges have been obtained. Postcolonialism is not important to this study simply because the field locations of the research are post-colonial[1]. Our 'ways of knowing' have largely been informed by ethnocentric "European cultures, and reflective of a dominant Western worldview" (Blunt & McEwan, 2002: 9), and the postcolonial approach seeks not only to address the vast gaps in the space of knowledge, but also to show that much of what we know and how we know it is one-sided and provides limited perspective. Put simply, it is important to be aware of and consider the incompleteness of knowledge that any research study is able to offer. There exist uncountable, myriad, and different knowledges in the world, and approaching the study from a postcolonial view recognises that none of them should be especially valued above another.

Sidaway noted that "postcolonial approaches are committed to critique, expose, deconstruct, counter and... to transcend the cultural and broader ideological legacies and presences of imperialism" (2002: 13). The discourse further attempts to reframe experiences of colonial relationships and allow for alternative representation – even for issues, subjects, and relations that may, superficially, appear to be unrelated to colonialism. A postcolonial approach thus also offers alternative understandings of concepts as they have generally been defined. It is also important to remember that, as McClintock (1995) has noted, postcolonialism does not, and should not, describe a

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[1] Postcolonialism refers to the approach and discourse; post-colonialism refers to the era (see Yeoh, 2001).

singular condition or experience, but can be perpetually applicable spatially. This echoes Bhabha (1994), who called for a movement away from binary and homogeneous conceptions of postcolonialism as an antagonistic relationship between 'us' and 'them' (for example, 'colonised' and 'colonisers'), but instead to build an understanding that postcolonial space is heterogeneous and hybrid.

Of particular importance to this study is the consideration of how concepts of people (Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia) and concepts of place (Chinatowns in Southeast Asia) are constructed in the context of colonialisms. Also, representations of the Chinese community and landscape are produced and consumed through the lens of orientalism (race) and imperialism (subject). Postcolonialism is further about the consideration of power and the effects that power has on creating and influencing knowledges – such as the mapping of the world, and including identities and ideologies. The significance of this is the social construction of race that creates essentialising imaginations of peoples in addition to places. As Jackson mentions, "racist ideologies have severe practical consequences particularly where they become institutionalised through the power of the state" (1989: 151). As a related illustration, Anderson (1987 & 1988, cited in Jackson 1989: 134) has shown that the idea of Chinatowns is a result of racial categorisation and cultural hegemony.

It may seem, at first glance, that framing this study in a postcolonial perspective is misguided, for it was *Southeast Asia* that was colonised, and not *China*; further, the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia both possessed and exerted a not-insignificant amount of power in the cities and local communities they have settled in. Yet, taking a

postcolonial approach to this research helps to reveal firstly the complexities in the colonial and post-colonial urban landscapes and the ways in which it has developed; secondly, alternative concepts of home; as a key concept in the ways diasporas are lived; and thirdly, the development of nationalisms and identities in hybrid ways of living. Perhaps not rendered completely powerless and subject to the various oppressions of European colonialism, but undeniably influenced, changed, and affected by their presence and interaction with it.

Finally, this kind of social, cultural, and geographical research calls for a healthy amount of reflexivity. The knowledge of myself as a postcolonial subject (or perhaps, object) requires an awareness that my interpretation and conception of the issues at hand is filtered through my own experiences; and positionality – as, oddly, both an insider and outsider to the research itself. I am not a passive observer in the course of my fieldwork; quite the reverse, I am implicated in my research. This brings me to the point of humanist and feminist geographies. In feminist methodologies, my positionality and my identity affects my "ways of seeing" (see Johnston, 1997: 289). It also affects the ways in which I conduct my research and collect data. In other words, my position and identity as female, of Chinese ethnicity, and also Southeast Asian regionality, affect my background knowledge and perspective of the field, the acquirement of data, the reactions of the people in the field that I work with to acquire data, and the way I interpret data. Feminist methodologies reject the idea that the collection, analysis, and presentation of data can be objective. Instead, as in the postcolonial approach, knowledges are situated, filtered through contexts such as race, gender, and class, among others (see McDowell, 1992;

Rose, 1997).

At the same time, while I am self-reflexive in that I understand my position and bias from my perspective in the research, I am also *not* a subject of the research; I am an entity distinct from my research subject. This separation must be clear. While I share commonalities with some of the research subjects (notably the interview respondents), we are not the same. Neither am I able to speak for them or claim to completely understand their positions and perspectives.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out in parts, beginning in the summer of 2007, and concluding in the spring of 2009.

Preliminary Fieldwork

Preliminary fieldwork began in summer 2007. From June to August, I visited and familiarised myself with the sites, spending a minimum of two weeks each in Singapore, Bangkok, Rangoon, and Ho Chi Minh City, respectively. Prior to this, I had prepared for the preliminary fieldwork by mapping out the physical boundaries of the urban areas popularly considered "Chinatown". At the sites, I spent the majority of my time exploring and mapping out the Chinatown areas. I walked the sites and recorded images through photography and keeping a journal of impressions and experiences of the space. I also took tourist tours, if they were available, in order to experience the "tourist" exposure to the area and to see which aspects of Chinatown were considered significant for the

consumption of tourists. Additionally, I made personal contact with a number of inhabitants in the area. These would provide a starting point and networks for the qualitative interviews for the principal fieldwork. With these networks and contacts, I also began to strategise further techniques for obtaining more interview respondents, such as through the snowball sampling method. At the sites, I also worked out access to archival institutions and investigated the availability of archival material. I further examined the feasibility of conducting my study at these sites.

In Singapore, archival material can be found in the National Archives of Singapore. Access is freely available to the public. Catalogues are accessible online, and material can be ordered to be viewed in-house. The National Library of Singapore – accessible publicly, also has archival holdings, particularly for the newspapers, as does the Central Library at the National University of Singapore (access limited to students, staff, faculty, and other affiliates). The Chinese Heritage Centre at the Nanyang Technological University has a resource centre, the "Wang Gungwu Library", and also hosts frequent exhibitions related to Chinese history, the Overseas Chinese, Chinese communities, and Chinese identities, among other issues. The Chinatown Heritage Centre in Chinatown is a museum that monumentalises the history of the Chinese migration into Singapore. It maintains exhibits that display a representation of everyday life of Chinatown in its earlier days, as well as provides information on the roots and heritage of Singapore's Chinese community in general.

In Bangkok, the National Archives of Thailand are also freely accessible to the public, although, officially, an application is currently required for foreign researchers

before they are able to use the Archives. Catalogues are in the Thai language, despite the availability of English language material in the holdings. Another source of archival material as well as some historical records of Thailand and Bangkok is the Siam Society. Membership and access is open to the public.

I was unable to find libraries or archival institutions in Rangoon that provided a collection usable for my research. I was further unable to gain admission to the library at the University of Yangon due to the lengthy (and additionally confusing and unclear) administrative procedures required. In the end, access to the University itself was restricted as I was told there was official government business occurring at that time and foreigners were barred from the area. The British Council library is open to the public, however it does not have any archival holdings.

During my preliminary visit in Ho Chi Minh City, I was able to meet with one of the Directors at the Southern Institute of Social Sciences. This was important as the Institute would later be able to sponsor my research visa to Vietnam for my fieldwork proper. The Institute also provided help with research, along with a Vietnamese language translator, as well as contact with the Chinese Division of the Peoples' Committee in Ho Chi Minh City, which supported my research by providing information, as well as putting me in contact with interviewees.

In the fall of 2007, I visited the British Library in London, United Kingdom, in order to identify the holdings of archival data for the Rangoon field site. Access to the British Library is free and open to the public, although a membership (also free) is required. Sources relevant to my research in the British Library include the India Office

Records (IOR), which includes a repository of municipal records and letters from the British colonial era in Burma, a number of map holdings, as well as newspaper archives.

Principal Fieldwork

Fieldwork proper began in the summer of 2008.

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

I began my fieldwork with Ho Chi Minh City, for a duration of 12 weeks, from June to August. As mentioned earlier, the Southern Institute of Social Sciences sponsored my research visa. The role of their sponsorship also extended to an affiliation by which I was able to obtain permission to access the National Archives II, as well as the Social Sciences Institute Library and the Library of General Sciences. The Institute also provided me with a translator. In addition, the Institute placed me in contact with the Chinese Affairs Department of the Peoples' Committee of Ho Chi Minh City. This Department, located in the Chinatown area of the city (District 6), placed themselves in charge of obtaining the interview respondents I required for the qualitative survey portion of my fieldwork. As part of the collaboration with the department, I was not permitted to select my interviewees independently. This was highly problematic, as I discuss later in the chapter.

In the National Archives II, catalogues were in French and Vietnamese. As I was primarily looking for colonial sources regarding the city, I focused on the French catalogues. The book-bound catalogues are arranged chronologically, and generally by subject. The material available in the French catalogues included, but was not limited to:

official letters and government records, municipal records, general policy statements, annual demographic and census data, and annual reports. These were all in hardcopy. The Archives also had a small collection of maps published during the colonial period.

The Social Sciences Institute Library uses card-based catalogues with which I could make searches by Author, Subject, or Title. The holdings of this library were largely limited to published books, in French and Vietnamese, and a small number in English.

The resources I used in the Library of General Sciences included their large, and quite complete, hardcopy archive of old newspapers, including *Le Courrier de Saigon*, and *L'Independent de Saigon*. The library (which was, at that time, also in the midst of digitising their archival collection) also had digital copies of older journals and published records pertaining to the colonial Indochine region and period.

I also made use of the library at the *Institut d'Echanges Culturels avec la France* (IDECAF), the institute of cultural exchanges with France in Ho Chi Minh City. Like the Library of General Sciences, this library also had electronic copies of English and French language academic journals and periodicals from the colonial period concerning colonial Vietnam and other parts of the French colony.

The Chinese Division of the Peoples' Committee not only contacted and furnished me with a list of 14 interviewees, but also provided me with an exhaustive and descriptive account of the history, society, and culture of the Chinatown area (Districts 5, 6, 10, 11). They arranged tours of the neighbourhood for me, which was useful as they were able to indicate relevant structures, such as Chinese-language schools and Chinese-

culture oriented communities. They also provided a personal visit to the "Traditional Revolution House of the Chinese", the Ho Chi Minh City Chinese-Vietnamese Revolutionary Museum, which showcases the involvement of the Chinese community in the revolution and liberation of Vietnam. Not unlike their selection of interviewees for me, however, these tours and visits to specific landmarks raise questions as to how much I was being "handled", and directed to a particular perspective that the Department intended to present.

The interviews in Ho Chi Minh City were conducted with the help of a representative from the Chinese Division and a translator provided by the Southern Institute of Social Sciences. These interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, French, and English, depending on the language that the interviewees were most comfortable and proficient with. The translator aided with the Vietnamese language translations. I also conducted interviews with three other participants that I had encountered on my own during participant-observation fieldtrips and through the snowballing method (they were introduced to me through a network of contacts). These interviews were carried out in English and Mandarin.

Singapore

As I made Singapore my home base and launching point for the rest of Southeast Asia for the duration of my research, fieldwork there was split up into a series of periods separated by my fieldwork in the other cities. The first part was two weeks in May 2008, followed by two weeks in September, and finally concluding with January to February 2009, a period of about 7 weeks. In Singapore I was affiliated with the Asia Research Institute of

the National University of Singapore, who provided me with access to the University's Central Library.

The Central Library has archival holdings of old newspapers such as *The Singapore Daily Times* on microfilm. The National Library has the newspapers on microfilm, as well as some hardcopy municipal records. The Map Library at the Department of Geography in the National University of Singapore also has an extensive collection of maps – of Singapore, as well as the rest of the region, including Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma.

The holdings of National Archives of Singapore included digitised photos and images of historic Singapore, digitised and microfilm copies of municipal records, policies, government records, communications, and town planning documents. Both the libraries and the Archives had electronic, online catalogue systems.

On my many participant-observation fieldtrips to Chinatown I was able to record images and experiences of being in the area. As my fieldwork period covered February, I was able to experience the Lunar New Year (colloquially, Chinese New Year) celebrations in Chinatown during the festive period. This offered a perspective on how the landscape changes to accommodate festivals and performances, a crucial note on the cultural space.

I visited the Chinatown Heritage Centre, which offers perspectives on the Chinese migration history in Singapore, particularly during the colonial era. I also found the Ee Hoe Hean Club (a Chinese Millionaires Club and social organisation), which featured a resident scholar on Singapore Chinese history, as well as an in-house exhibition on

notable Singapore Chinese personalities.

My interview respondents in Singapore were derived through random and snowball sampling. First, contacts and acquaintances who lived or worked in Chinatown were approached, and then further respondents were obtained through their own contacts and networks. Contact with a number of random respondents was also made through chance encounters in Chinatown. These were approached randomly and asked if they would participate in the research. The 13 in-depth interviews in Singapore were conducted in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hokkien. For the Cantonese and Hokkien-language interviews, I had the help of volunteer translators to help interpret the more unfamiliar and complicated terms.

Bangkok, Thailand

Research in Bangkok took place from September to November 2008, a period of about 10 weeks. Here, in addition to experiencing and recording views of Chinatown on my own, I also embarked on formal and informal tours of Chinatown. I established contact with a resident of Chinatown who took me on walking tours through the neighbourhood. One of these tours coincided with the Vegetarian Festival, a Buddhist Festival in October that is celebrated in the streets of the eastern part of Chinatown. These informal tours helped to establish an interesting perspective of the neighbourhood – from the point of view of a local inhabitant. More formal tours that I followed included one led by Ed Van Roy, the author of *Sampheng: Bangkok's Chinatown Inside Out*, who took a group of urban enthusiasts on a tour through parts of Chinatown that he had written about. This tour included the history and significance of many of the cultural structures in the area related

to the Chinese community.

Interview respondents in Bangkok were gathered via a random sample, with a smaller number from snowball sample. Many respondents were approached on the street, or within establishments such as temples and associations, as well as stores, and a particularly well-known coffee shop in the neighbourhood. Interviews were conducted with the help of a Thai-Chinese translator from Mahachulalongkorn-rajavidyalaya University, who also functioned as an informant and a network for interview respondents. These were carried out mostly in Thai and Mandarin, with a smaller number in English. There were 11 interviewees in Bangkok.

Archival fieldwork was carried out in the National Archives of Thailand. Here, the hardcopy, bound catalogues are in Thai. With the aid of a Research Assistant from Thammasat University, I was able to decipher the catalogue. The assistant also aided with the sourcing of early records of the city, as well as translation of records, for example the city directories of the Chinatown area. I was unable to find municipal records here, even with the help of the assistant. Maps were available in the National Archives, as were archives of old newspapers in microfilm format. The main colonial newspaper I researched was *The Bangkok Times*.

I also had the help of Steve Van Beek, author of *Bangkok Then and Now: The Saga of Bangkok's Evolution*. Steve shared with me his collection of maps, as well as a number of books and references regarding the history of the city.

Rangoon, Burma

Fieldwork in Rangoon was carried out in about two weeks in January 2009. Fieldwork

duration in Rangoon was much more brief compared with the other cities as I only carried out interviews and participant-observation work there, and would do the archival research in London, UK. During the preliminary fieldwork I had made contact with a Burmese-Chinese retiree who worked as a free-lance translator, and tour-guide, among other things. With his help I obtained interview respondents through snowball sampling – networks through his contacts, and following from those, as well as a smaller number of random samples – on the street and from clan associations. There were altogether 15 interviews, which were conducted in a combination of Burmese, English, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

While I spent some time observing Chinatown on my own, the translator – a Chinatown resident, also took me on tours of Chinatown. This was useful because through his familiarity with the neighbourhood and some of the residents, I was able to visit a number of establishments I would not otherwise have been able to find, such as certain associations (marked only by a small sign on a door), and particular Chinese-owned and run businesses.

Although I was unable to gain access to any of the university libraries, I managed to find the Chinese Library in Chinatown. Entrance to this library was via a small staircase marked with a small sign. The library's Chinese-language collection includes a majority of fiction, general world and Chinese history and geography, collections from the local community (such as school yearbooks), Chinese language study texts, and dictionaries. There is a small section dedicated to texts on Burmese-Chinese and overseas Chinese relations, as well as records and publications from the Burma Chinese Chamber

of Commerce.

London, United Kingdom

I spent two weeks in London, UK, in April and May 2009 in order to use the holdings of

the British Library. The catalogues of the library are electronic, and accessible online.

Most of the documents and maps are available in hardcopy, while the newspapers – *The*

Rangoon Times and *The Rangoon Gazette*, were used in microfilm format. The India

Office Records, as mentioned earlier, provide an account of the colonial administration in

Burma.

While in London I also had the opportunity to visit historian Dr Michael Charney,

who is in possession of a large number of maps of Rangoon, as well as various reports,

records, and documents regarding the city. He also had a small number of directories

cataloguing the Chinese presence in Burma and Rangoon.

Mixed Methods

The value of mixed methods in terms of conducting research and as a means of producing

knowledge is in the breadth of the data obtained, and in the way data can be analysed in

context. As mentioned, feminist and postcolonial methodologies contend that there are

many forms of knowledge, that no one perspective or knowledge is generally dominant.

The multiplicity of different forms of knowledge is thus acknowledged here. Although

some forms of data are used more than others, I do not imply that one method is better

than another. The different forms of data work together to present and illustrate one way

of understanding the research subject.

Landscape Observation and Analysis

I begin with landscape observation and analysis. Related to ethnographic methods, this entails exploring and experiencing the urban landscape of each specific Chinatown and considering the significance of visual and experiential patterns. Having mapped the boundaries of each Chinatown, I explored the neighbourhoods systematically. This activity took a varying amount of time to do. In larger Chinatowns, like Ho Chi Minh City's, this took a series of many days, over which I visited the area, sometimes alone, and other times with others, many times. In Singapore's Chinatown, which is comparatively much smaller in area, it took simply an entire day to walk most of the streets. I first walked the main streets and thoroughfares, for example Yaowarat in Bangkok, and what seemed to be the 'centre' of the neighbourhoods, like *Bình Tây* market in Ho Chi Minh City. Following that, I explored the smaller roads and lanes radiating from the main streets and central landmarks. For each Chinatown, I repeated the process several times, and at differing times of the day, and days of the week, in order to observe how the activities – or the structure itself changed over time. I also explored the supposed boundaries of the Chinatowns, as neighbourhoods rarely respect official borders as aspects of the space and community tend to spill over into neighbouring areas. Not only that, different maps sometimes show differing boundaries.

I recorded the physical urban landscape by photography. The imagery captured included urban structures, architecture and décor both permanent and temporary. Images of the Chinatown spaces are important because a large part of ethnic spaces like these

tend to be experienced through visual senses. Patterns are seen, recalled, and repeated in the landscape, and subsequently build a kind of familiarity into the imagery of the space. These patterns become visual aids that bestow a recognisability upon the space. When capturing people involved in activities where they could be easily identified, I first obtained their permission. I also kept a written journal of my impressions and perceptions of the place – the physical urban landscape and building structures, the people, and the activities that I witnessed occurring in the space. I also noted the atmosphere and the amount of traffic (pedestrian and motorised). As such, I am also an active participant in the landscape. As I traverse the space, I am using it – whether for movement, or as a passerby taking in the sights, I not only observe the space, but I also contribute to it, merely by being there, and by interacting with it. I am not invisible or intangible, but other users of the space also negotiate my presence there. Storekeepers and food vendors attempt to sell me their wares; décor and architecture are actively consumed, as is the culture in the street, and the performance of the everyday users.

The objective of my personal observation of the landscape was to note patterns, recurring signs and symbols in the landscape and to decipher the meanings attributed to them. I am reading the landscape for, as Daniels and Cosgrove note, "system and organism give way as metaphors to spectacle, theatre and text" (1993: 57). The urban landscape presents a continual series of patterns created by the (changing) structure of the space and the movement and actions of the people in the space. These continual interactions form patterns that lend identities to the space; with the experience of the space, place is produced and we continue to identify common actions in the space.

The value of the observation method and technique is in the ability to take the environment of the field into context; and observation is also a crucial method to noticing and examining clues and evidence that are visually discernible and accessible in the urban landscape. Whether these are in the less mutable physical structures of the landscape, like buildings and architecture, or the constantly changing aspects, like the people and the activities they enact upon the space, a familiarity with the landscape is obtained.

Archival Methods

I used archival methods as one way to obtain data about Chinatown and the Chinese community in the area, particularly during the colonial periods. The archival materials provide historical contexts and data detailing the development of Chinatown and offer colonial perspectives on the migrant Chinese community. These sources included old newspapers, old photography, and urban planning, city, municipal, administrative and development records. The value of archival methods is that they provide an insight into the history of Chinatown and the people who are associated with it. Although much of the insights provided by the newspapers – typically written and published by the Europeans, and the administrative documents and records – again, written and published by the same, are filtered through the lens of the colonial administration and reflect a largely colonial bias, they are able to represent a view of the encounters and interactions between the administration and the local communities (see Yeoh, 1996).

Newspapers

I used English and French newspapers from the turn of the nineteenth century. While there were a number of Chinese language papers circulated within the Chinese communities during the period, records and holdings of these were generally inconsistent. I used mainly the sections providing daily news and activities in the towns I researched. I searched these sections using keywords related to Chinatown and the Chinese community. These old newspaper articles provide colonial perspectives of Chinatown and the people who live there. They give an insight to the sorts of activities that the colonial press tended to highlight, and also provide an idea of the way in which the Chinese community and the Chinatown area in general were perceived by the colonial reporters. The articles that reference Chinatown and the Chinese population present popular colonial perspectives regarding the landscapes as well as insights into and about the Chinese identity at that particular period in time. Both English (for Bangkok, Rangoon, and Singapore) and French (for Ho Chi Minh City) language newspapers were sourced from as early as possible within the colonial era. The earliest archival holdings of these tended to be from the 1880s.

Daily mundane reporting of the activities in Chinatown and the issues faced by its population reveals the kind of community it was at that time. Repeated issues in the newspapers included activities considered "vices" at that time, particularly crime – such as robberies, opium trafficking and usage, murders and assaults, and issues considered problematic, like the presence of gambling dens, brothels, secret societies, and pawnshops. At the same time, there are also records and descriptions of the large

celebrations held by the community during festival periods such as the Lunar New Year and the Mid-Autumn Festival. Reports and editorials were occasionally made upon the death of particularly significant members of the community, such as important shipping magnates or business owners.

Colonial Records

Colonial records and administrative documents for the city were found in a variety of places. In Bangkok, they could not be found, except within published texts concerning specific topics, such as historical accounts about the urban structure of the city. The Research Assistant I had engaged in Bangkok at the archives noted that city records, such as those for the urban planning department, tended to be kept at those departments. However, she also noted that access to these was difficult, particularly because older records were generally destroyed as a result of frequent changes in administration. In Ho Chi Minh City, colonial administrative records are archived in the National Archives II, and catalogued, as described above in the *Fieldwork* section. For Rangoon, the India Office Records kept by the British Library provided an insight into the municipal administration of the colonial government. Some of these records have been bound and published as annual records of municipal reports and procedures. In Singapore, many of the records have been bound as books, preserved in microfilm format, or digitised. As in the search for relevant newspaper articles, I also utilised a series of keywords to find documents relating to the planning or development of the urban area, with specific focus on the Chinatown area and the Chinese community. These records provide clues to the way the Chinatown landscape has developed into its current form. Planning and

development records also show the kinds of landscapes and activities that Chinatowns presented during the time.

For Bangkok, one of the more notable archival sources was a local city directory from 1883. This directory lists the city by street, detailing the main inhabitant at each registered address, their occupation, describes the use of the building (residential, type of business), the material of the building, and whether the unit was rented or owned. In Ho Chi Minh City, some of the more relevant sources included infrastructural requests such as permissions to build and register Chinese language schools in the neighbourhood, as well as annual reports submitted by Chinese organisations such as the clan associations. Census data for *Chợ Lớn* was also found here. Related material in the Singapore archives includes colonial administration reports and records for the Singapore municipality, which contains urban town plans. For Rangoon, archival material found and used included *Reports on the Working of the Rangoon Development Trust* and the *Rangoon Municipality, Bye-Laws of the Rangoon Municipality* (sic), annual reports of various departments in the town, such as the Burma Chamber of Commerce. These collections were often incomplete, and reports for consecutive years were often hard to find.

Maps

Colonial era maps were useful to the research particularly because they allowed, where available, comparison between older and current representations of the city. These comparisons show, for example, changes in road names. This is significant as road names potentially reveal the issues and people that were important at that point in time. Further, changes in the road names show changing priorities in the images and representations of

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the city. A notable difference between a 1945 map of Rangoon (Rangoon Town Plan, 1945) and contemporary maps lie in the road names, for example. The change in street names, from "China Street" to "Sule Pagoda Road", and "Dalhousie Street" to "Mahabandoola Road" is an indication of a desire to change the representations of the city. Labels on the maps also reveal issues that are significant. The primary intended use of any particular map can be discerned from the objects that are represented, and those that are omitted. The items included and excluded on maps provide an insight into the values of the mapmakers (or commissioners of the maps). Comparisons of the maps also illustrate infrastructural changes in the urban landscape – such as roads and buildings. These changes show development priorities or patterns.

Images

Pictorial representations of Chinatown areas can be found in the archives of some of the cities. Two of these in particular were Singapore and Bangkok. These are often photos from the early twentieth century showing either the street views of certain parts of Chinatown, or the buildings and structures in the area. These images are useful for showing the changes that the structures and activities in Chinatown have undergone – or not – over time. Whether the structures or activities have changed or not is significant for understanding the development of the space over time. Further, comparisons of the Chinatown landscape can be made between these archival pictures and the ones I recorded, illustrating changes, if any.

Qualitative Interviews

The major source of data for this research comes from qualitative in-depth interviews. I interviewed members of the local Chinese populations. These included residents of, and people who work in, Chinatown. The purpose of these interviews is to generate data regarding individual and collective identities of people affiliated with Chinatown in some way. My questions focussed on personal experiences and perspectives with and about Chinatown – one of the key ideas in this research is to consider how topophilia (sense of place and affection for the space; see Tuan, 1974) is experienced by the Chinese community in Chinatown. I examined ideas about the Chinese diaspora and how the respondents felt about being a part of this community. I also explored concepts of home. I used a list of questions organised by theme as an aide-mémoire throughout the interviews. These questions can be found in Appendix A.

As explained in the individual city fieldwork section, I made use of random and snowball sampling in order to obtain the majority of my interview respondents in the four cities. The only exception to this was the 15 arranged interviews in Ho Chi Minh City, along with the addition of three more respondents found through snowball methods.

I planned to interview an average of 15 respondents from each of the four Chinatowns, for a total of 60. I did not have a planned set number of men and women, nor an even spread of respondents in each adult age group (18 years old and up) to allow for a maximum possible number of respondents in the relatively little time that I had to conduct my fieldwork. A large proportion of the respondents are male, and the average age was 40 to 50 years old. I also tried to interview respondents from as wide a range of

dialect groups as I could find. These would ultimately vary to reflect the main dialect groups that occupied the specific Chinatowns – for example, there is a higher incidence of Teochew people in Bangkok's Chinatown, and more Hokkien and Cantonese in Singapore's and Rangoon's, and the spread of interviewee dialects reflects this. A list and general description of the respondents for my qualitative interviews can be found in Appendix B.

Translators were necessary for many of the interviews where the respondents spoke mainly Vietnamese, Thai, or Burmese. In Singapore I had translation help with interviews where the subject spoke mainly Chinese dialects in which I am not completely fluent. I began each interview with a brief description of the research topic, emphasising the significance and value of individual experience and personal perception. I adopted a loosely structured format of interviewing by using a list of relevant themes and open-ended questions. A short list of fixed questions was used at the beginning of each theme – these were intended to introduce the topics and launch the conversation. The questions were intended to allow the interviewee to lead the conversation, and to convey their own experiences and perspectives. I planned for interviews to last an average of one hour. Most exceeded this amount of time, with only a small number taking less than an hour.

In addition to these, I also had the use of a number of informants who were knowledgeable about Chinatown, the Chinese community, and its history. These informants were able to provide more in-depth background and local knowledges of their respective Chinatowns. In Ho Chi Minh City, these were the representatives from the Chinese Division of the Peoples' Committee, as well as the Director from the Southern

Institute of Social Sciences. In Bangkok, the Thai-language translator spent her childhood in Chinatown and was able to offer views and perspectives. Also, writers Ed Van Roy and Steve Van Beek, who have both published about Bangkok's urban landscapes and Chinatown had insights and histories to offer. In Rangoon, the Burmese-language translator was a free-lance tour guide who had grown up in the Chinatown area, and also had many contacts in the community.

Expectations & Encounters

In any research project, plans and intention rarely coincide with outcomes and results. My experience with doing fieldwork in Southeast Asia showed this to be accurate. As such, research plans have to include a certain amount of leeway and flexibility.

Access to Information

Negotiating the National Archives II in Ho Chi Minh City was fraught with a certain amount of administration. Access to the archives is regulated; sponsorship from a Vietnamese academic institution is required to accompany a letter of application. The application is then sent to Hanoi for approval by administrators at the National Archives I. If access is granted, requests for individual archival documents also have to be sent to Hanoi for approval. This process usually took about a week, and approval to view the documents was loosely based on a summary of the research topic provided with the initial application for access to the archives. Thus, research summaries have to be carefully worded. An interesting encounter occurred with this as the approving body had a different

definition of the term "postcolonial" than I did, and had used in my research summary. My application to view maps of the city post-1970 was rejected. Their understanding of the term "postcolonial" related to one of era, equating the term to "decolonisation", generally the two decades post-Independence, and generally right before Reunification.

In Bangkok, it appears that city records are completely inaccessible or nonexistent – as the Research Assistant mentioned, many public records (for example, at the Department of City Planning) are disposed of with changes in government. While this is not a confirmed fact, I was unable to find much in relation to Bangkok's urban administration.

Limited access to information results in the unavailability of comparable archival sources and documents across the four archives. Due to the difference in governance by both the colonial administration and the post-colonial states at all four research sites, different kinds of records were kept and the organisation of catalogues were different. This makes it difficult to make complete comparisons of the urban planning and development of the cities based on archival resources.

Negotiating Interviews

While it was highly convenient that the interview respondents in Ho Chi Minh City were arranged by the Chinese Division of the Peoples' Committee, such an arrangement might result in a skewed perspective of views. The Division did not explain how they selected the respondents. While it is not my purpose to derive a comprehensive set of data in order to generalise the views of the entire Chinese community, the committee's selection of

specific respondents for my research possibly opposes the system of random sampling. A mitigating aspect to this is that the interviews focussed on personal experiences, and I do not attempt to paint a specific descriptive picture of the country from this data. Further, additional interview respondents were discreetly arranged through snowball sampling and personal contacts. These may compensate for any distortion caused by the pre-arranged interviews. From my observation, the selected respondents or members of their families appeared to have been involved with the Chinese Division, in their programs or organised activities, at some point in their lives.

I also highly valued the knowledge and the "insider" perspectives of the informants from the Peoples' Committee. However, the Committee also insisted that a representative from the Chinese Division accompany me and my translator to the interviews. While it was helpful to have the representative make contact with and introduce us to the interviewee, it is possible that their presence at the interviews affected the conversation, views and openness of the respondents' replies. Under the impression that the representatives are government workers, respondents may have moderated their comments and perspectives in order to provide a more socially agreeable appearance. The perennial problem of interviewing is whether the respondent is simply saying what they want the interviewer (in this case, all of us) to hear.

Language & Translation

Language was an expected barrier for this project. In the archives, the main obstacle I faced was with the catalogues in Bangkok, which were in Thai, despite the presence of

English-language documents. This issue was circumnavigated by having a Research Assistant who was fluent in Thai work through the catalogues with a list of keywords in order to find pertinent sources about Chinatown, related urban development and community issues. In Ho Chi Minh City, I was not able to use the Vietnamese language catalogues. This was mitigated by the availability of an extensive amount of French-language archival sources. While I am passably fluent in written French, I occasionally faced difficulties with less familiar terms used by the colonial administration. This may have slowed down the retrieval of sources from the archives.

Language in the interviews was another interesting issue. Many of the interview respondents were at least bilingual – in addition to their national language (Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese), many of them spoke a Chinese dialect. Cantonese, Teochew, and Hokkien were the most common, with Mandarin more popular among the younger respondents. More than half the respondents in Singapore spoke English; the others communicated in one of the dialects, typically Cantonese, and occasionally Mandarin. In the other cities, about a quarter of the respondents conversed in English.

When interviewing in languages other than English, I had a translator with me. The translators (Thai-language in Bangkok, Vietnamese in Ho Chi Minh City, Burmese in Rangoon, and Cantonese in Singapore) were briefed in detail about the research project before the interviews were carried out. Clarifying questions were encouraged if they felt unclear about any issue. In general, there were not many problems with the translators. The key issue with translation, however, is the frequent lack of satisfactorily equivalent terms when moving from one language to another.

Consequently, a mix of languages was used in many of the interviews. When at loss for an appropriate term to describe an issue or concept, everybody involved in the conversation – the respondents, the translators, and I, often switched languages in order to more accurately reflect the meanings we were trying to convey. This lent a multi-lingual quality to the interviews, in which any single interview might include two to three languages and dialects. Rather than being a disadvantage, however, the multi-lingualism enhanced the interviews. The respondents, translator and I were able to take this opportunity to explore the concepts and themes concerned, like home, or Overseas Chinese, and diaspora, and figure out the subtleties of the different terms in different languages.

Positioning, Reflexivity, and Other Interesting Observations

I conclude this chapter with a reflection on my place in the field. As the epigram from Hyndman (2001) notes at the beginning of this chapter, fieldwork is a complicated and complex process that involves the researcher deeply. Through a feminist framework, "researchers are always in the field" (2001: 265), and the experience garnered from being in the field helps to inform, but does not completely produce knowledge. As a researcher, I experience the field through my partial knowledges and perspectives. This is why the postcolonial approach is significant in this study – as a postcolonial subject, I mediate, and myself am mediated through this process.

I came into the field with preconceptions and partial knowledge of the research that I was about to undertake. I cannot completely disown these preconceptions, as it is

the partial knowledges that sparked the research questions and desire to examine the field further. In this sense I am not only mediating the field through my experiences and perspectives, but I am also a part of the field. In carrying out this research I do not seek to impose my knowledge upon the field, but instead to explore other knowledges in relation to it. As an ethnic Chinese Southeast Asian, I do not purport to study myself, however, I do find my identity implicated in the course of my research.

Carrying out fieldwork, I found myself in the position of both insider and outsider. Having at least a partial knowledge of overseas Chinese culture in Southeast Asia as well as a partially intimate knowledge of Chinatowns, and yet, at the same time, a limited knowledge of *other* communities and *other* peoples' perceptions of the space and place, I felt constantly in a state of disequilibrium. I found myself, in many instances, *within* the culture of the overseas Chinese, yet *outside* the nationality of three out of four of my research sites. I was *within* the region of Southeast Asia, yet *outside* of Chinatown. I negotiated the field with partial knowledges that simultaneously allow me to belong in the space and with the community, and yet was forced to view it from the outside. The dualities of this aspect are at once both tangible and intangible.

It was particularly tangible during my conversations with the interview respondents, who at once saw me as a researcher and academic, and hence the purveyor of knowledges. Yet in the context of my interviews, I was asking *them* questions and relying upon *their* knowledges. There was an expectation that I, as an overseas, ethnic Chinese, would understand and, possibly, identify with, them. Yet I am not one of them. The fluidity of my identity in relation to the people that I interact with in the course of

this fieldwork was something profoundly unsettling. However, it was also informative as

I continued to negotiate the field in search of more, partial, knowledges.

Chapter 4
CHINATOWN IN THE CITY: LANDSCAPES OF HERITAGE

Chinatown is a social construction with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality...

(Kay Anderson, 1987: 581)

The idea of 'Chinatown' ... has been projected on to the urban landscape...

(Peter Jackson, 1989: 134)

In the epigrams above, Jackson (1989), through Anderson (1987), explains that

Chinatown is a landscape created through the assertion of power. Anderson (1988, 1991)

has shown that cultural hegemony has played a part in arbitrating definitions of 'race', in

particular, the social construction and imagination of the idea of the community of ethnic

Chinese in Vancouver. In this way, Chinatown is seen as the result of an imagined place

materialised in the city based upon ideas about cultural identities. The 'idea of

"Chinatown"' is thus produced in part through the interaction of the politics of place –

according to Anderson (1988), it is the state and associated institutions that help to create

ideas about what Chinatown is, and the roles it plays, within the urban landscape. Jackson

(1989) explores this perception of Chinatown from the context of the social construct of

race, and the languages of racism.

Race, while playing a significant role, is far from the only means by which we

may approach the idea of Chinatown and the way it has been projected on to the urban

landscape. While Chinatown is a social phenomenon and construction, it is a physical

landscape given meaning by a large series of signs and symbols attributed to the

imagination of a highly particular Chinese culture (that belongs to and hails from a

completely separate nation from whence it is located) and the Chinese community that

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inhabits and negotiates the space. As Anderson (1987) notes above, Chinatown is

produced materially, upon the physical landscape, and cognitively, in the social

imagination. This is accomplished through an intersection of a particular immigrant

Chinese heritage with an institutional negotiation of its image. The geographical

imagination of the Chinatown landscape has been socially produced such that the

landscape of Chinatown is a highly familiar one. Multiplied simultaneously in cities

around the world it offers up instantly recognisable landscapes and practices across space.

The landscape is marked by a continuity that is based on recurring images and practices

that have been recreated to express the idea of Chinatown. The sensual experience of

these images and practices is encountered and observed repeatedly as Chinatown is

traversed in its many geographical iterations. In this chapter I argue that there is more

than one way that Chinatown is created and perpetuated and then subsequently projected

onto the urban landscape. In addition to this (as in Anderson's analysis), it is also through

the repetition of images and practices that occur repeatedly upon the landscape that an

idea of Chinatown is maintained (the landscape continuously recreates and reaffirms the

idea).

As a legible landscape upon which images and practices are read and interpreted,

Chinatown as a cultural landscape is also being written. The Chinatown landscape has,

over time, established more distinctive and compelling identities. As it evolves, the

distinct Chinatown identity that remains effective and enduring reveals how the Chinese

community is perceived in the city. Taylor (2009), in reviewing cultural landscapes in

Asia, notes that landscapes are cultural constructs that reflect the social culture and

identities of the people who live on those landscapes and continue to shape them.

Landscapes are thus products of the past and the present, and they facilitate an understanding between people and identity. Chinatown spaces, as cultural landscapes, are shaped as much by perceptions of the spaces as they are by the practices of the people who live there. As such the Chinatown landscapes adopt identities that are produced through understandings of its spatial history, cultural negotiations, as well as the political economy.

Another way in which the landscape is read, more literally, is through place names. Toponyms, the names of places, are, as noted by Yeoh (1996b), an indication of an assertion of power (the power to name and identify) over place. Place names, as Yeoh further shows, can be indicators of nationalism, cultural identities, ideological tools (particularly in postcolonial societies), and, significantly, a homogenising practice that privileges a single heritage over others through concealing the more complex histories and practices that took place in that space, which Yeoh calls a "savage toponymy" (citing Katz & Kirby, 1991: 266). The significance of toponymy to Chinatown cannot be understated. At the most superficial level, simply the name *Chinatown* indicates an association with the nation of China, and the cultural connotations, affiliations, and imaginations that are connected with it. The literal inscriptions of culture upon the landscape – not just through the name of the neighbourhood or urban area, but also on its streets, and possibly even on the structures in the built environment – label and mark the space to the exclusion of other identities. Place names tend to reproduce a particular heritage in conjunction with the landscape in question.

There are several ways of looking at how an idea of Chinatown is reproduced; heritage is an important one. At its most superficial, the idea of Chinatown reflects the history of the Chinese emigration from China to other parts of the world. As an ethnic space, Chinatowns are places containing multiple meanings; they are, among many things, indicators of difference and diversity, memorials to overseas Chinese migration and settlement, and evidence of cultural negotiations within the city. Heritage in the context of Chinatown constitutes meanings both material and intangible that pertain to the history and lineage of the ethnic Chinese community. It can be used to identify and define a particular culture, which is significant to a neighbourhood predicated upon migrant ethnic identities. One of the most succinct and concise ways that heritage has been defined is that it is "at its core 'the present-day use of the past'" (Ashworth, 2003, and Graham *et al.*, 2000, cited in Timothy & Boyd, 2006: 2). In this sense, then, heritage is key in the projection of a Chinatown's and a Chinese community's identities.

This definition is telling, in that it indicates a method for using the past to identify the present. Heritage is retained and preserved for several reasons, ranging from resisting modernisation to building and maintaining a sense of national or ethnic identity via collective nostalgia, and further, quite importantly, for generating economic value (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Chinatowns draw their meaning not only from the practices and imagination of its present-day forms, but more significantly from their past and their histories. Even the present-day practices and landscapes are predicated upon the heritages that are formed from interpretations of historical perspectives. As such, heritage, in general, tends to ambiguity. It is as much an economic commodity as it is a

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cultural artefact (see Graham, *et al.*, 2000). As a cultural artefact, heritage can be gauged in terms of exchange value, particularly in the context of tourism, where money is exchanged in order to view or experience it (Cohen, 1988). As a referent of history, heritage is an important component to identity-creation. As Lowenthal (1985) contends, the past is incorporated into one's identity, and history comprises the present. Further, heritage is formed of the nostalgia for the past, which relates to the Chinatown landscape as a reinforcement of culture and identity.

In this dissertation, 'heritage' comprises several aspects. Chinatown heritage recollects the histories of Chinese migration and settlement into these cities. As such it consists of the multiple cultures carried over by the migrants from their geographically varied origins in different parts of China. Heritage is also (social and personal) memories and cultural traditions, customs, and languages that have been conveyed through the generations of ethnic Chinese who may have never set foot in China, but still retain a sense of belonging and a sense of place, bestowed upon them by their ethnic lineage. Heritage, like the construction of Chinatown, is both cognitive (as histories and memories) and material. Material heritages manifest upon the landscape as indicators of the culture, in the form of icons and symbols that together convey a sense of place identity.

As Chinatown is seen as a heritage landscape that serves as a repository of history, knowledge, and culture, it is also subject to commodification. In ethnic neighbourhoods, identity is a core component of the culture – mutually reinforcing the heritage space. Zukin (1995) argues that culture is accentuated by the difference inherent in cities, and is

a viable industry that drives the urban economy. The reciprocal relationship between the ethnic community's identity and heritage produces the cultural landscapes that eventually become the commodity to be consumed. It is not, however, only tourists and outsiders who consume the landscape, but the community itself that also uses its own created landscapes to further sustain its cultural identities. Heritage, inseparable from the Chinatown culture, represents both the culture that is a part of the Chinatown and the Chinese community's identity, as well as the culture that is presented for consumption by the tourist gaze. Heritage is thus involved in both identity-making as well as cultural commodification.

In light of this, however, it is also important to consider the way Chinatown landscapes are given to tourism; as mentioned above, tourism can function as the main consumer of heritage in space, and is particularly extensive in Chinatowns. The difference presented by the cultural quarters in a city (see Bell & Jayne, 2004) help to reproduce and propagate culture as commodity, that can be consumed through, among other things, the tourism economy, as well as various sources of media. Although commonly accepted that cultural quarters such as these are also spaces of identity through which a sense of place and belonging are promoted, the production and consumption of this culture cultivate an economic space, in the form of the tourism economy, within the cultural landscape. Scott argues that local culture, with its particular situatedness and place, shapes the nature of the local economy, "[t]he more the specific cultural identities and economic order of these cities condense out on the landscape the more they come to enjoy monopoly powers of place... that enhance their competitive advantages and

provide their cultural-products industries with an edge..." (1997: 325). The depth and intensity of the culture that is infused in the landscape influence the degree to which the economy that is produced upon that particular landscape is based upon that culture. In Chinatown, therefore, the culture, predicated upon heritage and an ethnic history resulting from a deep interaction with the landscape over time, produces a deeply complex and dynamic economic space, that can be commodified in terms of the tourism industry. In turn, the heritage of the Chinatown landscape that becomes a viable tourism commodity continues to lend itself to propagating its place identity, in effect strengthening and reinforcing itself.

In this chapter I ground the concept of heritage in Chinatown landscapes. An understanding of how heritage influences the way that the Chinatown landscape is seen and understood is rooted in the manner that the space itself is produced. For this, the production of space as analysed through Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad (spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space) will be used as an approach through which the various meanings of the Chinatown landscape can be seen. Geographical imaginations (Gregory, 1994) contribute to subtle definitions of space, furthering the idea that there is a preconception of a Chinatown landscape. To the average viewer, there is already an expectation that a Chinatown landscape should look a particular way, and the landscape is shaped to meet these expectations. Additionally, heritage itself is socially constructed. It is constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted, manipulated to give varying meanings to selected issues. In this chapter I analyse how the past is used to give meaning to the present, how heritage is leveraged to create Chinatown identities within

the city.

In the next section, I consider the significance of the landscape in producing identities of the community, and having those identities reproduced upon itself. Following this, I explore the ways in which labels, in the form of names, help to construct a toponymic landscape of Chinatown. I look at the way names have a tendency to identify and label a place, as well as the way certain names take on the identity of the places they are associated with. In the fourth section, I examine the various signs and symbols that help to build a Chinatown identity. I consider the practices and images in the landscape that have come to represent a Chinatown identity and how these are constantly reproduced to maintain and recreate a landscape that has become so commonly imagined in the popular consciousness. In the final section, I analyse Chinatown in terms of the way that heritage is used to preserve and sustain culture, and explore the landscape identities that are produced as a result of this.

Landscape Matters: Place, Text, and Commodity

Landscape is significant to this research because of the way Chinatowns, and by association, the Chinese communities of Chinatowns, are identified mainly through their landscapes. As people and places are mutually constitutive in their productions of identities, Chinatown landscapes and their communities perpetuate a particular Chinatown identity. This is not to say that these identities are produced and exist in a vacuum – as Anderson (1987, 1988, 1991) has pointed out, these identities are often bestowed by outside forces in their interaction with the community, as well.

Landscapes, particularly cultural landscapes, were conceptualised by Carl Sauer (see Leighly, 1963) as a combination of physical and cultural perceptions of places. More than simply a passive, inanimate object, a landscape is a "living process; it makes men [sic]; it is made by them" (Inglis, 1977: 489). Sauer further notes that "landscape has identity that is based on recognizable constitution, limits, and generic relation to other landscapes, which constitute a general system" ([1925], Leighly, 1963: 321). Landscapes are shaped by perception, through the process of culture, and are thus highly relational objects, subject to organic meanings. Yi-Fu Tuan (1972, 1977) contends that perception, through cognition and emotion, helps to create a sense of place that defines landscapes. Landscapes are further filled with contexts; as Tuan also notes, "landscape is personal and tribal history made visible" (1977: 157). As such, landscapes are formed in the relationship between space and society, and additionally come to adopt identities through the cultures that inhabit them as well as the perceptions of them through other cultures. It is in this manner that we can begin to understand Chinatown landscapes, that they are shaped by the processes of cultures, both acting upon them as well as filtered through their particular perceptions.

Chinatowns, like other urban spaces, are a complex layering of cultural, political and economic space. The interaction of the specific political and cultural economies produces a symbolic economy that asserts a particular Chinatown identity upon the landscape. I suggest that these spaces interact, via a process of writing, to produce a *Chinatown landscape*. Landscapes are constantly being *written* as much as they are being *read* (see Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Duncan & Duncan, 1988; Mitchell, 1994). The

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various practices and signs that manifest upon landscape are, as Gregory (1994) (through Geertz, 1973; Duncan, 1990; Barnes & Duncan, 1992; etc) notes, textual. As language that can be read and interpreted, signs and symbols in the landscape are subject to interpretation.

Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) consider iconography a way of reading cultural meanings in the landscape. Landscapes are marked by icons that are understood and interpreted according to cultural norms, the way that signs and symbols are representative of things. Symbolic forms convey meanings that bestow a certain method of perceiving space. Fincher, *et al.* (2002: 27) note that the city as text is a "semiotic space shaped by struggles over meaning and signification". Multiple interests are represented upon any landscape at any one time, and are filtered through the lens of the viewer. Discrete power relations also elevate certain representations of space over others. A reading of the landscape often reveals the text as a thickly layered space filled with a multiplicity of signs, overlaid with the negotiation of contesting powers (see also Ley, 1986; Daniels, 1989; Duncan, 1990). The urban landscapes of the four Chinatowns can be identified through the practices and symbols that have become iconographies through frequent recurrence in the space, and which help to assert a sense of place in those landscapes.

Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad of space – spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space, utilises the functions of signs in order to theorise an understanding of how space is produced. I use this conceptual triad as an approach to examining the ways in which the Chinatown landscape is not only produced, but understood and consumed. The concept is useful because it considers the role of *signs*

which we use in order to read the landscape. Lefebvre's theory of spatial practices explains that the real, everyday functions in a space serve to give it meaning. In this sense, the activities and routines that occur consistently in a space help to define it. In the case of Chinatown, it is its popularly-imagined activities, such as trade and mercantile activities, in the form of marketplaces, for example, that help to identify the landscape and the culture in this specific place. In theorising representations of space, Lefebvre notes that "conceptions of space tend ... towards a system of verbal ... signs" (1991: 39). There is a system of language that functions to clarify meanings in space. This helps to label the space in an easily readable manner, so that viewers of the space can understand it without difficulty. Lefebvre contends that these representations of space are often in the form of official language, established through top-down institutional structures. An example of signs in the representation of space would be actual signs in the landscape, such as street signs, that specify the area as "Chinatown". Finally, Lefebvre notes that systems of non-verbal signs and symbols are the third mode of production of space – representational spaces. In this case, the space is lived through the signs and symbols that are associated with it. Symbolic use is made of the physical space, represented through a medium that helps to label and code it. In relation to Chinatown, I suggest that a carefully curated system of imagery, for example the use of design such as the curved eaves on the roofs of buildings that imitate bamboo tiles, the colours green and red, and the presence of culturally significant creatures such as dragons and phoenixes, applied in conjunction with each other, have, over time, come to form a representational space that is specific and unique to this landscape. That is, Chinatown is perceived and recognised through

symbols that have become associated with representations of Chinatown culture in space. How the Chinatown landscape is produced, identified, experienced, and recognised can be understood through this conceptual triad of space. I will argue that the Chinatown landscape is created through the intersection of spatial practice and the representation of space, which then helps to form the representational space. The symbols presented by the representational space, in turn, contributes to the geographical imagination of the landscape, helping to strengthen a particular sense of place and reproduce its Chinatown identity.

Harvey speaks of Moore's Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans as "the projection of a definite image of a place blessed with certain qualities, the organization of spectacle and theatricality, have been achieved through an eclectic mixture of styles, historical quotation, ornamentation, and the diversification of surfaces" (1990: 92-93). There, the combination of several physical characteristics in a particular urban space expresses a certain identity. This returns us to Jackson's idea of something being projected upon the landscape, whether an idea or an image, the occurrence of cultural heritage on to the space has been socially administered. The associations made between the objects and their social meanings help to perpetuate their symbolism. In Harvey's example, Moore's Piazza d'Italia brings Italian architecture into New Orleans. The effect can be alienating as the structures are strongly recognisable as belonging to a particular nationality, but it also tells of an identity that is related to a migrant history. Further, the symbols do not act alone, but in conjunction with each other. As such, one sign in isolation would not convey meaning on its own, but together with a group of signs in the same place, strengthens the

meanings associated with it. The combination of symbols and signs of a type of Chinese culture helps to perpetuate the Chinatown landscape in the social imagination.

The Chinatown landscape processes and represents multiple meanings simultaneously. While the overarching, popular representation of any Chinatown space appears to be that of a cultural landscape – a space that displays the characteristics of the ethnic community that inhabits it, Chinatowns are also landscapes of politics, where differing ideologies have been negotiated upon (and perhaps, beneath) its surface. As Anderson (1991) and Mitchell (2000) have discussed, the representation of Chinatown through particular "Chinese" iconographies in the landscape reflect the "Chineseness" of the space. Yet this overly simplistic rendering of culture-in-space also marks the experiences, and the socio-political struggles of the Chinese community in that space. In Southeast Asia, particularly, it is a postcolonial landscape – not simply in the way that it displays a legacy of colonialism, but also in the way it struggles to represent itself in the wake of colonialism. Additionally, as landscapes of economy, Chinatowns reproduce cultural meanings in spaces of historical Chinese mercantilism. In many ways the landscape continues to embody its historical meanings and functions, primarily through a continuation of their original practices (in the case of Chinatowns, usually economic activity), but also through the memorialisation of their past.

Like any other urban landscape, Chinatowns are a dynamic process. As in Lefebvre's representational spaces, the meanings of the signs and symbols associated with the space follow movements in contemporary society. Chinatowns are changing constantly to reflect and embody the shifting social values that are occurring upon them

(see Teo, *et al.*, 2004). Likewise, the representations of Chinatown landscapes are also in flux. As Mitchell notes, "the 'power to define,' which is itself a product of social relations, is always subject to change. ... The image of Chinatown has been transformed from one of pestilence and depravity to one of exotic, fascinating 'otherness'" (2000: 107). Perceptions and representations of Chinatown change over time, under the aegis of those who have had the power to influence its image. Control over the appearance of the landscape does not emerge from a single source, either, but a negotiation of discrete interests in the place. In the present day, Chinatown and the Chinese community do not evoke the same sense of revulsion as they did in the past, as Anderson's (1991) study of Vancouver's Chinatown from 1875 to 1980 describes. While Chinatowns continue to persist as landscapes of culture and difference in cities, the idea of Chinatown is changing over time.

In the rest of this chapter I focus on the images and imageries in and of Chinatown, particularly as they pertain to its physical forms and representations in the urban landscape. As explained earlier, Chinatown scholars, such as Lai (1989), Anderson (1991), and Zhou (1992) have explored the imagery of Chinatown landscapes and the ideas they communicated to the viewer. Thus, in examining this highly recognisable landscape, I turn to consider the characteristics that make Chinatown so easily identifiable, and identify the processes in the Chinatown landscape that make it distinct from other urban landscapes. The oft-repeated images and experiences are duplicated and encountered in most Chinatowns and are also related to an imagination of a Chinese culture. This is not simply a *Chinatown* culture, but also a reference to the nation of

China itself, whence ideas about Chinatown may have been drawn.

It's All in the Name – Identifying Chinatown

> Naming is power – the creative power to call something into being, to
> render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things.
> To an extent perhaps unique among civilizations, Chinese cities and
> landscapes have been spoken and written into existence.
>
> (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1991: 688, 692)

In all four cities, the label "Chinatown" is commonly understood to refer to the specific

sites of this research. However this name is more official in some places than in others. In

Bangkok, Chinatown is most often referred to locally as *Yaowarat*, after the eponymous

road that runs through a large portion of the neighbourhood; or *Sampheng*, a narrow street

parallel to Yaowarat; and also *Samphanthawong*, which is the name of the district in

which Chinatown is located. Chinatown is the English term used on the tourist signs, and

while the locals recognise the term, they rarely use it themselves. In Ho Chi Minh City,

the locals refer to the Chinatown area as *Chợ Lớn*, directly translated as "big market", or

by the District (Districts 5, 6, 10, 11). To the ethnic Chinese, particularly early in the

establishment of the community, the area was known as *Tai Ngon* (Cantonese), which

means "embankment", as it is located along the northern banks of the Saigon River. As in

Bangkok, the local people in Ho Chi Minh City recognise the term Chinatown, but rarely

use it. In Rangoon, Chinatown is colloquially known as *Tayote Tan*, meaning Chinese

quarters, although this name was likely adopted during the British colonial period in the

late nineteenth century. In the present day, particularly among those who work in the

tourism industry, including hotel workers and tour guides, the moniker Chinatown is fast

becoming the norm, although it is not formally recognised as such. Locals refer to specific areas by their corresponding street names. In Singapore, Chinatown has many names. Although "Chinatown" is the established name, recognised in formal literature, evidenced by the naming of its eponymous subway station, it is also known in the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu) as *Kreta Ayer* (lit. "cart-water"), and in mandarin as *niu che shui* ("bullock-cart-water"). This particular reference stems from the early days of the Singapore colony when the water was supplied to the neighbourhood by carts drawn by bullocks. In the earlier half of the twentieth century, the Chinese also referred to the area as *tua poh* (Hokkien dialect), or "greater town district". That the Chinatowns in these four cities have several names, whether the same name in different languages, as in Singapore, or simply descriptive terms to label the geographic situation of the place, is an interesting aspect of the particular landscape, and suggests that colloquially, the core meaning of Chinatown as a place of the Chinese people is not Chinatown's most significant characteristic.

The significance of names, as mentioned earlier, cannot be understated. Tuan (1991, above) notes that things – particularly Chinese cities and landscapes, are *named* into existence. Chinatown landscapes, I argue, are likewise named into being. It is not that ethnic Chinese enclaves in the city did not exist before being named "Chinatown", but that the designation "Chinatown" denotes the recognition of a special type of landscape. Toponyms (from the Greek, *tópos* – place, and *ónoma* – name) infer meanings in the context of location (Yeoh, 1996b). Toponyms are an important indicator of landscape, not least because they label the space with the associations made with words,

but these words also provide contextualisations for the space. Historical backgrounds and spatial heritage, for example, can be inferred from the names of places. As such, the name "Chinatown" would not only denote an urban area that is notably different from the rest of the city in some way, but a space with associations to the nation of China, as well as inhabitants with a history of migration.

Naming is power; Yeoh cites Emmerson, "names are rooted neither in reality nor custom, but express instead the power of the namer over the thing named" (1984: 4, in 1996b: 289). As earlier argued by Anderson (1988, 1991), it is not only the idea of Chinatown that has been conceptualised through the negotiation of power between state institutions and migrant peoples, but also the name. Who *calls* Chinatown "Chinatown" asserts power – and not simply the power of naming, but also the power to define, over a place and the people affiliated with it. In this section I consider the significance of the name "Chinatown" in my four research sites, as well as the background and context of other placenames connected with Chinatown, such as street names, in order to understand how a concept and identity of Chinatown is constructed in these cities. The point here is that names are never arbitrary; there is always a context behind and a meaning transmitted through the use, the acknowledgement, and the acceptance, of a name. To view landscapes as text also considers the meanings behind their names – that is, what can be *read* about a landscape through an understanding of its name. Like landscapes, the meanings of names will also change over time, despite the constancy of the name itself. And, as mentioned in the introductory section, names may also serve to conceal more complex or less desirable meanings.

Understanding that the name "Chinatown" itself already endows the space with racial connotations, it also, particularly in Southeast Asia, demonstrates a colonial approach of organising urban society through race (Yeoh, 1996a), revealing a contextual background fraught with negotiations of power over identity. As much as "Chinatown" adequately projects an image of a racialised urban space that is significantly different from the rest of the city, the name is superficial enough to hide the inherent complexities of the space. For example, the idea that Chinatown is inhabited or used mainly by the ethnic Chinese may not hold true in the present. Further, the Chinatown space may not actually be completely discrete from the rest of its urban and social context. In Singapore, for example, a nation where 76% of the population identifies as ethnically Chinese, a large proportion of the Chinese do not live in Chinatown. In Ho Chi Minh City, many of the research respondents claiming Chinese ancestry do not view themselves as particularly different from the rest of the Vietnamese population. The name "Chinatown" also obscures the heterogeneous nature of the Chinese population, not simply in this population's inclinations towards national, rather than ethnic identities (as explored in Chapter 6), but more importantly in terms of their dialects. The Hokkien Chinese, particularly in Rangoon, distinguish themselves from the Cantonese Chinese[1]. The existence of other Chinese groups, like the Hakka, the Hainanese, and the Teochew, notable migrant groups from the Southern provinces of China, are likewise undistinguished in the naming of Chinatown. Finally, designating a particular space as

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[1] This differentiation is also reflected in the geographical placement of the two separate groups of ethnic Chinese: the Hokkien living in the lower block of the downtown Rangoon Chinatown area, adjacent to the river, and the Cantonese living in the upper block, further away from the river.

"Chinatown" disregards other spaces that may be similar to the area of Chinatown in most characteristics, such as a high population of ethnic Chinese inhabitants, but are not part of the formally recognised Chinatown. In Bangkok, for example, the Chinese-inhabited and -owned areas of the city extend far beyond the urban area commonly known as Chinatown. Stretching east- and south-wards along the banks of the Chao Praya river are warehouses and various businesses that are still owned and inhabited by the Chinese community, yet are not considered a part of Chinatown. In Ho Chi Minh City, Districts 5 and 6, particularly the area around the *Bình Tây* market, are popularly considered Chinatown. However, this disregards Districts 10 and 11, which are also occupied largely by ethnic Chinese, and contain businesses and industries run by the Chinese community.

As such, it is important to consider the source of names. The terminology used by insiders often do not coincide with the language used by outsiders. In contrast with the colonial or imperial administration which referred to neighbourhoods by their racial categories, the local population instead employed terms that refer to the area's geographical contexts, or other landmarks. Ms. Ma, who manages a clan association in Bangkok's Chinatown, notes that "foreigners were the ones who called *Sampeng* 'Chinatown'". The Chinese community who live in these areas designated as 'Chinatown' recognise their neighbourhood, the place where they live and work, primarily as *Yaowarat* – which directly translates to "Young King", because the road around which the neighbourhood was developing was built in honour of Rama V. The local community does not naturally form an association of the area as *Chinatown*. While

they acknowledge the presence of a connection with China, in the form of origin, heritage, and migrant history, they also recognise that the Chinatown appellation is a reference to tourism, a separate economy of which they may not necessarily be a part. There is an acknowledgement that the foreign community, or outsiders, identifies the area with the primary racial group that inhabits it. However, the local Thai community identifies Chinatown with its national history, through the name of the road that was built to honour royalty. The difference between the way insiders understand their landscapes and the way outsiders identify it is telling. It suggests that the racial composition of the Chinatown area is less important to the locals than it is to foreigners, which hints at the possibility that racial differences – at least between the ethnic Chinese and the ethnic Thai, are not of major significance in general Thai society. Further, this suggests that the Chinatown area is locally more strongly and commonly identified with a different characteristic, such as business, mercantilism, and trade, than with race and ethnicity. In this case, then, the identity of Chinatown is complex – with discrete communities reading the landscape differently and identifying it with completely separate issues – one with race, and the other with (largely economic) function.

> When you [say] Yaowarat in the past you think of the Chinese community or commerce community, but now you think [of] the "china town" [sic] that is a part of tourism world, like many china towns [sic] in the world (email corresp., Ms. Kam, Bangkok).

Ms. Kam noted that despite its renown for cultural tourism, Chinatown has its roots in commerce. The above quote emerged from a discussion about place names, and indicates how words and names can, over time, come to signify something else that it does not describe. In this example, we are aware that while *Yaowarat* means "Young

King" in Thai, a description of the major thoroughfare in the city, it eventually ceased to be a reference to Rama V as the Chinese community grew and established its economic presence in the area. Thus, *Yaowarat* is symbolic of more than just as place where the Chinese live, but also where the businesses and light industries of the city are geographically based. As time further passes, and in association with the tourism economy in the present day, the name *Yaowarat* itself becomes recognised as a reference to the Chinatown area and community, and is used interchangeably with Chinatown. The name of the road *Yaowarat* has evolved to signify meanings that are different from its original, literal and descriptive definition. Not only does this show that landscape meanings change over time, but it is also indicative of the way external influences, such as those of foreigners, can modify the identity of the space – from "Young King", to place of commerce and the Chinese community, and then further to that of a tourism destination. Even as a place of tourism *Yaowarat* is still an economic site of commerce, tourism is a particularly different *type* of commerce as compared with trade, warehousing and light industry. These changes in meaning are further significant in the way that the name of the street, and the area the name refers to, itself has not changed, but that its meaning has, as *Yaowarat* now equates to "Chinatown".

In Ho Chi Minh City, the term *Chợ Lớn*, often simplified to "Cholon", particularly in tourism material, is synonymous with Chinatown. The meaning of "Cholon", as "big market", is maintained in the constant repetition to outsiders and tourists as they are often told, by the locals, tourguides and tourism material, that Chinatown's major identifying characteristic is its commercial trade and mercantilism, manifest in the form of its major

market, *Bình Tây*. In this case, then, "Cholon" is descriptive of its present-day context, in which it directly refers to the commerce that draws the tourism community, and reflects exactly what visitors expect to see. At the same time, the name "Cholon" signifies multiple meanings; it does not solely refer to the market, but is additionally associated with the Chinese community living in Ho Chi Minh City. It does not simply refer to a place of commerce, but also a particularly racialised place of commerce – that of the Chinese. Commonly accepted that *Chợ Lớn* was established by the migrant Chinese during the nineteenth century, it was also its commercial preponderance that defined it. Thus the link between the business function of "Cholon" and its racial identity is present, although this is not directly referred to in its name. The obsolete, Mandarin term *di an* was used primarily by the Chinese community when the settlement came into being, but the Vietnamese referred to the area only as *Chợ Lớn*. Eschewing the name used by the majority-Chinese community that inhabited the settlement, which would have been *Đê Ngạn* in Vietnamese, in favour of *Chợ Lớn* when it was incorporated as a city shows that the power to label the space lay with the Vietnamese. This exercise of power suggests that the space was, by preference, named for its commercial functions (market) than for its geographical location. The significance of this possibly lies in the economic importance that "Cholon" had begun to present to the region in general. This has had the effect of identifying the Chinese community with its commercial functions, reaffirming the idea that Chinatown is very much a lándscape of Chinese-dominated business and industry.

In Rangoon, independence (1948) led to changes in many of the road names in the

city as the nation struggled to distinguish itself from its colonial identity. Under colonial rule, Shwedagon Pagoda Road, one of the main streets in the Chinatown area, was called China Street. The difference in this street name is illustrated in the comparison between Figure 4.1, from 1945, and Figure 4.2, from 1959. Colonial-era maps have the Chinatown area labelled "Taroktan Circle" – a variant in the pronunciation of *Tayote Tan*, an indication that the colonial government addressed the area by its racial characteristic, and further anglicising what was originally a Burmese language term. Although these names have ceased to be in use, they are evidence that some of the roads had been named for their inhabitants, or the origins of their inhabitants. The marker of the names "China Street" and "Taroktan", although disused today, is a prelude to the identification and the informal designation of the area as Chinatown in the contempory era. These names, of course, ignored the fact that Rangoon was highly cosmopolitan at the time, and the city boasted large Chinese and Indian communities. The idea that the Chinese community was restricted to the "Taroktan Circle" is erroneous; while there was a concentration of Chinese-owned business and property in the area, the Chinese were by no means confined to it. It is also telling that in the present day, there is no formal term for the Chinatown area. While the neighbourhood is informally recognised as "Chinatown", particularly within the tourist industry, there is no indication otherwise that the local Rangoon community has a formal name for the area. However, the loss of the street name as well as a formal neighbourhood title in the post-colonial era may be due to one or both of two impulses. First, the city administration has no need or desire to recognise the area by the racial characteristics or heritage of the people living there, preferring instead to

Figure 4.1: Downtown Rangoon, 1945
Source: Compiled, Drawn, and printed by Survey Dte, Main HQ, ALFSEA April 1945
Dr Michael Charney, private collection

Figure 4.2: Downtown Rangoon, 1959
Source: Published under the direction of Colonel HLA AUNG, Director General of Surveys, Burma
Dr Michael Charney, private collection

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identify it by a religious landmark (notably, the street that leads towards the Shwedagon Pagoda for which the city is famous). Second, it is a sign that the city is attempting to erase, or least forget, its colonial past, by writing over the landscape labels conferred by the British. Even as its presence is undeniable in the city, the identity of Chinatown and the Chinese community is muted. There is no formal or institutional recognition of the Chinese presence in the city, and this is not simply by omission, but through an intentional act of removing the reference to the Chinese community – the China Street road name – and replacing it with a name completely unrelated to the community that inhabits the area. The deliberate de-naming of the area results in the concealment of the community; it even de-racialises the space. The effect of this is that the Rangoon city-scape becomes more homogenous; instead of displaying the diversity of urban landscape, there is an effort to flatten it. As such, the Chinatown landscape depends solely on informal name usage and private enterprise such as local businesses that put up signs and décor on their establishments in order to provide an identity.

In Singapore, again, the many names for the area that is now considered part of Chinatown, illustrate the several meanings that the landscape holds for the various communities that inhabit it, inside and out. That its Chinese name, *niu che shui*, is still in use in the vernacular, particularly among the Chinese-speaking population, as opposed to the more generally popular translation *tang ren jie* (lit. "Tang people street"), suggests that the historically inherited context and meaning of the space is still referenced in social memory, as that particular part of town where the water supply is different. In a different vein, the Malay language name *kreta ayer* is not in use for the area anymore; it is

however the name of a specific street (Kreta Ayer Road) in the neighbourhood. The adoption of the Malay language term for the area into an official street name is a demonstration of recognition for the historical context and heritage of the space. While the term *kreta ayer* (cart-water) itself holds no reference to the ethnicity of the community that inhabited the neighbourhood, it is still an acknowledgement of the physical (geographical and municipal) characteristic of the the area. Further, the name *kreta ayer* has, over time, become associated with the Chinatown landscape and community, so that although, literally, it merely refers to the water source in the neighbourhood, it has also come to signify the identity of the place. A further point of interest is found with the retention of a Malay language name in a landscape primarily associated with Chinese-origin culture. This hints at a particular localising trait of Singapore as a multicultural nation. Notwithstanding the presence of diverse religious and ethnic structures that are not commonly associated with most Chinese cultures (for example the Sri Mariamman Hindu temple, or the Masjid Jamae Chulia mosque), assigning names not associated with the local Chinese culture to streets and areas within Chinatown is an assertion of local identity and an attempt to "Malayanise" the landscape (see Yeoh, 1996b), as part of an effort at post-colonial nation-building. It further helps to promote and maintain the multi-racial characteristic of Singaporean society in an easily legible, textual manner.

Many of the roads in Singapore's Chinatown are named after landmarks or people (see Figure 4.3). In addition, many streets also have Chinese names in the Hokkien or Cantonese dialects that have not been directly transliterated into the official names they

Figure 4.3: Map of Chinatown, Singapore, 1950
Source: Map of Singapore Town, Yellow Top Cabs, National Archives of Singapore

have today. Descriptively named roads include Amoy Street, which is named after

Xiamen, a coastal city in Southeastern China. Many of the Chinese migrants who

eventually settled in Singapore came from Amoy. Naming streets after the origins of their

inhabitants works in two main ways in Chinatown. Firstly, it helps to maintain the

Chinese heritage of the people who lived there by identifying it with their history; on the

other hand, it also works to define and pigeonhole the people who live there, reducing

them to a category of origin. Not all the inhabitants of that space were from Amoy, so the

effect of naming a particular street for the characteristics of one dialect group in the entire

area has the further effect of homogenising the space. There is also Club Street, named

for the many Chinese clubs that used to be sited along that street, a small number of

which still remain.

Many roads were also named for prominent Chinese figures in the community at

the time. Ann Siang Hill and Street were named after a Hokkien businessman and

landowner; Boon Tat Street was named for a businessman and Municipal Commissioner;

Eu Tong Sen Street was named after a tycoon (part of the street was also previously

called Wayang Street for the Chinese opera theatres -- *Wayang*[2] -- that were situated

there); Jiak Chuan Road was for the grandson of philanthropist Tan Kim Seng, who later

ran the Kim Seng Company; Teck Lim Road was named after a Chinese businessman,

who was also a Justice of Peace and a Municipal Commissioner. Yeoh (1996b), in her

article on street names in Singapore, argues that toponymic inscriptions upon landscapes

are shaped by the socio-political ideologies and purposes, particularly within the post-

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[2] Interestingly, *wayang* is not a Chinese but a Javanese word.

colonial nation, in order to "foster a sense of 'nation' and 'national identity'" (1996b: 299). Naming streets after prominent members of Chinese society memorialises these individuals as part of the heritage of the Chinese community, commemorating their contributions to society as a whole. However, situating the memory of these particular Chinese figures within Chinatown itself, as opposed to outside of Chinatown serves to further Sinicise the area. Through the borrowed names of these particular characters to label the streets and spaces in the neighbourhood, the landscape become more *Chinese*, and reinforces the Chineseness and Chinese heritage of Chinatown within a muti-cultural society.

At the same time, many of these roads had alternate, unofficial names in Hokkien and Cantonese that are descriptive, for example *ma cho kiong pi* for Boon Tat Street, which means "beside *ma cho* temple" in Hokkien; or *tua man lai*, "within the big gate" in Hokkien, for Club Street, where there was a big gate at the junction of Cross Street (see Edwards & Keys, 1996, and Savage & Yeoh, 2004, for a guide to places and names in Singapore). The reasons these descriptive names were disregarded are unknown, as several places in Singapore are named for their geographical location and descriptive characteristics (for example, Bukit Merah, or the literal English translation, Redhill). It may be that references to these descriptions were too esoteric, or that it may have been considered more appropriate to memorialise important contributors to society by naming streets after them. In any case, the effect of this has been to further identify the Chinatown area with the Chinese community in Singapore as a whole, which in turn helps to assert a particular Chinatown identity and heritage in the space.

From this, it is clear that place names work in several ways. Toponyms not only serve to label, categorise, and homogenise space – as the name "Chinatown" itself demonstrates – generally (though not exclusively) a largely ethnic Chinese-occupied area of a city outside of China; but names also tend to take on meanings and associations over time, such as shown in Bangkok, where *Yaowarat* has taken on largely the same meaning as "Chinatown" in the context of this particular city. Names are further descriptive in different ways – they generally describe one specific characteristic of the primary social group that inhabits the area (like "Taroktan" in Rangoon); at the same time official names tend to ignore the popular and informal terms used by the local community, as seen in Singapore. Place names are thus layered upon the landscape, serving as a kind of simplified text summarising a particular landscape, providing succinct, but often incomplete, identities to these spaces, and often adding yet another layer of meaning and function to the place. Imaginations and identities of Chinatowns produce and are produced by their textual contexts.

Signs & Spectacles: Identifying the Landscape

> Merchants did their best to adapt Chinatown's streetscape in conformity
> with the neighbourhood image that Europeans sought to discover. ...
> Chinatown had come to suit the imagination and tastes of European
> consumers (Anderson, 1991: 176-177).

Landscapes, Chinatown landscapes in particular, tend to reflect a certain preconceived idea, or expectation, of what they should look like, as Anderson shows above. There appears to be a need to construct a landscape that people – visitors, tourists, various users of the space – are expecting to see. In the case of Chinatown, there already exist several

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possible imagined representations of what a space associated with Chinese migrants overseas, or an ethnic Chinese community, or even a dislocated piece of China itself, might look like as a discrete space within a city. There might be, for example, an expectation to see markets, or restaurants offering "Chinese-type" cuisine, or "Chinese-style" architecture. For several reasons, the landscape appears to be constructed to reproduce these expectations and imagined representations.

One of the questions with regard to the imagery of Chinatown landscapes that I explore in this section is, what are the images that represent Chinatown? I further seek to determine how these images have come to represent Chinatown. I contend that heritage plays an important role in the formation of Chinatown landscapes. A not insignificant proportion of the created and interpreted Chinatown landscape is derived from conceptualisations of the Chinese community's history and heritage, which in turn forms a base upon which imaginations of the Chinatown landscape are created and reproduced. Heritage is borne of social and cultural histories. Further, what constitutes heritage is often highly contested, and the result of much negotiation. The kinds of heritages that are preserved, memorialised, and perpetuated are instrumental in the eventual formation of the culture that a particular Chinatown presents, as well as its cultural identity. These spatial imaginations of place help to form, assert, and reproduce ideas about the cultural identities on the landscape. Pratt and Hanson (1994) note that space is fundamental to constructions of cultural identity through the negotiations and interactions of social identity that occur within spatial relations of place. At the same time, cultural identity reaffirms and reproduces spatial identities. As such, the Chinatown identity is influenced

by the social activities – both practice and heritage – that occur upon the urban space in Chinatown, as well as the resulting imagery that becomes a part of its place identity.

The meanings of the symbols and iconographs that have come to represent a Chinatown identity are socially constituted. Symbols and icons are created by a process of ascribing meanings to images. They are signs created for the purpose of communicating ideas (Eco, 1990). Signs are "something by knowing which we know something more" (Peirce, 1931, in Eco, 1990: 26). By being able to read a sign, we understand the message that it represents. Through recognising a combination of specific practices and images – reading the landscape and recognising the signs – we are able to deduce and understand the message that we are in a particular environment. It is thus, through recurring and continual connections between the sign and the thing, that images and practices become associated with landscape. The imagery of Chinatown is embedded in the identity of the thing; the identity of Chinatown inseparable from the idea of Chinatown; and finally, the idea of Chinatown is congruent with its image. In this section, I refer to objects tangible and intangible that, put together, serve to identify a landscape that is Chinatown. These are visual and experiential instruments that serve to identify and label the landscape. There are relative consistencies in the common practices of place that appear in the Chinatown landscape.

According to Cohen (1997), Chinatown's cultural heritages are maintained through recreations of imagined social histories that are often seen to be authentic. Old, traditional practices are revived and preserved, and then physically perpetuated in the form of businesses and building decor. The preservation of these kinds of heritage

appears to offer a cultural commodity: to outsiders, it is an exotic curiosity; to insiders, it performs a nostalgic reminder of roots and collective history. In Chinatown, heritages are maintained through the practices and imagery that continue to perpetuate this "authenticity" of cultural histories. Practices, like certain forms of trade and mercantilism, and imagery, such as dragon and phoenix iconologies, appear repeatedly on the landscape. These images and practices have, over time, come to signify and symbolise Chinatown, or particular overseas Chinese communities. Signs and symbols, like festivals, can also be spatial rituals that represent aspects of a culture. Rituals are routinised sets of actions that imply symbolic meanings (Jackson, 1989). In the Chinatown landscape objects such as décor and ornamentation contribute to the physical and visual aspects of the architecture and the built environment. The physical, built form of any space is one of the most accessible means of recognising and identifying that space.

Festivals

Signs in Chinatown landscapes include events and patterns that occur in space, such as festivals. The occurrence of festival is not always spectacle (see Debord, 1973); there are meanings and significances both within and without these events that take place, without fail, annually. It is easy to consider these events spectacle because of their inclusion in tourism promotional material, marketed heavily as must-see cultural affairs. However, this is not to say that these festivals do not still hold cultural relevance and significance. Festivals mark cultural landscapes through the regular repetition of similar or related

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practices on a particular space. Johnson has argued that ritual performance "defines and defends the social boundary of the ethnic group" (2007: 146), essentially acting as a signifier that emphasises the practices of a community. Through actively performing practices that are carried out in the homeland upon places of new settlement, performances and ritual events function to further strengthen the identity of diasporas. As such, these festivals not only serve to help distinguish and establish a community but also become associated with the landscape. In their viewing, such events become spectacles that serve to identify the landscape, and thus comprise a part of it.

The festivals that occur regularly in Chinatowns mark the cultural practices of the people who live there. These cultural practices are maintained for several reasons. As Waterman (1998) notes, festivals contribute to the cultural landscape, and help to maintain the culture of social groups. Festivals are also a symbol of collective identity. Chinatown landscapes can be identified in the displays of their festivals in the sense that these events tend to occur in specific places. In Singapore, the Lunar New Year (locally known as "Chinese New Year") is celebrated annually with a massive street festival that occupies the core of the city's Chinatown. The festive street bazaar (Figure 4.4) typically begins three weeks before the first day of the Chinese (lunar) calendar. It commences with the "Chinatown Light Up", which signifies the opening of the night markets, and closes with a large stage performance by local artistes and celebrities and a countdown on the eve of the new year that culminates with firecrackers and fireworks at midnight. The Chinese New Year festival appears to be the main function of Singapore's Chinatown. When asked about the significance of Chinatown, the interview respondents all
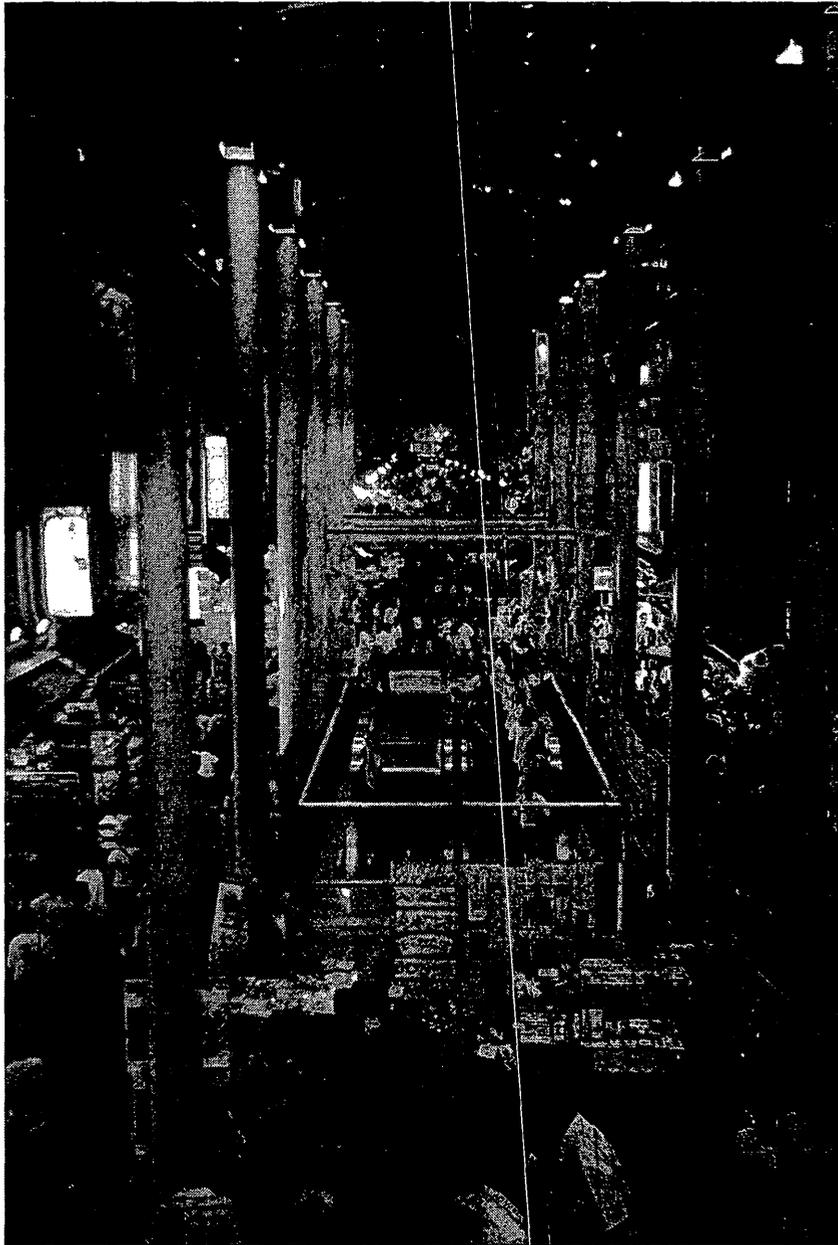
Figure 4.4: Singapore's Chinatown during Chinese New Year

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immediately replied "the Chinese New Year celebrations", many stating that the festival was the single most important thing that took place there annually.

Of slightly smaller significance (although growing in festive proportions to match the Chinese New Year Festival) is the Mid-Autumn Festival (colloquially, Lantern Festival), occurring during September and October. While the Chinatown streets are heavily decorated and the cultural performances and parades of lights and lanterns are well-attended, with fireworks and lion and dragon dances, this event went largely unmentioned in interviews, overshadowed by the spectacle of the Lunar New Year festival. In recent years, a "Mid-Autumn Festival Light Up" has also been instituted to mark the celebration of the festival.

In Singapore, "Light Ups" have become a popular way of marking significant cultural festivals. Of particular note are the festivals of Deepavali (the Festival of Lights, located in Little India) in October, and the well-known annual "Orchard Road Christmas Light Up" (along the stretch of Orchard Road in the commercial district) that begins in November. The "Light Up" events feature extensive street decorations that involve immense displays of bright lights along entire streets and neighbourhoods.

In Bangkok, the Chinese New Year festivities typically occur on the first two days of the Lunar calendar. Official parades and performances as well as itinerant stalls selling festive products (Figure 4.5) occupy the major roads while the secondary streets are filled with smaller performances. The celebrations include Chinese opera performances, dragon and lion dances, as well as the setting off of fireworks and firecrackers. Religious ceremonies are also held in and around the several Buddhist and Taoist temples dotting

Figure 4.5: Bangkok's Chinatown during Chinese New Year

Figure 4.6: Bangkok's Chinatown during *Kin Jay* Festival

Chinatown.

As in Singapore's Chinatown, other festivals are also held in Bangkok's Chinatown. In September or October, the moon, or Mid-Autumn, festival is celebrated; however, this festival is also observed all over Bangkok. The *Kin Jay* Vegetarian festival, usually falling in early October, is another large celebration that takes place over the course of a week in Chinatown (Figure 4.6). Similar to the Chinese New Year festivities, night markets offering vegetarian foods and other delicacies fill the streets in Chinatown, and temples hold large ceremonies. On the final day of the festival, firecrackers are set off, and there are parades and performances of lion and dragon dances that carry on late into the night.

Lunar New Year is celebrated all over Vietnam as *Tết*, so it is difficult to separate the Chinese festivities that occur in Chinatown during the holiday. Many interview respondents mentioned *Tết Thượng Nguyên*, a holiday celebrated 15 days after *Tết*, known as the first moon festival (first full moon of the New Year). Festivities are usually organised by temples and various Chinese associations in Chinatown. Many interview respondents suggested that there are few differences between the festivals the Chinese-Vietnamese (*người Hoa*) and the ethnic Vietnamese celebrate. Many of the cultural events and festivals that occur in *Chợ Lớn* are also celebrated in other parts of the city, involving non-*Hoa* Vietnamese.

In Rangoon, Chinese New Year is usually marked in the city by the increasing amounts of New Year paraphernalia available for sale in the weeks leading up to the event. The festival celebrations are generally organised and held by the temples and the

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clan associations. Stores are decorated with red banners and other auspicious decorations for the festival. In 2010, Tiger Beer (a Singapore-brewed beer) erected a temporary Chinatown arch in Rangoon to observe the new Year of the Tiger (2010-2011) (Figure 4.7). Stores and shops in Rangoon's Chinatown offer discounts on festival merchandise and lotteries to attract the crowds there for the festivities. The majority of patrons shop to obtain foodstuffs and religious and decorative items specifically for the festival. Street vendors also take advantage of the crowds, and set up stores along the sidewalks to offer their goods for sale. Unlike the festivals in Singapore and Bangkok, in Rangoon there are no massive displays of the celebrations in terms of parades and performances, save for the highly localised smaller performances organised by the associations at the temples. Lion and dragon dances are services provided by the clans and associations, hired by private businesses to bless their stores and to bring good fortune for the year ahead.

Festivals are a significant aspect of Chinatown. A large part of the Chinatown identity is formed and perpetuated by these highly visible performances and rituals in the public and highly accessible spaces of the neighbourhood. Local members of the community and other ethnic Chinese people participate in the practices of the festival by patronising and consuming the culture produced by the event. They also help to produce the culture by performing the ritual, through being a part of the crowd, or as a merchant providing goods for sale, or being a literal part of the performances and displays, for example as a dancer in the lion dances. Outsiders and visitors consume the culture produced by the festival through watching and experiencing the rituals and performances, reinforcing the Chinatown identity.
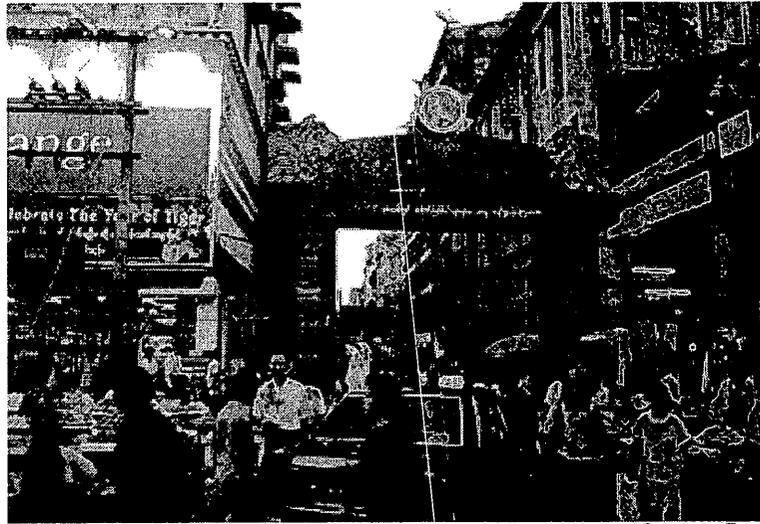
Figure 4.7: Rangoon's Chinatown during Chinese New Year showing the Tiger Beer sponsored temporary arch. Source: Irrawaddy.org / Aung Thet Wine

Figure 4.8: Transient stores in Singapore's Chinatown during Chinese New Year

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Trade & Commerce

The Chinatown landscape is also an acutely economic one. Trade and commerce feature greatly as an important part of Chinatown. More than simply a landscape of commerce, the production, consumption, and trade of particular products, such as certain types of comestibles and specific cultural products (for example "Chinese-style" foods, desserts and pastries, teas, and herbal medicines), signify Chinatown. The commercial function of the neighbourhood is also emphasised during festivals, when the sale of foods and products is a main focus of the cultural celebrations. Additional transient stores (Figure 4.8) are set up along walkways and in the street to capitalise on the increased pedestrian traffic that appears during these periods.

During the festivals, crowds patronise these stores for artifacts related to the events, such as special New Year foods and decorations. The presence of these items for commerce is a marker for Chinatown. During non-festival periods, Chinatown is still primarily an economic space. The establishments that make up the permanent landscape are those of trade and commerce. Zukin notes that "[i]n great cities today, as in the past, ethnic shopping streets thrive with imported goods, street vendors, music, political debates: signs, in short, of urban public cultures" (1995: 190). Further, spaces of commercial culture are not only sites of "lived experience... where identities and communities are formed" (1995: 190), but also places of necessary consumption that are more complex and diverse than some kind of commodity fetishism. Certain trades and products appear to be common to particular cultures, and these practices become entrenched in the landscape, endowing the space with its particular identity. For

Chinatown, markets and other specific spaces of trade and commerce (for example, stores and warehouses) feature prominently in the landscape – in its history as well as in the present. It is a landscape based on economic activity, and this is well represented by the proliferation of such spaces. I will further explore the economic spatiality of Chinatown landscapes in the next major section, "Selling Chinatown: Landscape as Commodity".

Language

As explained earlier, landscape can be a text. Language is a significant object in the landscape that can be read. The link between language and landscape is embedded in the cultural space. More than simply the way Chinese languages are related to Chinatown by means of communication, language contributes to the construction of cultural identity. As Jackson (1989) explains, social and cultural identities are formed and affirmed by the meanings that are communicated through a linguistic medium. As explained earlier that landscape is text that can be read, the recognition of Chinese language displayed in Chinatown also, literally, codes a space into a distinguishable, identifiable cultural landscape.

The Chinatowns of Ho Chi Minh City and Rangoon may be the least obviously marked of the four cities. Far from the decorative signposts indicating the Chinatown neighbourhoods in Singapore and Bangkok, the few signs and clues that denote the crossing of neighbourhood boundaries are subtle, and mainly found in language. In Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, and Rangoon, it is common for visitors unfamiliar to the cities to be told that it is through recognising the presence of Chinese language in the

environment that one knows one is in Chinatown. While it helps to be familiar with the language, for non-speakers, Chinatown can still be quite clearly marked by both the aural and visual signs (sights and sounds) of the various Chinese dialects.

In Ho Chi Minh City, as one travels westward from the city centre from District 1 into District 5, which is part of the *Chợ Lớn* neighbourhood, a slowly increasing number of storefronts begin to display Chinese characters on their signboards and banners alongside the Vietnamese language (Figure 4.9). Apart from suggesting that the boundaries between Chinatown and not-Chinatown are not solid, but rather permeable and may cover a wide zone, the function of the Chinese language serves as a marker of cultural landscape. Where Chinese characters are seen and recognised, there is an awareness that one is in a Chinese landscape.

The case is similar in Rangoon, as in Bangkok (Figures 4.10, 4.11), where the presence of Chinese language on the landscape announce the Chinese ethnicity of the neighbourhood.

In Singapore, the symbol of language functions quite differently. As the majority of the population in Singapore is ethnically Chinese, much of the landscape, Chinatown or not, is marked with Chinese language. With the exception of Singapore, however, the presence of Chinese language concentrated in a space within a non-Chinese-majority city is generally a clear indication of the existence of the cultural community there. The visual impact of the language in the area is a sign, a Chinese iconography in the landscape that serves as a representation that helps to identify Chinatown.

Figure 4.9: Storefront in Ho Chi Minh City's Chinatown

Figure 4.10: Storefront in Rangoon's Chinatown

Figure 4.11: Storefront in Bangkok's Chinatown

Design & Décor

There are many more symbols which, in tandem, help to code a Chinatown landscape
with a distinct identity. The function of the designs and décor that are frequently found in
the built environment help to identify the space through the associations these design
styles and architecture have with ideas of Chinese culture and built form. There is an idea
of a certain "Chinese style" that characterises the built Chinatown landscape, an
"architectural expression of Chinese collective identity, from its origins as an Orientalist
import to its appropriation as a national symbol" (Broudehoux, 2001: 158). Identity can
be found in the physical landscape of the neighbourhood, enabling people to not only
recognise stylistic features and relate them to a particular culture, but also allowing the
local community to identify and associate themselves with those features. Some of the
most highly visual traits of this "Chinese style" are the three main colours, red, gold, and
green. Other traits of note are the curved roof lines and the curved bamboo-replicate roof
tiles. The reproduction of the pagoda style roofing, where the next higher level is smaller
than the previous one below it, is also a common theme. Red lanterns are an artifact
commonly found in the Chinatown landscape, usually hanging from the roofs mentioned
previously, or as an additional part of the décor during festivals. Finally, there are statues
and figures of animals that are imagined to represent some facet of Chinese culture, such
as dragons and phoenixes, as well as lions. The repetition of these colours and styles
throughout the landscape in many Chinatowns help to build a cohesive idea of a
"Chinatown style".

One feature that has come to be a defining icon, particularly in North American

and European Chinatowns, is the Chinatown arch or gate, sometimes referred to as a "friendship gate". Globally well-known examples of these include the gates in San Francisco, USA, and Liverpool, UK. These gates tend to be elaborately decorated and prominent. In my four Chinatowns, however, not all have gates, and those that do may be more or less elaborate and well-known than others. At the same time, Chinatown gates appear to add to the identity of the community and the landscape. Their presence often signifies an acceptance of the Chinese community by the host society. The gates are usually also erected to symbolise cooperation and partnership between the two groups, ostensibly the reason they are often dubbed "friendship gates". In any case, as the visual effect of the gate illustrates the formal recognition of the Chinatown community, it works to cement its legitimate presence in the space, thus solidifying its social and cultural identity.

The Chinatown arch at the Odeon Circle in Bangkok is the largest and most impressive of the gates found in my four cities. It is a prominent feature of the neighbourhood and espouses the general meaning of the "friendship" gate. Evidenced by the Chinese language writing on one side of the arch, and Thai on the other, it symbolises the unity between the Thai and the Chinese communities in Bangkok (Figures 4.12, 4.13). As a landmark, this imposing and elaborate archway identifies without question the cultural space of the Chinatown area. Standing out from the midst of the urban environment, the conspicuousness of the feature seems to characterise the distinctiveness of Bangkok's Chinatown itself. The archway may be seen as a rallying point or a symbol of Chinatown identity that characterises the popular imagination of
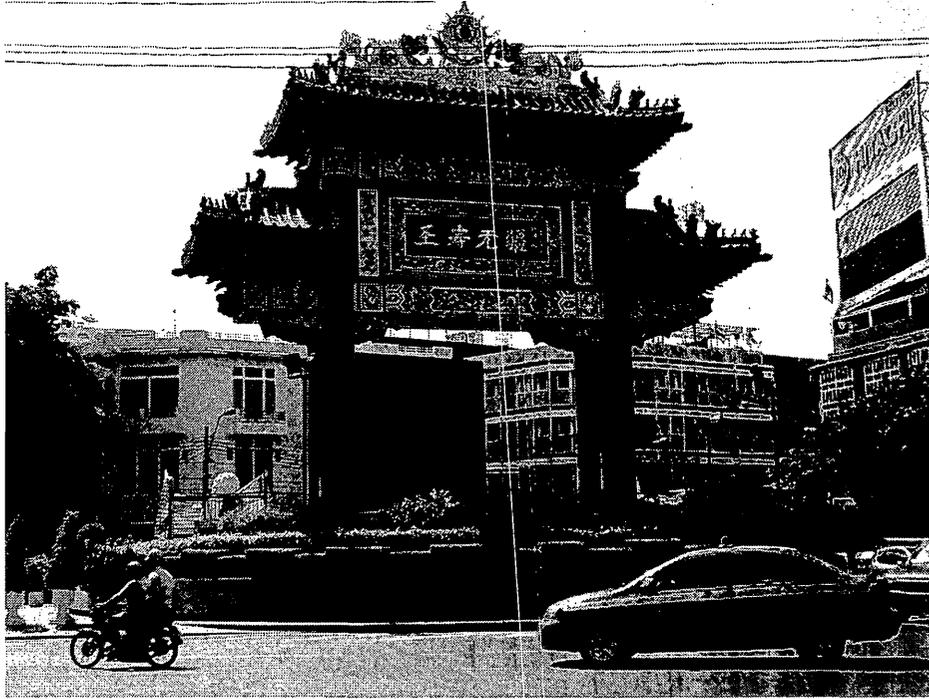
Figure 4.12: Chinatown arch in Bangkok, Odeon Circle, displaying Chinese characters

Figure 4.13: Chinatown arch in Bangkok, Odeon Circle, displaying Thai characters

Chinatowns in general.

In Singapore, there is an arch that is unobstrusively located off Keong Saik Road
at an alleyway leading through the Chinatown Complex, a mixed-use set of buildings
comprising residential and commercial spaces. It is small and obscure (Figure 4.14); its
location is inexplicable, save perhaps for its announcement of the Complex, which is but
a minor portion of the entire Chinatown area. I had not known of its existence until I
chanced upon it during a thorough investigation and exploration of the area. Quite the
opposite of the archway in Bangkok, in its simplicity and unadornment, combined with
its secluded location, the arch appears to be an afterthought in the fashioning of this city's
Chinatown, possibly built for the sake of completion, pandering to the idea that it is
characteristic for Chinatowns to have an archway. In this case, the archway in
Singapore's Chinatown does not appear to contribute to the identity of the community in
any meaningful way.

However, temporary decorative arches are constructed in Singapore's Chinatown
during particular festivals that are held in the area. During the Lunar New Year and the
Mid-Autumn festivals, these temporary archways are constructed over the main
thoroughfares at Eu Tong Sen Street and New Bridge Road, as well as at South Bridge
Road. These gates are usually ornate, constructed of coloured plastic and lightweight
materials and lit from within, creating the appearance of a glowing archway (Figure
4.15). The illuminating effect this has on the street is particularly attractive in the
evening. As these archways are only present for the duration of the weeks leading up to
the festivals and during the festivals themselves (they are often rapidly deconstructed and

Figure 4.14: Chinatown arch in Singapore, Keong Saik Road

Figure 4.15: Chinatown arch for the Lunar New Year festival in Singapore, New Bridge Road

removed in the days following the event), they tend to draw the attention of local Singaporeans and tourists alike, greatly elevating the numbers of visitors to the area when these events occur. These arches are part of the festival performances of Singapore's Chinatown, and their presence symbolises the occasion of these festival practices. As such, the function and impact of these temporary arches, which are like the temporary stores set up during these festival periods, contrast dramatically with that of the permanent arch at Keong Saik Road. They are highly visible, draw a lot of attention from visitors, are elaborately decorated, and are closely related to the performance of Chinatown identity functions and formations.

The identity-building function of Singapore's Chinatown arches, therefore, is limited. During non-festival periods, there is effectively no Chinatown arch, at least none similar to the arch in Bangkok, or in other North American or European Chinatowns where the gates and arches are prominent and obviously symbolic, clear markers of the presence of the Chinatown community and its involvement in the city. In both Rangoon and Ho Chi Minh City, there are no gates or archways of similar dimensions or importance as the permanent Bangkok arch or Singapore's temporary decorative festival arches. While the presence of an archway contributes to a sense of a Chinatown identity, mainly through the formalised recognition of the space of the Chinese community in the city, it remains to be seen whether the lack of an archway or gate actively takes away from the Chinatown community and identity. As mentioned earlier, the Chinatowns in Ho Chi Minh City and Rangoon are the least obviously marked. While a Chinatown identity definitely exists in these cities, it falls upon other signs and symbols in the urban

landscape to maintain and emphasise these identities. Further, the lack of an explicit declaration of cooperation and friendship with a physical monument may show that there may be no need for the city to display this in an overtly pronounced manner, or even that the relationship is tenuous or uncertain.

Examining the two extant gates, however, reveals a number of design details clearly intended to convey "Chinatown". These design characteristics may be considered orientalisations of a "Chinese style" of architecture. Broudehoux notes that the deliberate development of "Chinese architecture" in China followed from architects (both Chinese and not, and who were trained in the West) who believed that Chinese architecture should be "based on local heritage" (2001: 166). This they called an "Indigenous style" of architecture, which showcased elements of "early Chinese style". As the above figures (4.12-4.15) show, the Gates display characteristics of the "Chinatown style" described at the beginning of this section, with the tiled roofs, decorative animals, and the colour scheme.

The fixed palette of colours can be seen in most decorative elements in the built environment. In Bangkok, the police post, telephone booths and lamp-posts in the streets of Chinatown are painted in red (Figure 4.16). Both the police post and telephone booth display the bamboo-replicate roof tile style and the curved roof lines. The architecture and design of such street furniture in Chinatown helps to make the landscape a distinctly "Chinese" one. It is separate and different from the landscape in other parts of the city. The style is associated with a kind of Chinese identity, and again, it is the combination of styles that conveys the sense of Chinese-ness. The colour red alone would not

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Figure 4.16: Information station and police booth, lamp post, and telephone booth in the background, in Chinatown, Bangkok

Figure 4.17: Park Entrance in *Chợ Lớn*, Ho Chi Minh City

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communicate that the neighbourhood is Chinese, but with the curving roof lines and the roof tiles, the identity becomes clear. The landscape is marked in an unmistakably recognisable manner that sets it apart, affirming its identity in relation to other spaces.

In Ho Chi Minh City, an elaborate archway (Figure 4.17) marks the entrance to a park in District 5. The colours displayed, green and red, are in keeping with the shades commonly identified with the "Chinatown style". Similarly, the bamboo-replicate roof tiles, and the pagoda-style layering of the roof tiers are shown here. This park entrance stands out in the urban landscape. There are no words or verbal signs to inform the viewer that this neighbourhood is predominantly Chinese, yet the recognisable composition of style and colour conveys the meaning in the landscape effectively. At *Bình Tây* market (Figure 4.18), the pagoda style of the market structure sets the building apart from its urban surroundings. The building, constructed in the early twentieth century, sports a red bamboo-style tile roof and dragon figures lining the roof-lines. The blue and white tiled design on the apex of the first level roofing displays two dragons facing each other. Again, the architectural styling and the inclusion of the dragon figures are symbols that reinforce the Chinatown identity. The dragons alone may have no meaning, but in tandem with the roof design, separate components combine to mark the place as "Chinese". Like the park entrance in Figure 4.17, the market stands out from the surrounding structures in the neighbourhood. The sprawling complex, with its elaborate and deliberate styling, conveys a sense of significance: this is unquestionably an important building in *Chợ Lớn*. Its architecture communicates and identifies its Chinese-ness, but the building in totality conveys further meanings: it is notable for its function as

Figure 4.18: *Bình Tây* market in Ho Chi Minh City
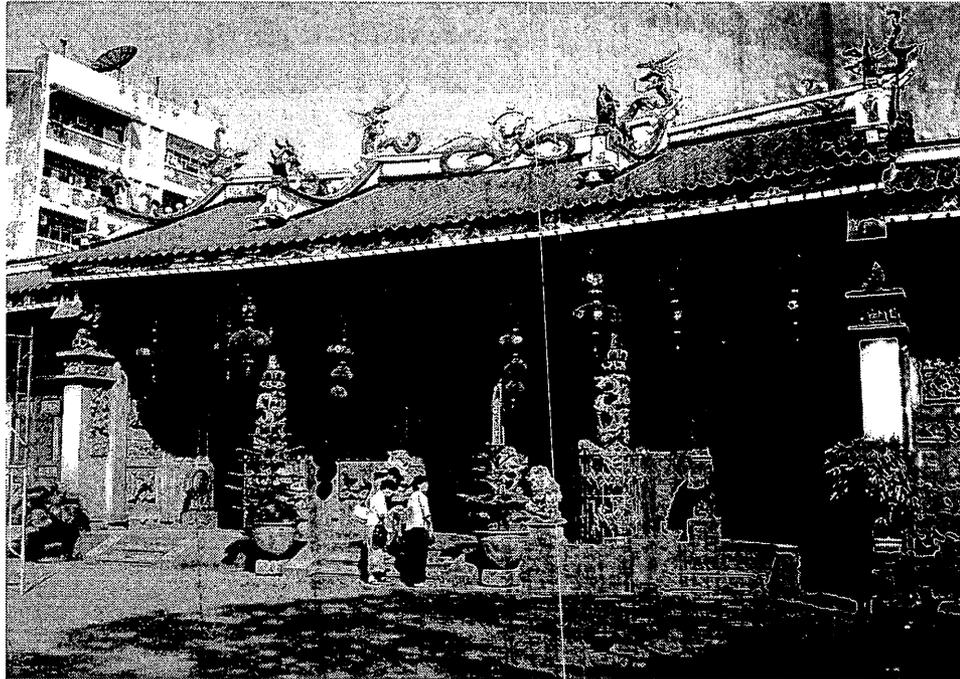
Figure 4.19: Taoist Temple (Hokkien Association), Chinatown, Rangoon

a market, and it is a physical indicator of the economic significance of the Chinese community.

In Rangoon, as mentioned earlier, the built landscape is not marked as "Chinese" in any obvious way. Save for the presence of the Chinese language on buildings that belong to Chinese owners, or have been built by them, or plaques announcing the location of Chinese associations, signs and symbols indicating a Chinatown identity can be hard to find; the buildings in Chinatown are relatively homogeneous with the rest of the city. As a consequence of this, the temples built by the migrant Chinese when they arrived in Rangoon tend to stand out in the landscape. As Figure 4.19 shows, the temple is decorated with many of the symbols and themes that are common to the "Chinatown" style. It features the green bamboo-tile roof, and dragon statues on the roof and pillars. There are also stone lions at the entrance. The stepped pagoda roof is hinted at with the split roof levels, and the main accent colours of the structure are green and red, with some gold. The red lanterns hanging from the ceiling further add to the sense of "Chinese style". The temples run by the Chinese associations tend to display the densest combinations of architecture and décor, almost as if they function as a repository of Chinese-ness and heritage. This may not be inaccurate. As some of the earliest structures built by the Chinese settlers (this temple was built in the mid-nineteenth century), the structure recalls the culture and heritage of their homeland in a symbolic and iconic manner.

Other spaces that display decorative characteristics of the Chinatown urban landscape are the clan associations in the neighbourhood. The clan association in Figure

Figure 4.20: Clan Association in a Residence, Chinatown, Rangoon

4.20 features some of the popular themes. Apart from including the three main colours,

red, green, and gold, there are also lanterns (white, with red-coloured Chinese characters)

hanging from the ceiling. Although the urban landscape is not as highly marked here in

Rangoon as it is in other cities, these small and individual efforts at maintaining a

Chinese or Chinatown identity help to not only identify the area as Chinatown,

but provide a sense of cohesion and a visual expression of heritage for the local Chinese

community.

In Singapore, the majority of the architecture in Chinatown is of the "shophouse"

variety, the "vernacular architectural style of the working class" (Chang & Teo, 2009),

once common over most of the Singaporean landscape, but now substantially eliminated

by urban redevelopment. The few remaining shophouses are conserved in heritage areas –

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of which Chinatown is one. Even in the shophouses, "Chinese style" décor can be found.

Figure 4.21 shows a block in Chinatown where the roofing on the ground floor of the

shophouses have been designed to include the green bamboo-style roof tiles. Consistent

with the Chinatown theme, this building also includes numerous series of red and gold

lanterns hanging from the rooftops, as well as festooned across the streets. This image

shows that while shophouse architecture can still be found in other areas of Singapore, in

Chinatown designs and features have been appended to the landscape to add to the

"Chinatown" environment.

Figure 4.22 shows the Chinatown Complex, two levels of commercial activity

(shops on the first floor, food on the second), with residential buildings on top. An open

space marks the front of the complex, with a raised platform on the left side of the

picture. In this particular figure, several themes stand out. The accent colour on the

building, its façade and pillars, is red. On the platform, the pillars of the structure are

painted gold, while the roof beams are red. The pillars are also lined with Chinese

writing. The complex and open area here are relatively new, built in the past decade, and

are clearly styled and decorated with Chinese-type themes. This serves to maintain a

cohesion between the newer mix-use (residential/commercial) buildings with the older

ones (as seen earlier in Figure 17), which have nevertheless been renovated to conserve

their original form. The cohesion also helps to strengthen the idea of a Chinatown

heritage, history, and identity in the area. While modernisation and urban redevelopment

march over Singapore, there is an effort to maintain a Chinatown identity through the

sinicisation of the built form. As Henderson (2000) explained, the conservation project of

Figure 4.21: Buildings on Trengganu Street, Chinatown, Singapore

Figure 4.22: Chinatown Complex, Singapore

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the area in the 1980s saw the structures in the neighbourhood preserved and restored, eventually becoming the Historic District of Chinatown. The conservation and restoration of the neighbourhood was a major project, planned and carried out in a public and private collaboration. The Singapore Tourist Board (STB; then Singapore Tourist Promotion Board), together with the Tourism Task Force, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and advised by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and later, the Singapore Heritage Society, were all involved in the Conservation Plan.

By using images that draw from a Chinese cultural heritage such as the architectural style of pagodas and associations with particular animals, as well as a certain set of colours, the Chinatown neighbourhoods are able to establish and reinforce an identity that sets them apart from other spaces in the city. It also produces a recognition of similar landscapes in different places, and is the primary way that Chinatowns are recognisable and identifiable in their incarnations in other cities. The claim to an identity via cultural artifact and heritage is a mutual history that ties different Chinatowns together. There is a physical reproduction of a landscape imagery that matches the social and cultural identity of the community that lives there.

Selling Chinatown: Landscape as Commodity

As a socio-cultural landscape, Chinatowns and their communities are reinforced by their functions, which in turn serve to reproduce their identities. Heritage is a source and a symbol for identity. In the urban landscape, the physical signs and symbols that indicate and signify a Chinatown culture contribute to a sense of place, and to a Chinatown

identity. Heritage maintenance and preservation serve many purposes and have many effects. Apart from reinforcing community identity, the chief impact of these efforts is usually upon the economy. Culture is one of the main aspects of Chinatown, and this is clearly seen in the way it is marketed in tourism literature. The physical features and social practices of Chinatown are often highlighted as attractions for visitors. As such it appears that the tourism economy of the neighbourhood is what Chinatown has become known for. Chinatown has become defined by this tourism economy – its culture and identity have become major selling points as the difference in cities that drives the urban economy (Zukin, 1995). In this section I draw on the practices and symbols found in the Chinatown landscape to explore how interpretations of culture and heritage cultivate spatial identities. I contend that the manipulation of culture and heritage produces a layered landscape that contributes separately to the multiplicity of Chinatown identities.

Chinatowns (and most ethnic landscapes) are comprised of a complexity of cultural, economic, political and social spaces. Each of these lend a particular aspect to the Chinatown identity. In this section, I focus on Chinatown as economic space and consider how the physical urban landscape is consumed. Cultural landscapes such as Chinatown are consumed through tourism. There are many ways that landscape can be consumed; however, ethnicity- and heritage-based cultural quarters have major economic value in their viability for tourism. This is in addition to the other functions of Chinatowns as active spaces for the production of other types of goods and services, which are also consumed by the tourist gaze. I noted at the beginning of the chapter that Chinatown as a heritage landscape is often commodified, and the heritage and culture on

display is consumed: the tourist gaze turns culture into something saleable (Urry, 2002). The presence of the tourist begins a process that transforms culture into a consumable; the gaze creates the commodity. Greenwood (1977) argued that tourism is the capricious commoditization of culture, and culture becomes more than simply an identifier of a group of people, but an asset that can be marketed and exchanged for capital. He problematised tourism by arguing that the gaze alters the meaning and function of local culture and public rituals. The use of heritage and culture has the ability to modify the ethnic neighbourhood by turning it into an urban destination (Lin, 2011). Cultural heritage can be a "legitimate device for education, public affairs, and community development" (2011: 14), however, the commercialisation and commodification of heritage can turn the community into an ethnic theme park. At the same time, Chang (1997) has challenged the notion that heritage development and preservation are targeted at and benefit solely the tourist visitor. The conservation of culture and heritage is demanded and consumed by the local population, as well.

Contemporary Chinatown is still known for its commercial role. As a tourist attraction in many cities, it is a neighbourhood that continues to retain many of its original functions, such as providing specialised goods and services for its Chinese community (for example, ethnic foodstuffs, provisions, and community services, to name a few). At the same time, it is the preservation and continuation of these commercial activities that attract the tourist gaze. The exotic appearance of these mundane yet culturally different activities is what draws the attention of visitors. Engaging in these activities – through participating in commercial acts such as purchasing the products

produced and sold in the neighbourhood, or even by simply being in the environment and contributing to the traffic in the area, enable the visitor to become part of the Chinatown landscape. These subtle performances (of consuming the landscape) add to the cultural experience of Chinatown.

In this analysis, there are two main layers to Chinatown as economic space. Chinatown is a space of production and consumption. There is an economic space comprised of the mundane practices and industries that have characterised and produced the landscape that eventually becomes Chinatown. This space is still in service today, and constitutes the heritage of Chinatown. In addition to this, however, there is a separate layer, a newer economic space that is comprised *of* Chinatown and its tourism industry. Tourism spaces can be spaces of significant economic activity. In the formation of this *new* economic space, heritage is manipulated. The history and social lives of the Chinese community overseas become part of the Chinatown culture, which is then commodified, and subsequently comprises part of the economy. The Chinatown landscape, as a physical, urban representation of the community and its culture, is consumed under the tourist gaze as the commodity in the new economic space.

The recognition that Chinatown is more than simply an economic space of trade and commerce is clearly seen in the contemporary landscape, through a matrix of visual and verbal cues that clearly describes Chinatown as a tourist space specialising in the gaze. These landscapes are places of representational culture that represent a kind of overseas Chinese culture in the form of heritage. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, signs and symbols endow spaces with meanings that are construed through associations,

and utilising this system of signs and symbols enables a comprehension of the space (Lefebvre, 1991). A wealth of symbols and physical components, what I term a visual lexicon, that appear to represent or signify Chinese culture and heritage, is used to reinforce a Chinatown identity in these landscapes. These appear most commonly in the form of design elements in the architecture that indicate a constructed representation of Chinese culture. These structures and decorations are not seen anywhere else in the city; at the same time these designs refer to, and are recognisably part of a kind of Chinese-ness. These lexicons are the system of signs and symbols that facilitate the transaction of culture in the economic landscape.

The *new* economic landscape is characterised by objects in the urban landscape that transmit the Chinatown identity to the viewer. These are recognised symbols. Visual lexicon, which refer to many of the landscape artefacts described in the previous section, such as the Friendship gates and arches, or design tropes like the curved roof lines and bamboo-style roof tiles, allow the viewer to read and identify the nature of the space. For example, the visual effect of the red-coloured street furniture in Bangkok (as seen in Figure 4.16, previous section) identifies the landscape to be associated with the Chinese, or Chinatown in some way. As a reference to an imagined and constructed Chinatown identity, the meaning of this highly recognisable urban design is not explained, but is hinted at; these designs are not repeated outside of the Chinatown district.

Complementing the subtlety of the visual lexicon, there is the verbal lexicon. As explained in the section on toponymy, a system of actual language produces an effect on the landscape. It labels and categorises the space; it provides an easily readable and

understandable key to identifying the landscape. The verbal lexicon is an explicit

reminder that the landscape is distinctly Chinese or Chinatown in case one misses the

symbology of the visual lexicon. There are clearly marked street signs that clearly inform

the viewer that they have set foot in Chinatown; Chinatown is named and identified in the

landscape. In *Yaowarat*, Bangkok's Chinatown, a sign indicates that one is following a

"Walking street in Chinatown" (Figure 4.23). It points out a clearly marked route

directing tourists through the neighbourhood's significant landmarks. The signs in

Yaowarat are in English, appealing to the large portion of the tourist population in the

city. Chinatown's tourist attractions both major and minor are featured in this series of

signposts. Even directions are provided to an old Chinese-run coffeeshop that is

historically an integral part of *Sampeng*'s social landscape.

In Singapore, the Chinatown Complex and its open space area are also clearly

labelled with the term "Chinatown". With this highly noticeable and easily read *sign*

plastered in conspicuous places over the landscape, it remains impossible for the viewer

to ignore the spatial identity of the place as specifically Chinatown. There appears to be a

need for the casual viewer of the landscape to internalise, without a doubt, that this space,

and no other place, is Chinatown. Through the labelling of the space with the words,

"Chinatown", a preconceived imagination of the space is attained; without having to

completely experience Chinatown, the viewer already knows what the landscape means.

The propensity to mark the landscape in an easily recognisable manner is mirrored

in Rangoon. In the Chinatown district, despite the lack of obvious "Chinese style"

architecture and design, a conspicuous "China Town" label on a building at

Figure 4.23: "Walking Street in Chinatown", Bangkok

Figure 4.24: "Chinatown" building, Mahabandoola Road, Rangoon

Mahabandoola Road (Figure 4.24) performs a similar function to the street signs in Bangkok and the building plaques in Singapore. Situated on one of the more prominent and comparatively newer buildings on the street, it displays to the viewer without question the knowledge that one is in Chinatown. Again, the verbal lexicon helps to produce the space; Chinatown is literally created through the placement of the signs. As a factor in the urban landscape, Chinatown is constantly propagated and unable to disappear from view.

The visual lexicon suggests and hints that one is in Chinatown. The verbal lexicons mark the place and the viewer is informed beyond doubt that this is unmistakably Chinatown. The presence of such symbolic cues signifying the specific culture of the landscape is indicative of the efforts to represent Chinatown as a space that must be seen and recognised. The tourist gaze is crucial to the contemporary function of this place. These signs and symbols indicate that Chinatown does not exist solely for its inhabitants and the mundane users of its services, but also for the outsider, the visitor who desires the experience of being a part of landscape.

In Bangkok and Singapore, the Chinatown culture and identity is clearly commodified: with the copious Chinatown signage marking the landscape, it is specifically distilled to direct the tourist gaze. The verbal lexicon is highly visible. In conjunction with this, the visual lexicon becomes easily interpretable. The distinct efforts at pointing out specific cultural objects to gaze upon effectively create the commodified heritage. Here, Chinatown is obviously Chinatown. It appears difficult to be otherwise.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the verbal labelling of the neighbourhood is subtle. Unlike

Bangkok's and Singapore's Chinatown there is no obvious verbal lexicon that labels the districts as Chinatown. However, there is still a conscious effort made to clearly associate that landscape with a Chinese-related identity, such as the location of various Chinese-related institutions in the area, including schools, the Chinese Committee of the Peoples' Association, as well as the various festivals and events conducted in relation to various Chinese cultural activities. The visual lexicon provides a context for the landscape to be gazed upon and consumed. The décor and styling found, for example, at *Bình Tây* market is an iconographic representation of Chinatown culture and heritage.

Chinatown in Rangoon is markedly different compared with the previous sites. The verbal lexicon exists, as shown above, but it appears infrequently, and not as deliberately as that of Bangkok. The landscape does not appear to have been deliberately and consciously commodified, or heritage packaged and presented for the tourist gaze. Rather, it appears that the cultural landscape is used primarily by the local community. Chinatown is not patently obvious in the landscape, but is something that needs to be sought out. The visual cues in the landscape are more easily identified by those who are aware of the specific objects that mark the space -- not everybody is able to recognise Chinese characters on the business signboards in the neighbourhood, for example; nor have the cultural knowledge necessary to interpret the visual cultural cues in Chinatown.

Additionally, tourism promotion material of these cities feature the Chinatowns very prominently. In the *Lonely Planet* series, for example, Chinatowns often make up large sections of the guide books, and are marked as unmissable parts of the city. Walking tours are highly recommended, and the guidebooks frequently provide snippets of

historical facts and features about the neighbourhood. The Chinese markets and temples are a recurrent theme in the tourism material, often described with the terms "bustling" and "crowds". In line with the economic functions of the neighbourhood, shopping for cultural artifacts is frequently mentioned, as is the food – whether for actual consumption or merely for the sights. The festivals that occur periodically in Chinatowns are also sights and experiences that the guidebooks recommend. These festivals offer visitors intense Chinatown experiences by involving them in practices that the local Chinese population themselves participate in, promising an "authentic" experience of the landscape.

It is clear that the extent to which the landscape is commodified and heritage is marketed varies from city to city. While it happens at all four sites, this cultural exploitation does not happen in the same way. However, the landscapes continue to assert Chinatown identities. The creation of such a landscape is the generation of an economic space. Chinatown is already present, but with these signs and symbols that point to its existence as a space of cultural commodity and tourism a new function is presented.

It would be erroneous to say that Chinatown tourism is merely a *new* economic space, however. I continue the argument in this section that Chinatown has always been a predominantly economic space. What is pertinent here is that the kind of economic space that the primary image of Chinatown embodies has subtly changed over time. As an intensely economic space, where activities of trade, industry and production are carried out, the landscape is not primarily seen as a cultural or ethnic space where heritage is deliberately emphasised, at least not until more recent developments in tourism and

cultural preservation. As mentioned earlier, Lefebvre's (1991) theorisation of spatial

practices explains that the real, everyday functions of a space serve to give it meaning. I

make the case that there is a primary economic function to Chinatown that persists

beneath, and is distinct from, the constructed landscape of the cultural economy of

tourism, and it gives meaning and identity to the Chinatown space.

> Situated along the river of the Western provinces, the city of Cholon
> occupies an area of 1240h, 80h by 67h, by its industry and commerce has
> become an important development aspect of our [illegible] and our
> economic wealth (transl. from French) (Ville de Cholon: Rapport sur le
> development de la ville de Cholon, 1907).

This description of *Chợ Lớn*, Ho Chi Minh City's Chinatown, from the report of the

development of the town of Cholon in 1907, portrays the role of Chinatown as a

significant economic space of commerce and industry in the early part of the twentieth

century. From the outset, Chinatown was recognised and established, officially and

otherwise, as space of production and commerce.

The commercial functions of many Chinatowns that are not directly linked to its

tourism economy are clear in many of the research sites. Yet they have also become part

of the Chinatown identity. As mentioned in the previous section, markets are a common

sign of mercantilism in Chinatown landscapes, and particularly so in these four cities.

The presence of both large markets as well as frequent smaller shopping areas

characterise the economic influence of Chinatown communities.

In Ho Chi Minh City, several stores are housed within the large, two-storey *Bình*

Tây market with even more stalls spilling out unto the surrounding streets. The stores in

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the market sell a plethora of goods, from clothing and shoes, to hardware and housewares, as well as food. A large proportion of these goods are for wholesale trade. This market is a signifier of the trading stereotype that characterises the ethnic Chinese, who have been established in Southeast Asia as traders and merchants since their early days of sojourn. This characterisation also extends to the types of goods and services provided in Chinatown.

In Bangkok, small markets line the smaller alleys, or *Trok*, selling foodstuffs and household items (Figure 4.25). In the larger lanes, or *Soi*, foodstalls and more foodstuffs are available, as well as wholesale stores selling apparel and other items (Figure 4.26).

In Rangoon, the marketplaces are on the streets, along the sidewalks. Similarly, these stalls retail produce and household products (Figure 4.27). Many streets are lined with businesses producing or packaging merchandise for wholesale, such as rice and noodles, electronics and machinery, and metalware.

In Singapore, the Chinatown complex retails clothing items on the ground floor, and food on the second floor. On Sago Street, which has been converted into a pedestrian mall, retail stores selling souvenirs and other "cultural" products have extended their store spaces into the street, creating a dense, crowded atmosphere that emulates that of a bustling marketplace. Unlike the other three Chinatowns, Singapore's Chinatown has ceased to have wholesale businesses.

Outside of the markets, there are specific trades and merchandise that are usually found clustered in Chinatown neighbourhoods. One of the common ones is the traditional Chinese medicine trade. This can be found in all four Chinatowns, and many in the same

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Figure 4.25: Market in a *Trok*, Yaowarat Road, Bangkok

Figure 4.26: Sampeng Lane, Bangkok

Figure 4.27: Street markets, Mahabandoola Road, Rangoon

style, as seen in Ho Chi Minh City (Figure 4.28), Bangkok (Figure 4.29), and Singapore (Figure 4.30). The traditional Chinese medicine trade can be found in Rangoon, as well, but in the form of a clinic (Figure 4.31). This trade remains traditionally popular in Chinatowns as it continues to serve the local communities, beginning from a history of supplying the migrant Chinese with affordable healthcare as part of their work with the Chinese clan associations.

Gold shops are another common sight – and this is particularly apparent in both Bangkok (Figure 4.32) and Rangoon (Figure 4.33). Gold shops are present in the Ho Chi Minh City and Singapore Chinatowns, as well, but not in the noticeably large concentrations they enjoy in the two other cities.

The final noticeable indicator of Chinatown as an economic space is that of the Chinese restaurant. Food can be a significant marker of culture, and this is demonstrated in the way that Chinese cuisine is to be found (and is expected to be found) in the ethnic Chinese neighbourhoods in the city. The clustering of ethnic cuisine within the ethnic neighbourhood solidifies the way culture is commodified and consumed. A specific – *Chinese* – food is produced, sold, and eaten in Chinatown. Despite the wide range in regional variety found in "Chinese food", the regional differences are not often well-defined or advertised in the landscape. Being a part of this cultural practice involves both the producer and the consumer of this commodity in the daily activity of the landscape.

Clearly, there is cultural significance in consumer goods and business practices. This cultural significance is passed onto the landscape by the presence of these goods and trades. Previously in the chapter, Ms Kam mentioned the changing association of the term

Figure 4.28: Traditional medicine store, Ho Chi Minh City
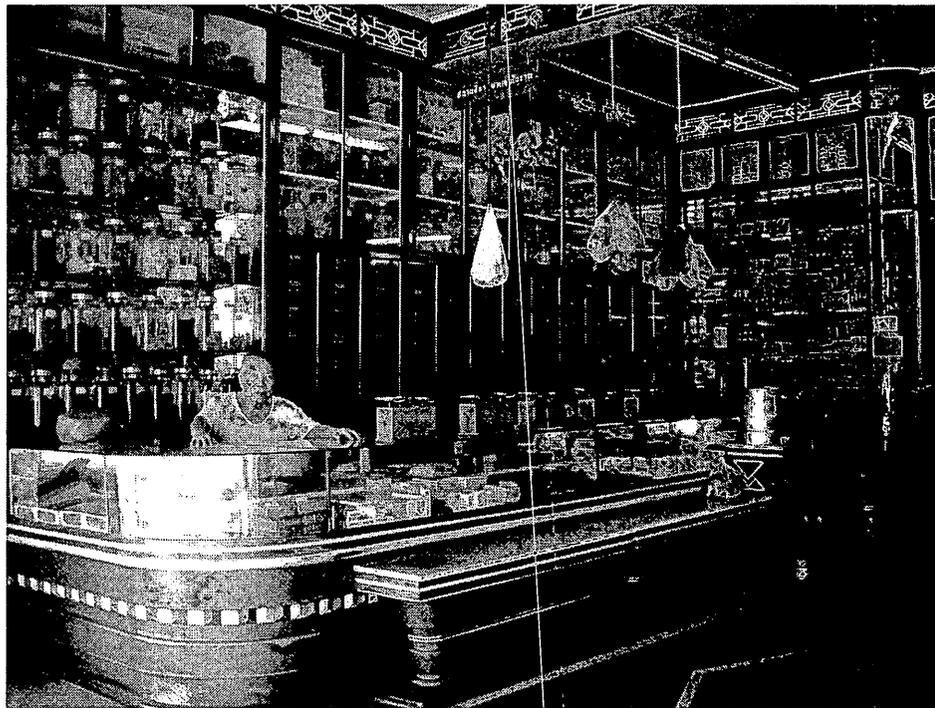
Figure 4.29: Traditional medicine store, Bangkok
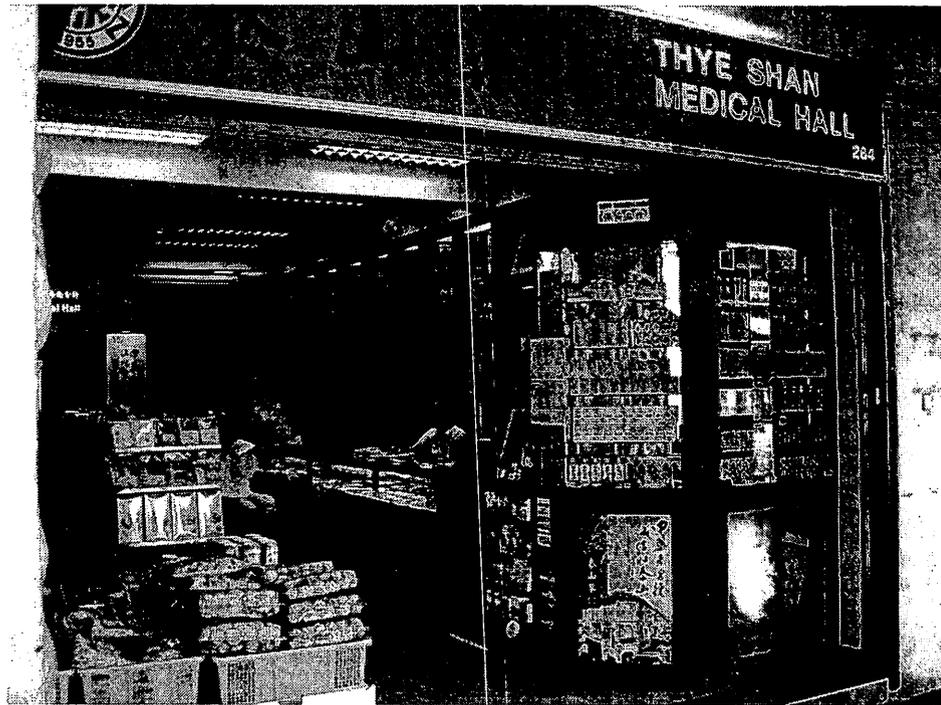
Figure 4.30: Traditional medicine store, Singapore

Figure 4.31: Clinic, Rangoon

Figure 4.32: Gold shop, Yaowarat Road, Bangkok
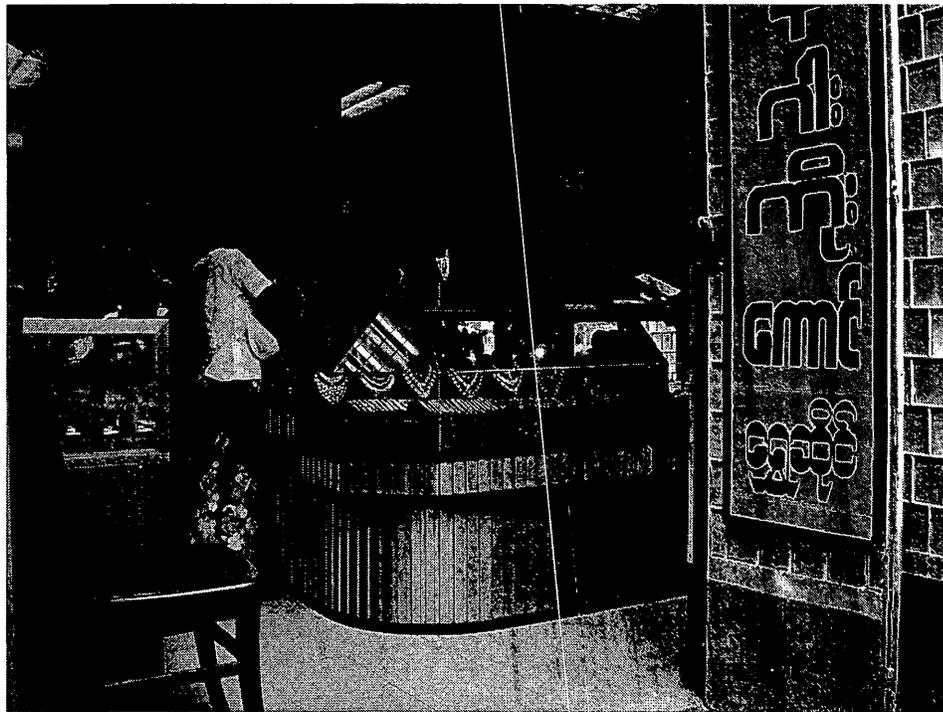
Figure 4.33: Gold shop, Mahabandoola Road, Rangoon

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Yaowarat – previously identified with a commercial community, the name now refers more specifically to Chinatown and its related meanings. There is an awareness that Chinatown landscape meanings are dynamic and have been changing. There is a knowledge that this place, Chinatown, in addition to being a home to, and the space of, an ethnic community, can function as an everyday place of commerce, and also be a tourist site. The long-standing spatial practices within the Chinatown landscape have expanded to include the activity and economy of tourism. This knowledge adds to the multiple layers of meaning upon the landscape, forming yet another facet of cultural economy in the city.

Landscapes are effectively layered on top of each other. The newer layers of economic function, or the new economic spaces, sit atop the existing economic space of commerce and industry. Tourism is an additional, secondary circuit to the already existing economic circuit, and it also appropriates visual aspects of the landscape. Even where the visual characteristics of the neighbourhood (its designs and architecture) are attributes of the primary economic space, the visual consumption of these sights has become the main economy of the secondary circuit. The existence of this new, tourism-based economic space is based on the functions of the long-established primary economic landscape.

According to Mr Cuong (July 2007, Ho Chi Minh City), the Chinese community's identity is most clearly seen in their economic activities, and this particularly in their trading activities. In the post-colonisation period in Vietnam, the extensive regional trading activities (which included in particular the production and shipping involved in the rice trade) of the *Việt Hoa* were restricted by the government in Ho Chi Minh City.

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Despite the limiting regulations, however, the Chinese continued trading on a smaller scale. Business and trade activities within the community are based on long-established histories and networks within the Chinese dialect groups. These networks stretch all over Vietnam and throughout the region into many other Southeast Asian countries, encompassing a wide hinterland market. The Chinese communities are additionally affiliated through temples and clan associations which often provide protection and ensured business connections. Over the past 30 years, the continuing urbanisation, intensification and expansion of Ho Chi Minh City, the larger businesses, industries and enterprises have mostly moved out to the outlying industrial districts; whereas smaller businesses remain in the city's Districts 5 and 6. Mr Cuong (2007) notes that the spatial representation of the Chinese community lends an image to the Chinatown landscape, whereupon it is precisely the history and commerce – the primary economic landscape, of the Chinese that forms the product for the tourist industry. It is the culture of the Chinese economy and marketplace that the tourists consume here.

As illustrated, *Bình Tây* market in *Chợ Lớn* is exemplar of this two-pronged economic space. As a primary draw within the tourism circuits in Ho Chi Minh City; it is one of the more popular attractions in the neighbourhood. Despite the increasing progression of the tourist gaze over the market's structure, its original businesses continue as usual. Comprised wholly of individual stalls, it is touted as the biggest market in Saigon, and is promoted as one of the main tourist attractions in Ho Chi Minh City. Tour buses are often parked on the street around the market. *Xe ôm* and *cyclo* (cycle rickshaws) drivers in the backpacker and other tourists districts constantly offer to take

tourists there. *Bình Tây* market is expressedly an important part of the tourist circuit, and has become representative of the Chinatown image in the city.

At the same time, the stallholders in *Bình Tây* market are comprised of wholesalers who supply goods to retail outlets throughout the city. They have mixed reactions to the tourists. A large proportion of stallkeepers are brusque in their treatment of the visitors, raising prices for sales below bulk quantities. As shoe storekeeper Ms Minh describes, "most of us, we sell large quantities to local people, who sell retail. Many stall keepers won't sell you just one item. But if you want these [shoes] I will sell to you! And you must tell your friends to come, also." (pers. comm., July 07). The primary concern of the market is the local wholesale business. However, on a small scale some sellers do recognise the tourist industry and accept that they are a part of it. In doing so, they acknowledge the existence of the tourism economy where others might ignore, or even shun it; but this new economy is by no means a major focus of this Chinatown institution

As such, Chinatown is still primarily an economic space, even if the nature of that economy evolves over time. In an interview in Bangkok, Mr Sae described the changes he has seen: "The business of Yaowarat changed a lot. People have changed. [There are] more people now. Very bright, more businesses along the road. *Yaowarat* used to be quiet. Business has moved out from *Sampeng* to *Yaowarat*. This place keeps changing" (November 2008). Mr Sae is describing the extensive expansion of the Chinese community, such as ownership of property, markets, and business, from its historical location along Sampeng Lane northward onto Yaowarat and Charoen Krung Roads. The

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business of the Chinese community has also brought growth, economic and otherwise, density, and intensity into the neighbourhood. In addition to the commerce and the crowds, Mr Sae also refers to the bright lights that light up *Yaowarat*, which do not just belong to the storefronts of the various restaurants and businesses that line the street, but most particularly the itinerant foodstalls set up on the footpaths and on the roads in the evenings. These stalls serve dinners, suppers, and snacks to both the local population as well as to the tourists well into the night.

At the same time, there are members of the Chinese community living in these Chinatowns who feel that *Chinatown* is not a landscape that they are necessarily a part of. Ms Ma, who heads a clan association in Bangkok's Chinatown explains that "foreigners were the ones who called *Sampeng* 'Chinatown'" (November 2008). The Chinese community who live in these areas designated as 'Chinatown' recognise their neighbourhood primarily as *Yaowarat*, the place where they live and work. They do not naturally associate with the place as *Chinatown*. While they acknowledge the presence of a connection with China, in the form of origin, heritage, and migrant history, they also recognise that the Chinatown appellation is a reference to tourism, a separate economy they are not necessarily a part of. The following quote illustrates this quite poignantly.

> There is a lot of Chinese culture here. It is the centre of the Chinese people. Chinatown is the centre for economy and business, a lot of buying and selling. Especially at night, there's a lot of food and clothes shops. I go to Sampeng often to shop. Gift shops, clothes, stationery. And there's so much wholesale. I like to shop and look around. *A lot of China tourists come, but in this area we mostly speak Teochew or Thai, we don't speak Mandarin* (emphasis mine; Ms Fa, Bangkok).

It is important that Ms Fa here notes the linguistic divide between the effective

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languages in use within Chinatown. This shows that there is a divide between the Chinatown of the locals and the Chinatown of the tourists; there is even a divergence between the local and foreign ethnic Chinese (those who visit from China and Taiwan). Tourists and locals, while co-existing in the same place, often traverse separate landscapes or circuits, and experience the same landscape in extremely different ways. Bangkok's Chinatown, while appearing to cater heavily to tourists, is still a place that belongs firmly to the locals. The visitors consume the sights and sounds of a Chinatown that is constantly being created by the locals and the primary economic landscape. The major proportion of the economy in Chinatown still belongs to, is still directed at, and is still produced by the local markets. Just like in Ho Chi Minh City, many of the shops and industries in Bangkok's Chinatown are wholesalers, an economic circuit that has been long-established, and despite the emergence and development of the new economic circuit of tourism, is still dynamic and operative. Particularly in Rangoon and Ho Chi Minh City, the primary spaces of Chinatown are dominated by the original economic space. The Chinatown identity is drawn from these practices and activities, in a much less essentialised manner than exhibited in Singapore's Chinatown, where the landscape has been deliberately fashioned and conserved to feature aspects of traditional Chinese heritage, an imagination of the past. With many of the more traditional trades displaced from the core Chinatown area, the landscape is replaced by the tourism economy, specialising in heritage preservation. In Bangkok, where many of the original trades still function, the new tourism and the older, original economic landscape co-exist simultaneously in a relatively agreeable manner, offering up a landscape that is accessible

to both locals as well as tourist visitors.

The entire landscape of Chinatown is an example of the spaces of commercial culture. As shown, establishments such as gold shops, markets, traditional medicine stores, Chinese restaurants, among many others, demonstrate the continuing economic functions of Chinatowns. These practices contribute to the Chinatown landscape, and have become part of its landscape identity. These spaces of commerce simultaneously constitute the landscape that draws the tourist gaze and creates the new economic space – as an entity separate from the original – or primary, economic purpose of Chinatown. Chinatowns are recognised as tourism destinations capitalising on cultural heritage. Place is made through the accentuation and recognition of histories and heritages. Particularly in Singapore (through conservation and restoration plans) and Bangkok (specifically through the explicit signage in English), the landscape is fashioned to be demonstrably Chinatown, with an explicit Chinatown identity.

Conclusion

The reinvention of tradition is rife in Chinatowns: "[t]he past thus conjured up is, to be sure, largely an artifact of the present," (Lowenthal, 1985: xvi). The efforts to rebuild and re-present portrayals and idealised expressions of Chinese culture are illustrated by attempts to recapture the past within the present. Thus, the preservation of heritage appears to offer an authenticity that is questionable. Broudehoux (2001) argued that the stereotyped images commonly found in Chinatowns (in North American case studies) have been adopted and reproduced by Chinese merchants and benevolent associations to

gain visibility and attract tourism. These images have since become signifiers of Chinese heritages, physical manifestations of the presence of ethnic Chinese communities around the world.

In every Chinatown there are physical similarities in the landscape that function to identify the space as well as the culture that is practiced in that space. Many of these are constructed or conserved as part of a cultural heritage that serve to not only identify the physical landscape of the ethnic neighbourhood but also contribute to the cultural identity of the group. What I suggest in this chapter is that these landscape similarities and built heritage are symbols that have become simulacra, bestowing Chinatown experiences that reflect nothing else but other Chinatowns, and a particularly specific *idea* of Chinatown. I suggest that the Chinatown landscape has, to a certain extent, become a repository for the lives and practices that it used to contain. It is in the process of becoming – or it has become a memorial, an archive, or a museum for the history of the Chinese experience overseas. I have explored the physical, urban traits that constitute the geographical imaginations of Chinatown in these four cities in Southeast Asia, and considered the varying landscape meanings and representations in the Chinatown experience.

The Chinatown landscape is recognisable because of the extremely sensual experience it offers. Its familiarity is seen in the visual objects that are broadcasted at the viewer. The landscape is marked by symbols like recurring colours, shapes, designs, language, objects, and practices. It is also labelled by a system of verbal signs that are engraved upon the space; they title and caption the spaces. Seen over and over again they become a series of tropes that one begins to expect to see everytime one encounters the

space, or they become landmarks for people to identify the particular space that they're seeing.

Heritage preservation and representation makes Chinatown an easily identifiable landscape. The association of the signs and symbols with some kind of Chinese culture – whether this be an idea of China, or even overseas and immigrant Chineseness, is a highly visible marker of the landscape. The idea of Chinatown exists in the imagination as part of a socially constructed and imaged space, and this image is reproduced upon the landscape, affirming the imagined geography of a Chinatown culture.

Chapter 5
CHINATOWN: HOME

> There is no place like home. What is home? It is the old homestead, the old
> neighbourhood, home-town, or motherland.
>
> (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1977: 3)

Given its centrality and significance to ideas of self and identity, the word and concept

"home" is remarkably ambiguous, surprisingly general. According to Duncan and

Lambert, it is "perhaps the most emotive of geographical concepts, inextricable from that

of self, family, nation, sense of place, and sense of responsibility towards those who share

one's place in the world..." (2003: 395); the notion of home and its geographical location

is fundamental to both individual and collective notions of identity. There are multiple

understandings of home, and Tuan (1977) above suggests above four possible locations

of home. Clearly, home encompasses a large range of scales. And yet *what is home?*

signifies the presence of even more complex meanings. Home is simultaneously material

and imaginary space. In this research, it is the physical space of dwelling and household,

or the material, urban site of Chinatown. It is also the city; and additionally, the country.

Tuan's "homes" are sited in the past. He refers to them as "old", indicative of something

not currently in the present. Therefore homes are also imagined places in the individual

and collective memory. Duncan and Lambert explain, "[t]he notion of home as the place

one comes from can extend over more than one generation and the country of origins can

still be home, even among those who had never set foot there" (2003: 388). Homes can

be places not *here* and not *now*. The physical site of *home* does not have to be

experienced to be imagined; in this manner home becomes conceptual, and begins to

represent many things other than physical sites.

In this chapter I explore the potential inherent in the idea of Chinatown as home. I argue that it is possible for the overseas Chinese, a Chinese diaspora that appears to have little left to do with China, to perceive Chinatown as home. Through the negotiation of identity with ethnic heritage and diverse nationhoods, the familiarity of home is found more in Chinatown and specific Chinatowns than with the nation of China. At the same time I also suggest that Chinatown is representative of multiple homes. The overseas Chinese reference Chinatown as home, as opposed to China. Even for those who do not live there, Chinatown is *closer to home* than China may be. However, by virtue of representation, Chinatown references China as home. At the same time, Chinatown is necessarily located in a space that is distinctly not China. Thus, Chinatown is *home*, physically, in the city of settlement, and is simultaneously *home*, in the sense that it represents *original homeland*, China. I contend that there are relationships between various places and times: significantly, I explore how the *here* and *now* – generally understood of as the current location – is identified with as home; and how the *there* and *then* – understood as China – is also perceived as home. This can be a complex relationship. The past of the *there* and *then* is compared with the present *here* and *now*; where the past is the source of culture and, particularly, ethnic identity, maintained through collective memory, performative rituals, and language; while the present home is maintained simply through being *present* at that place and time.

Hence, the ethnic Chinese who have settled in Southeast Asia manoeuvre multiple identities simultaneously. In particular, nationality and ethnicity do not coincide (more on this in Chapter Six). Chinatowns present a space where the ethnicity of the Chinese

settlers is layered upon the nationality of the host nation. This complex superimposition of identities on the landscape creates a sense of belonging and affinity together with a community that experiences the same complex combination of identities. This is a trait of diasporic communities, that there is a triangular relationship between ethnicity, nationality, and community. Safran's (1991) explanation of the triangular relationship is explicitly social, involving the diaspora (community), the homeland (ethnicity), and the host society (nationality). The central difference in this particular research is the acknowledgement that, at this point in time, many, if not all, of the ethnic Chinese residing in these Chinatowns are citizens of the countries they currently reside in, whether by birth or through the process of naturalisation. My interpretation of the triangular relationship involves more than individuals and communities, but also ideas of nationhood, ethnicity, and most importantly, place. Claiming Chinatown as home not only claims Chinese ethnicity, but also belonging and legitimacy with the nation of settlement.

As Gilroy (1993) and Clifford (1997) note, diasporic communities negotiate "roots" and "routes". Where "routes" refer to the seemingly transient places of settlement, "roots" involve places of origin, or original home. Places of origin are as important as place of settlement. Notions of identity, particularly in a social group, have their source in one's origins. Where one is from greatly informs one's identity; the concept of *origin* provides a history that reinforces ideas about culture and heritage. In the context of this research, the notion of identity is given via a sense of lineage; the overseas Chinese claim ethnicity through a connection with the nation of China.

This relationship between diaspora, nation, and ethnicity that gives rise to ideas of home involves geographies of affect and emotion as well as geographical linkages and networks. Emotional geographies, or geographies of affect, are involved through devices such as memory, yearning, and topophilia. The way these devices create home through the development of a sense of place and attachment to place has subsequent effects on identity. A key concern of diasporas involve a complex combination of feeling "at home" in the location of settlement, while at the same time yearning for the original home that one has departed and to which one dreams of returning. There is an inside-outside dichotomy, where diasporans feel a sense of belonging to the place of settlement while at the same time strongly identifying with a separate place outside of it (see Walter, 2001). "Emotional sites may be in geographically distanced places, so that people live a kind of polycentredness…" notes Ley; "such polycentredness may be read from the landscapes of every major city today" (2004: 155); illustrating connections to hybridity, multiplicity, and plural conceptions of "here" and "home". Individuals and communities may live in and experience many different geographical places, but it is strong, emotional attachment to place that construes diasporas, rather than other terms, like migration. As such, the overseas Chinese may find their centres in their site of settlement, as well as in China, parts of China, or, more significantly, imaginations of China.

Tuan (1977) notes that the construction of home is based upon the development of a sense of place; at the same time the construction of Chinatown as home to the overseas Chinese community is also based upon a geographic imagination of "home". An emotional attachment to place can be dealt with externally, not just internally as per the

individual's or society's attachment to an imagined (or not) homeland. Emotions, such as topophilia, may be manipulated, just as space and place can likewise be manipulated and manufactured (such as within the Chinatown landscape). As dealt with in Chapter Four, the Chinatown landscape refers to China, and appears to represent concepts and understandings of China. Chinatown alludes to China – primarily physically – but China also provides Chinatown with a source, and a point of reference. It further functions as meta-origin. Chinatown is imagined to represent China, a reproduction that can be experienced when China cannot be. As such, it can be said that Chinatown is an urban experience of home, away from homeland. For the overseas Chinese, Chinatown serves as a reminder of what 'home' is supposed to be, and be like. This function is illustrated in many different ways, for example through a community of similar people, or the availability of goods and services, such as food related to Chinese cultures, or Chinese-language education, that can only be found in certain places in the city, in the physical aggregation of myriad Chinese cultures, Chinatown. It is also the congregation of the ethnic Chinese in this particular landscape that further emphasises the reference of Chinatown to China. The Chinese diaspora is composed of the collectivity of the Overseas Chinese community. The concentration of Chinese cultures can be found in such a dense collective social identity. One is part of a community that shares a home. Thus if China is homeland, then Chinatown can be home, by virtue of transference. The décor, the presence of services, and the languages of Chinatown allude to Chinese cultures; it reminds both inhabitants and visitors that Chinatown simulates China, or, as mentioned earlier, an imagination of China. Chinatown also serves as a reminder that

home is elsewhere.

Additionally, the idea that nostalgia and memory (see Parker, 2005) can be constructed and engineered (promoting an anti-cosmopolitan insistence on having 'roots') is a significant one. This is to say that diasporas can be reproduced through the maintenance of an imagined yearning for a mythical homeland. Because Chinatown, as a China-referencing landscape, serves as an ever-present reminder of the ethnic origins of the Overseas Chinese, homeland cannot be forgotten. Thus the affect for homeland, topophilia, is artificially constructed; the drive to maintain and retain the diaspora's culture and traditions keeps the collective identity of the ethnic group from declining. Nostalgia and memory for the Overseas Chinese can also be created and promoted through many of the activities, goods and services found in Chinatowns. Observing particular practices by organising special events, such as lunar new year festivities, or the mid-autumn festival – which oftentimes consumes the entire neighbourhood with parades, performances, and foodstuffs specific to the event, is frequently named as one of the ways the community keeps its culture alive. Whether the Chinese diaspora, and the image of China as home, is intentionally perpetuated by social, economic, or political structures remains a debatable issue; nonetheless it is important to be aware that cultures can be intentionally maintained through the manipulation of heritage and memory, as opposed to organically adapting and evolving. Tradition can be continually reinvented to promote cultural loyalty – and subsequently, attachment to the homeland that is deeply associated with that culture.

It is important to note that overseas Chinese experiences do exist outside of

Chinatowns, but for purposes of this study, the focus is on the role that Chinatown plays in the formation of a sense of place (i.e., home), and the various discourses caught up within the placedness of Chinatown. It is also useful and important to note that Chinese experiences are not homogeneous at any scale. Not everybody experiences Chinatown as home, or imagines China as homeland in the same way, nor do they to the same scale. Obviously there are differences in the individual experiences, generally tempered by age, place of birth, and length of time spent inhabiting one (Chinatown) or the other (China), or even other places.

In the next section I consider the significance of diaspora to the concept of home. I explain the inseparable and triangular relationship between a dispersed overseas community, concepts of home, and the diaspora concept. Following that, I turn to the ways in which Chinatown represents multiple homes simultaneously, and its subsequent implications on hybrid identities. The sections after that deal with the concept of *home* as *homeland*, speaking to the diasporic idea of returning to a mythic homeland; and the process of making Chinatown and the current location of settlement *home*. Finally, I address the idea of Chinatown – a landscape – as a diasporan in its own right. As the concept of diaspora has most commonly concerned the experiences of dispersed people and communities, this section focuses on the scattering of a distinct landscape across the world, focusing particuarly on my research locations.

Diaspora and Home

Chinatowns, as established, are communities that the overseas Chinese, occasionally

referred to as the Chinese diaspora, have settled into. These may have been established by the Chinese themselves, or through negotiation with, or coercion by the host community. The concept of diaspora is significant to this thesis, and particularly to this chapter, for two main reasons:

Firstly, the overseas Chinese can be categorised as a diaspora. As such there are implications that are relevant and apply to the community. Cohen (2008) cites Cohen (1971) on trade diasporas as "a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed communities" (2008: 83). Clearly, the Chinese diaspora is not the same kind of diaspora as the Jewish diaspora. The Chinese were never expelled from their homeland the way the Jewish diaspora were exiled from their nation. The Chinese ventured forth of their own volition and generally had few barriers to return. According to Safran (1991), the Chinese overseas are categorised as "genuine diasporas". Safran lists the Chinese community's efforts at maintaining its cultural identity and cultivating communal institutions as comparable with the characteristics of other traditional diasporas. Further, the Chinese diaspora is implicated with the economic diasporas in that they function as go-betweens in the countries they have settled in. Since sojourning from China to nearby regions such as Southeast Asia, they have been capitalist intermediaries between the agrarian locals and the enterprising elite, as well as foreign commercial and industrial interests. The original Chinese sojourner journeyed with the objective of making enough money and returning home. This economic dispersion formed the Chinese diaspora. Cohen, then citing Curtin (1984: 2-3), mentions that "trade communities of merchants living among aliens in associated networks are to be found on every continent..." (2008:

84), further emphasising that the concept of diaspora backgrounds the overseas Chinese population and society. This backgrounding is critical to the communities and places built by the migrant Chinese, most notably, Chinatowns. The dispersed nation of the Chinese overseas creates opportunities to maintain a homeland myth without actually needing to return.

The second reason is that home and homeland remain significant discourses within diaspora (see Cohen, 2008: 2). Central to the concept of diaspora is the idea that the community is not present at their original home. Also critical to the concept is that the diaspora community has established home in a place separate from its origin. As such, diasporans experience multiple sites of home. Home has been left; and another home has been found, and built elsewhere. It is this connection with various homes and relationships with homes (having and not having homes, being away from home, and yearning for home) that identifies diasporic societies. Despite postmodernist arguments that identity can be deterritorialised (even as the concept of "home" has been deconstructed and made vague and miasmic (see Cohen, 2008: 9)), and not necessarily tethered to a physical place or location (as evidenced by "where the heart is" and other such intimations). Brah (1996) argues that "homeland" is replaced by a "homing desire", which can be taken to mean that one does not necessarily intend to return to place of origin, but rather maintains a memory of mythic proportions. Moreover, this memory is one that can be continually recreated and reimagined. Diasporans tend to carry a part of their home landscapes with them, transforming the places they settle, creating a resemblance to place of origin. It is this way that Chinatown is able to reference China,

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through the transformation of space by the diasporic Chinese community. Chinese merchants and traders have proliferated landscapes famously and immediately recognisable as allusions to their 'homeland' in almost every major city over the world, whether or not in an authentic deliberate attempt to recreate home. The settlement of diasporic peoples and their efforts to recreate a part of their homeland in their new host society thus generates a landscape that reflects their diasporic nature. This further reinforces the idea that Chinatown is a diasporic landscape. The site's reference to an original home physically (see Chapter Four) and conceptually is a relationship found in the dispersal of a vast collection of social and cultural spaces, geographically separate, yet sharing a common background of national origin. As such, the idea of Chinatown is inextricably tied up with the concept of diaspora, and of home.

The emotional involvement between people and places is firmly entrenched in the idea of diaspora. Without a sense of home, that there are ties to somewhere (that may be elsewhere), there could be no sense of distance and belonging, and hence, no diaspora. The diaspora involves a shared, communal experience of dispersion, of being a member of a community based upon being a part of a larger, geographically myriad group connected by their removal from a homeland. More than this, the connection to homeland is paralleled by the connection to the other places in the world where the dispersion has settled. In this sense, then, the Chinese diaspora is not only about a globally dispersed community feeling an affinity for China, but also for other Chinese-formed physical communities, such as Chinatowns, around the world.

The key critique of the concept of the Chinese diaspora has been the increasing

use of the term diaspora in place of migration. Wang Gungwu (see 1999, 2000a, 2000b, and particularly the *Asian Affairs* interview (n.d.)) leads the critical discussion of the term "Chinese diaspora", by rejecting the use of "diaspora" as misleading and unrepresentative of the overseas Chinese population at large. Wang considers the term diaspora more relevant in a political context, rather than the all-encompassing and homogeneous social context. According to Wang, the politics of the term diaspora used in the Chinese context is related to the idea of sojourn. The image that the migrant will always return is tied in with the idea that "... no self-respecting Chinese would leave home permanently..." (Skeldon, 2003: 53), and that maintaining their Chinese identities while abroad meant that travellers would not assimilate with the local host societies (and would thus always be free to return "home"). Wang further explains that the concept of the Chinese diaspora was meant to include the sojourning population, enabling the entire overseas Chinese population to be included as part of the Chinese nation.

As discussed earlier, the identity of the Chinese overseas have their roots in sojourn. The earlier overseas journeys were temporary; there was always an intention to return home to China after money had been made. This is echoed in the Chinese adage *luo ye gui gen* (落叶归根) – literally, a falling leaf returns to its roots; everything has an ancestral home; and which implies a yearning to return home. Yet the label 'sojourner' is out-of-date for the ethnic Chinese inhabitants of the four Chinatowns in my research locations. None of my interviewees who were born in China seemed to expect (or even desire) to return to China permanently. There is definitely a variance within the overseas Chinese population with regards to their relationship with China.

The historical orientation of sojourn, with the idea of returning home, has implications on the way the Southeast Asian Chinese (particularly in these four cities) understand their Chinatown home. How does it affect their identity as 'guests' in Southeast Asia? Does Chinatown serve as a 'home' for their historically 'transient' status? Claiming citizenship, whether through naturalisation or by birth, is a powerful way of asserting their belonging to their nation of settlement. Bonacich (1973) describes two types of immigrants who remain in the land of their sojourn. There are, firstly, those who relinquish any dreams of homeland and act toward integration with the host community; and secondly, those who maintain a sojourner orientation in a mythical way. The latter orientation is presented as one that includes symbolic aspects with some concrete substance of ethnic attachment, for example through maintaining communications with homeland, making occasional visits, and resisting assimilation. These aspects of sojourn are mythic because there is no real desire to return. The occasional homebound visits do not constitute the action of return because they are temporary; the intention to leave again (re-sojourn?) is always present.

In this project, it is prudent to consider that some of the interview respondents were not the original sojourners – rather, they were born and raised in the country of settlement. However, they maintain the mythical sojourner quality as part of their ethnic identity. These descendants of the original settlers can be said to have inherited a sojourner orientation, through the passing on of ideals, memories and concepts of ethnic heritage. Clearly, the extent to which the current occupants of Chinatowns, and members of the overseas Chinese community, vary at a grand scale. Bonacich's (1973) simplistic

characterisation of the settler community into two groups hints at the heterogeneous nature of the group, but by and large ignores the complexity that a growing hybridity with the host society can effect on the individuals in the community.

This leads to the other critique of the concept of the Chinese diaspora, which is that it homogenises the diasporic experience. As Brah (1996) mentions, the diaspora is a composite of many different lived experiences into a collective memory and a shared story. In such cases, the individuality marked by specificities such as gender and origin disappears into the common "we" experience. Yet echoing the earlier caveat laid out in Chapter One, that Chinatowns and overseas Chinese experiences are not homogeneous, there are many different types of Chinese people, of many different origins, who have travelled abroad for many different reasons. Their intentions of return are likewise heterogeneous; as are their concepts of home. The concept of the Chinese diaspora tends to see the overseas Chinese as having dispersed for similar reasons, as well as originating from similar backgrounds. Many (see Pan, 1999, etc; also Chapter Two) have documented the history of the Chinese overseas, recording in great detail how the groups of Chinese who left China at different periods, and from different regions of China, left for different reasons. It is easy to overlook the sheer size of, and the diversity located within, the nation of China. The several different generations of migrating Chinese have maintained varying levels of (Chinese) cultural identity; for example some overseas Chinese insist on preserving their Chinese heritages by continuing to speak their respective regional dialects (Cantonese, Hokkien, etc), while others disregard this practice by only speaking the language of their settled land. Likewise, not all overseas

Chinese yearn for a homeland in the form of China. The most important factor in the

diaspora of the overseas Chinese is a social and emotional connection and a relationship

between dispersed groups of the community; the cohesion of the group is based on a

sense of shared roots and a similar place of ethnic origin that produces a sense of

communal identity.

Multiple Homes: Articulating multiple identities

> ... the condition of diasporisation may be celebrated ... as the very basis of
> the identity of 'plural societies'... (Brah, 1996: 240).

Being part of a diaspora necessarily denotes multiple belongings – there are multiple

places with which one identifies. As Brah mentions above, a diaspora identity entails not

only an affect for multiple homes, but being part of a plural society. The plural society

implicated in the condition of diaspora is related to the overseas community's

identification with their host settlement, as well as simultaneous identification with a

national community outside of their current society. The identity of the diaspora is further

complicated by the way the host community (and other communities in the plural society)

perceive and label them. In having more than one place to call home, as well as having

more than one identity in each place, diasporans develop hybrid identities. Diasporans

and migrants struggle with and negotiate identities that stem from a sense of belonging to

the places where they came from (that is, place of origin – here, China), and with the

places they presently inhabit. The struggle is involved in a here-versus-there and now-

versus-then dichotomy that can also be characterised with an insider-outsider positional

identity (see Relph, 1976), in which both existential insideness and outsideness are

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experienced at the same time. In this sense, diasporans simultaneously inhabit more than one place, and more than one time.

The diaspora community experiences Tuan's (1974) concept of topophilia, affection for place, with more than one place, and to several different degrees. In this section, I explore a sentiment expressed by many of the interview respondents, "*that* is home, but *this* is also home", *that* referring to China, or a particular place in China, and *this* referring to their city or country of residence. I argue that in the negotiation of hybrid identities and understandings of multiple homes, Chinatown can be the location, the physical manifestation, of a plural society, through being the place of settled home as well as representing the place of homeland. In this sense, Chinatown is a multiple place. It is simultaneously part of the place of settlement in its respective city, as well as a place representative of China, or a place in China. Chinatown represents multiple homes.

There are a number of terms and references for home in the Chinese language, particularly *xiang* 乡, which is often used to denote one's village of orgin; *jia* 家 the etymology of home; *jiaxiang* 家乡, hometown or native place. These are common terms used to refer to home and may represent home at different scales, levels, and places, as well as different things. Significantly, the word for "country" or "nation", *guojia* 国家 contains the word "home", *jia* 家 in it. This potentially draws parallels between the idea of nation as home, conceptually, and the idea of a country as place of home, literally. At the same time, diasporans exist in multiple states: not everybody expects to return home, as some are already at home. How are the multiple homes articulated and juxtaposed? The negotiation of having more than one place to call home is necessarily a complex and

messy process.

The Chinese terms for Chinatown are *tangrenjie* 唐人街, "tang people street", or *zhongguocheng* 中国城, literally, China town (city). The first, *tangrenjie*, refers to the Chinese people as *tangren*, meaning people of the Tang dynasty – although this is a colloquial reference to the Chinese people rather than a historical reference to the dynasty. Both refer to the fact that there is a location, a street, or a collection of streets, a neighbourhood, where there is a population of Chinese people. It is characteristic of diaspora communities to make home in their places of settlement (home-making, Blunt & Dowling, 2006) . As people travel, they bring pieces of *home* with them, and transpose them onto the landscape where they have settled. This would be the process of *homing*, and transforming their place of settlement into a Chinatown, a neighbourhood that references China (Brah, 1996).

Most of my interviewees seemed to struggle with conceptualising home. I found that asking the question, "where is your home?" elicited a reaction of confusion. There is, firstly, the "obvious" answer (such as "I'm Vietnamese, of course Vietnam is home."), and the occasional "here" with a hand gesture pointing at the floor of their residence. In most cases, their first instinct was to name their local country or city home ("Home? Saigon." or "Myanmar is my home"); but there was often a pause, followed by an insistence that they were also Chinese, and belonged to China; or had a place in China ("but China is also home..."). However, given the nature and topic of the interview conversations, about Chineseness and Chinatown, respondents often considered less obvious answers, citing it ("China") as a place of belonging, and forging the connection

between the multiple meanings of home.

> We have two *guxiang* 故乡(native place/homeland). The first is *zuguo* 祖国
> (ancestral land, homeland – lit. ancestral country); *yuan lai de di fang*
> (original place) – which is China. The second *guxiang* is Vietnam. I don't
> know how the second generation would feel about this. (Mr Quang, HCMC)

Mr Quang's response to the question "where do you consider home?" illustrates a

diasporan's comprehension of multiple homes and the subtle differences between the two

homes. Although this respondent has named the physical impossibility of two native

places (one can only be born in one place), there is a qualification that one of these places

(China) is the ancestral land. As such, one is *native* in the literal sense of the term (having

been born there), and at the same time *native* in a figurative sense – referring to heritage.

Another interviewee's response, "China is homeland, Vietnam is homeland – we have

two homelands" (Mr Dat, HCMC) is indicative of a perception that home and belonging

can possibly be made with multiple places. The diasporan has aspects additional to the

local people around them; they have more than just one home; more than just a single

identity. Negotiating multiple homes is an inherited condition of the diaspora.

Mr Quang's sentence, "I don't know how the second generation would feel about

this", shows that claims to home are tempered by an acceptance that not everybody feels

the same way. Clearly there is heterogeneity to the state of being hybrid, of having

multiple homes and identities. Most of the interviewees are also aware that there are

generational differences in perceptions of home. Many of the older interviewees

distanced themselves from the younger generation using terms like "people like us" to

differentiate from "people like you" (referring to me, as I appear to represent the younger

generation to them), often personalising the gap by referring to the weakness in my

language skills, and not being fluent in my *jiaxianghua* (hometown language/mother tongue). One interviewee drove home the point, *"shi ni men de shi jie le"* (Mr Vu, HCMC), meaning "it's your (the younger generation's) world now", acknowledging that the continuation of Chinese culture is now the responsibility of the younger, less concerned, and less involved generation of Chinese migrants who were becoming more local than they were.

The main issue faced by the overseas Chinese is the state of being ethnic Chinese in addition to being their settled nationality: "I'm Vietnamese, but also Chinese" (Mr Thang, HCMC). This dual, hybrid identity is a condition of the diaspora, in which the negotiation of multiple selves is important to defining home. Definitely, the condition of hybridity differs for many of the respondents, and this particularly by country. In some nations, the taking on of the national identity was a deliberate, and conscious action. This was particularly the case with my respondents in Thailand, where surnames were changed in the mid-twentieth century for social and political purposes, and to make their Chinese heritage and ancestry less obvious; "my father's generation changed our surnames" (Mr Ung, Bangkok). This deliberate action could be seen as abandoning the Chinese ethnicity, which may have been important during the nationalistic period of Thailand, yet many of the Thai-Chinese today are proud of and forthcoming about their Chinese heritage, to the point of claiming even tenuous connections to Chinese ancestry. Even the younger generations of ethnic Chinese in Bangkok are aware of the change in their family names and are generally able to cite their original Chinese surnames (often a part of their Thai surnames). For example, the Thai surname "Ungrangsee" began as "Ng" (variations of

Wong, Eng, or Ong, etc.). In Burma, Singapore, and Vietnam, however, the assumption of the national citizenship and identity was less a conscious act, and more of a process of naturalisation. There are further differences: in Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam, respondents often cite differences between the locals and the ethnic Chinese, such as the local Burmese, and the Burmese-Chinese (or the local Thai with the Thai-Chinese, and the local Vietnamese with the Vietnamese-Chinese), which speaks of an awareness that one is somehow more than their nationality. In Ho Chi Minh City, Mr Ly described the Vietnamese as spendthrift and the Chinese as fiscally prudent. In Rangoon, Dr Zhen described the difference between the Burmese and the Chinese similarly. He noted that "the Chinese and Burmese styles of living are different. The Chinese are thrifty – they save money to do business. The Burmese don't, they like to enjoy life!" He additionally hinted at the stereotype that the Chinese were hardworking, while the Burmese generally were not. In Singapore, this is nuanced in quite a different way, possibly through the national emphasis on multi-racialism, but likely also because of the massive majority of the ethnic Chinese population that tends to downplay the foreign and migrant nature of the Chinese. Ms Lin (Singapore) explained that "we are all Chinese, but we are not the same. We were born here and been here longer, we are different from [the more recent Chinese migrants]."

While being situated in one particular home location, there is an indication of the importance of claiming legitimacy to ethnicity: the *then* and *there* of China. This is particularly common with the older generation who were born in China, less so with the interviewees who were born in Southeast Asia. This is because the migrant Chinese are

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not present in the China homeland – they have travelled away and are presently somewhere else. As a result, there is an emphasis on the maintenance of culture and tradition, in such forms as the continuation of speaking the various Chinese dialects of the dialect groups they belong to. Equally important is the continuation of traditions, such as observing the particular Lunar New Year cultural celebrations (which are often different from the local ones), or the Mid-autumn Festival. Respondents also cited the cultural differences in ceremonies such as weddings, baby's first month celebrations, and funerals. In Ho Chi Minh City, Mr Hieu brought me to the local Chinese bakeries to show that there were biscuits and pastries made specially for distribution at weddings or to mark a baby's first month. These baked goods were unique to the ethnic Chinese, and the Vietnamese had different traditions. All these rituals are reminders and indications that the overseas Chinese are not completely integrated with the locals. Further, many of these rituals and events take place in Chinatown, or are hosted by societies and organisations that are based in Chinatown. For many Chinese who do not live in Chinatown, visiting the neighbourhood to participate in the festivities during festival periods is also important. For many, being a part of the celebrations affirms their Chinese heritage and ethnicity, and maintains the link to homeland traditions and culture as well.

The claim to ethnicity is often made through lineage and heritage: "we're only Chinese because our ancestors are Chinese" (Mr Prasong, Bangkok). The separation from the original home distances the overseas migrants from claiming ethnicity, which is now claimed through lineage rather than through the political connections of being present in the nation. For some, simply having one ancestor who was Chinese accorded them their

Chinese ethnicity. Mr Pheng (Bangkok) was emphatic about his ethnic linkage, "I am Chinese! My grandmother was Chinese!" Acknowledging ancestral roots may be one of the only ways to legitimately retain a relationship with the homeland while migrants are forging new ties and alliances with their new homes.

Despite the importance of asserting their ethnic heritage, the overseas Chinese are not blind to the importance of claiming legitimacy to nationhood and nationality: the *here* and *now* of their present location (Burma, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam). At the same time, the migrants who have settled are not always as local as the local population is, although there are efforts at assimilation, as mentioned earlier, for example by changing their surnames and speaking the local language. Mr Ung (Bangkok) further stressed the need, as a young man, to be the same as the locals, "I wanted to fit in, so I never learnt, never wanted to learn, Chinese". The rejection of his ethnic heritage through refusing to learn Chinese seems extreme, but he acknowledges that he was a teenager then, and conforming to the local culture and population was vital to him at that age, although the national and societal pressure to assimilate in Thailand in the 60s and 70s likely played a part in this desire, as well. It is important to feel as an insider in the place one would call home, as, at that point in time, Thailand was home for Mr Ung. These days it matters less that he is Chinese; there is no need to hide his ethnicity, and he acknowledges his ethnic heritage openly.

As such, feeling *at home* is a significant emotional perception to have. The articulation of multiple homes is that all homes are experienced and perceived different ways. The topophilia one feels for one's home and homeland can be translated into the

experience of insideness. All the respondents cite their native or naturalised present location (in Southeast Asia) as home; they are "used to it", having grown accustomed to the way of life and the culture there after having lived there for a long time, or having grown up there. Yet there is a conflicting feeling towards homeland. One imagines that Chinese migrants would feel *at home* in China, but the opposite is usually true. For those who have made the trip, China is often strange and unfamiliar. Respondents are able to appreciate the country for the familiar customs and culture they have referenced and practiced most of their lives, but it is also foreign. It is too different to feel comfortable with, so perhaps maintaining the vision of an unobtainable home is preferable to seeing it for what it is, having grown accustomed to their present country and place of settlement, and this undoubtedly quite different from China. As Mr Oo (Rangoon) noted, "I want to go back, but I'm used to here now. Things are too different in China."

The factors that make home (present and here) home and homeland (past and there) home are very different. One would feel *at home* at home; but not necessarily at home in their homeland. The feeling of belonging still remains, passed down through lineage and heritage, to endow the overseas Chinese with a certain feeling of belonging to China, relative to the other people around them, particularly the locals, who do not have this extra location of topophilia. *Home* signifies many different things. The experience of feeling at home may not apply to some of the places that are identified as home.

Relating to homeland is akin to parentage. Home and homeland have often been alluded to as "mother" or "father"; viz. the terms "motherland" or "fatherland". This refers to the way places tend to nurture affection, the way parents do. Additionally, there

is the idea that people are descended from places. One comes from a location just as one comes from a certain family background. As Ms Ma (Bangkok) noted, "we have two mothers: China and Thailand. We love China but we can't live there", suggesting that one cannot return to a previous "mother" after having embraced a new one. The ethnic Chinese is descended from two heritages. This dual parentage sentiment breeds a sense of hybridity, and in this sense the diasporan is the product of multiple national cultures.

There is hybridity in both the ethnic Chinese (people) and Chinatown (place). The overseas Chinese negotiate multiple identities, having become a people of hybrid background. Chinatowns are likewise hybrid landscapes, with their landscapes negotiating multiple identities by being physically present in their local space and at the same time referring to China.

For some, hybridity is inherent in turning to cosmopolitanism. Mr Ung explains, "I'm an internationalist", signifying that, as a result of one's hybrid nature, one is either (at) home anywhere in the world, or nowhere in the world, as part of the cosmopolitan condition. The condition of multiple homes results in multiple identities. Mr Ung refused to favour any one particular place (or home) over another. This results in a lack of a strong sense of personal national identity. It was thus that Mr Ung declared that he is hybrid, a mix, while not retaining a connection to any specific place for purposes of identity.

The presence of Chinatown, whether for residence or work, allows many of the respondents to access their multiple-belonging status as part of the Chinese diaspora. While they are not completely isolated from their nation of citizenship (Thailand,

Vietnam, Singapore, Burma), in the proximity of Chinatown they are also present in the place of their ethnicity. In this sense, the overseas Chinese are in the place of home and homeland. Chinatown is able to represent the mystical homeland that diasporans yearn for in their sojourn from their native land.

Placing Home: Positioning homeland

> My roots are in China, just like a tree. When you have problems, you depend on – you go back to – your roots. So China is home (Mr Nam, Rangoon).

As mentioned earlier, the term country (also nation), 国家, in the Chinese language references home: ~jia, ~家 I posit that there is a significance to this, that one of the scales of home can always be on the national level – and this is particularly pertinent to a diaspora group, which is usually identified with/by their connection to a specific homeland country. In this section, I explore the concept of homeland – as it pertains to place of origin, or ancestral home – in the context of China and the Chinese diaspora in my four field sites in Southeast Asia. In the majority of cases, this is referred to in the abstract, simply as xiang, 乡, or jiaxiang, 家乡. In addition, I explore the way the memory of homeland as a place appears to be rebuilt in the form of Chinatown in the host cities of settlement. The concept of homeland is crucial to the perpetuation and the cohesion of the diaspora. Without the homeland, there is nothing to tie the diaspora together. The vision of an imagined home that the diaspora originated from and is expected to return to is common to the community. The importance of claiming homeland as home is in the way place and identity are linked. Ethnic identity and heritage are informed by one's source of

origin (original home). As such, claiming Chinese ethnicity would mean that one was from China, or had roots in China. Identities based on geographical (and national territories) are ways in which concepts and ideas of the self is created. The knowledge that one is part of a nation separate from oneself (being Chinese, but not being from or located in China) is also defining, and sets one apart from the other locals in the place of settlement (having roots from a different place).

Relevant to the subject of homeland is the concept of *Heimat*, which is difficult to define, but is generally accepted as referring to the idea of homeland, particularly with an edenic, pure, and unspoiled country (both in terms of nation and the pastoral countryside). There are a number of pertinent issues with *Heimat*: firstly, like *home*, it has a multiplicity of meanings; secondly, it is an ideal often considered lost, but constantly yearned for; and thirdly, it can be mythical – echoing the sense of the unattainable ideal, the paradise reflected in the memories of the past. *Heimat* could be very loosely translated as *xiang*, 乡, in the sense that they are both something that may have been lost in the past (whether directly experienced or inherited) and something now yearned for.

Xiang seems to refer to a village-type birthplace that one can claim through ancestral origin, even if one was not born there. As such, *xiang* is almost always the village of the forefathers, usually mentioned as a place where "my father (or grandfather) was born there" or "I have relatives there". The overseas Chinese relate to *xiang* as part of their lineage and heritage. This is often linked to surnames and dialect group. As such, kinship is found between strangers who share a common surname or dialect group, or who hail from geographically contiguous *xiang* areas, with the suggestion that they are

related. To bring the relationship further, the family-making naming of homeland as "fatherland" (perhaps in relation to the idea that it is one's father's land that one has descended from), or "motherland" – again, because one had originated from that country – is yet another device that links the diasporan to their original home, through the intimacy of references to family as well as familiar cultures. Calling a place "motherland" or "fatherland" makes the connection much more intimate and personal, raising the stakes in affect for a place.

The similarity of *xiang* to *Heimat* is seen in its reference to pure, unspoiled country. Interviewees particularly mention the natural landscapes that can be found in China. As Ms Hong (Singapore) describes of a visit to China, "I liked the landscape (*feng jing*) there, it was beautiful". The stark comparison of the ideal countryside to the urbanity of the city that they currently live in is a possible cause for this. One yearns for what one lacks – the opposite condition that one is presently experiencing. *Xiang* is imagined in a positive light, as a retreat from the city – espousing everything that the horrors of urban living is unable to provide, just as the concept of *Heimat* was used to express notions of unspoiled life in the countryside during the period of modernisation and industrialisation. Ms Lin, who periodically visits relatives in Hainan, described life as different there: "it's so different from Singapore; it's so natural, [there is] so much nature. You feel closer to the earth there", and later added, "you feel close to your roots there".

At the same time, the unspoiled countryside is not always the ideal home. Interviewees often describe *xiang* areas as rural and backwards, particularly after having experienced them. According to Mr Ung, "toilets were a problem". The reality

encountered when homeland is experienced conflicts with prior imaginations of *xiang* and *Heimat*. Experiences are not always positive, and the pure, unspoilt, edenic vision of the village hometown is broken. One's imagined "memories" of homeland rarely coincide with reality.

Despite the imagined Eden, relatives in *xiang* areas are generally seen as poor, and interviewees recounted experiences of their village-bound relatives asking for money (to build bigger houses or to make investments in farmland). They often found themselves constantly bringing (expensive) gifts back from their local place (such as mechanical equipment, bicycles, and motorcycles). In many cases, relatives from the home villages imagine that their overseas counterparts' lives in the city are opulent and comfortable in direct contrast to their hard and spare village lives. At the same time, most of the respondents who had visited their hometown villages recalled the community back "home" as warm and welcoming.

The feeling of home in one's homeland is generally more based on the intangibles of affect, on the abstraction of emotional belonging, rather than the concreteness of physical comfort. In the light of the "backwardness" or "ruralness" of the countryside in China, it is the warmth of family and kinship that provides access to the affection and emotions of feeling at home in the homeland. According to Ms Lin (Singapore), "home is also China – I mean, Hainan. Although I wasn't born there, I feel comfortable there. Not in the physical sense, but emotionally". Ms Lin further specified that it is Hainan, a particular province of China, that she feels comfortable with and an affect for, as opposed to the entirety of China. It is significant that she corrected herself in this particular quote,

emphasising the closeness to a very specific segment, rather than the whole of the nation. This further points to the heterogeneous and scalar nature of homeland – homeland can be a large, amorphous whole (China), or it can be a certain subset of the whole (a province, or a city).

Conversely, China can also be home in the abstract, rather than as a particular, physical location. Respondents spoke about visiting China as a tourist, paying particular attention to culturally significant places such as Beijing, the capital, which is also regarded as the cultural centre of China. The cultural capital is seen as representative of the entirety of Chinese culture and heritage. It is this aspect of Chineseness that these respondents feel an affinity for that makes it home. As Ms Ma opined, "when I go [to China], we speak the same language, we are the same people, we have the same culture. Of course it is home!" China in this sense is seen as a cultural entity; one feels at home with the connection to the heritage and culture, rather than to the space. This is the sort of communal Chineseness that appears to make the Chinese diaspora and the Chinese nation a homogeneous collective. This communal identity is constituted in many ways; mainly through language, as many of the interviewees speak Mandarin, or another Chinese dialect. For Mr Hieu (HCMC), having taken extra-curricular Mandarin lessons since childhood helped him to develop a sense of connection with China. There is also is the process of growing up with traditional practices. Mr Hieu explained that the traditional customs that he has followed since childhood (as instructed by his parents, such as partcipating in the Chinese Lunar New Year festivities that differed slightly from the Vietnamese *Tết*) had encouraged a sense of Chinese identity that further promoted

feelings of attachment to and a relationship with China.

For those who have never returned "home", and never visited homeland, there remains a "nostalgia for places half-remembered even if never encountered" (Parker, 2005: 416). According to Mr Thang (HCMC), "I haven't been to China, but if I have the chance, I will *go back*." (emphasis mine). The idea of going "back" to places one has never been infuses the idea of "home" into one's homeland. Home is only ever gone "back" to, or "returned" to. It is never considered a new place, even if it has never been seen or physically experienced. This endows the home with a sense of the mythic; that one's unseen, ancestral origin can actually be home, and that one has ties with a place so strong that visiting it, even if for the first time, is an action of return.

The action of going back "home" is a dream, a carefully nurtured yearning that many do not expect to fulfil. Many respondents talk about it in terms of "returning to their roots" (*luo di shen gen* 落地生根) and mention that, ideally, they would return to see their *jiaxiang*; yet given the chance to travel, they would not necessarily head to their home village, or even China, first. There is an idealised fantasy of having a "home" to return to; beyond their mundane, settled lives in Southeast Asia, the migrant Chinese share their greater purpose of sojourn, like a mission, or destiny, that they would eventually return to their long-lost, unseen home. The dream of sojourn is then further maintained by *not* returning to the ancestral home, because, as mentioned above, actually returning would shatter the myth of the lost homeland, of *Heimat*. Ms Chay (Singapore) expressed a desire to visit her parents' village, but found that whenever she had the opportunity, she travelled elsewhere instead: "I think I want to go see [the village], but

there are all these other places [in the world] to visit. I don't know what I will find there... Maybe I'm scared of it?"

There are also difficulties associated with "going back" or "returning home", as idealised in the proverb, *luo ye gui gen,* 落叶归根. Particularly in old age, the desire to return to rest in one's ancestral home is strong. This sentiment is quite clearly illustrated by Mr Nam, in the quote at the beginning of this section. But the difficulties are reflected in the realities of the way life in China is so different from the lives of the migrant Chinese overseas. Having lived in the city for so long, and having made their own personal networks in the land of settlement, "going back" is frought with complications, even a measure of uncertainty.

> *Xiang* is China, Fujian, Quanjiu (a village in Southern China)... But I can't go back; there's nobody to take care of me there. [But] I'm still a Chinese citizen. (Mr Sin, Rangoon)

Even as Mr Sin has maintained Chinese citizenship, which is a strong tie to his China home, living in Rangoon has its familiarities and networks. At 92 years of age, he firmly rooted in Burma, having spent the latter half of his life living, working, and now retired in Rangoon, the roots he has planted in his new home are more familiar and comforting than the roots he has left behind in China. The attrition of relationships – socially, and with the homeland itself, over time, has pushed the weight of "home" towards his present location, Burma, and away from China. The desire to return is strong, but the impracticalities of return – he is too old, and there is no one there for him, make returning home an impossibility.

Faced with the possibility that going home to China is a desire that remains

unfulfilled, many respondents talk about language and culture as a way of retaining their cultural and ethnic identity. Reproducing that Chinese-related cultural and ethnic identity in their present place of home is also a way of maintaining close ties with their homeland, and to remind them of the mythical dream of home that Chinatown is based upon. This maintenance of identity is the connection between the *here* and *there*, and the *then* and *now*; the link between China and Chinatown, particularly in terms of home.

It is often quite unclear exactly what my interviewees mean when they refer to culture (*wenhua*, 文化). Mr Lu (Bangkok) noted that "there is a lot of Chinese culture here", but he was vague about what he meant. When asked to clarify, he replied "language and customs". However, there is an assertion that China is a reference for Chinatown – without China, clearly, there is no Chinatown. Chinatown would not have a context if China is not perceived of as home; the purpose of the ethnic neighbourhood would be significantly trivial. The reproduction of home in the form of Chinatown, even if simply a simulacra, requires an archetype, an imagined original, to portray. Acknowledging China as home reinforces the Chinese ethnicity: "tradition (*chuan tong* 传统) is important for where our *gu xiang* (homeland) is" (Mr Quang); it reinforces the Chinese identity, and strengthens the tie to China as homeland. In place of (or the acceptance of another) nationality, ethnicity is asserted.

The assertion of ethnic identity is strong in many of the respondents – who also feel that it is important to maintain their Chineseness, their culture and traditions. The strength of ethnicity, "we are still Chinese people" (Mr Quang), reinforces the Chinese heritage, sustains the tie to China, and reaffirms home.

The role of community also plays a part in nurturing the link to China. Institutions such as Chinese associations and communities (often based in Chinatown) serve to maintain a certain core of "Chineseness" and ethnic heritage by providing services to the community, as well as maintaining cultural institutions such as Chinese libraries and Chinese language schools. These actions support the social capital of the local Chinese community. These associations and communities are usually also part of an international network that function in many major cities (definitely throughout Southeast Asia), with affiliates in China. Moreover, they are initiatives in observing important cultural activities (for example through organising lunar new year celebrations).

The narratives of place and the maintenance of traditions via performances (telling stories, celebrating and observing important dates and festivals, following specific cultural practices, etc) likewise perpetuate ties to China. They perform a kind of memory of homeland, just as there are also textual references in the physical, urban aspect of Chinatown. Again, *here* references *there*: the landscapes of Chinatown reference China, as shown by the toponymics of the places: "this road used to be China Street" (Mr Aw, Rangoon); roads are named after aspects of Chinese culture, or places in China. The recreation of China within the Chinatown landscape is a process of transposing homes. Resettling diasporans carry their homes with them as they move, changing their spaces of settlement around them to reflect who they are and where they were from, actively reaffirming their ethnic and cultural identities.

At the same time, there is an awareness that diasporas are a process and are continually changing, particularly from generation to generation. Even as the diasporic

community is not homogeneous at any scale, the degree to which homeland is maintained and dreamt about will change with time, as diasporans spend more time away, and chronologically move further from home. While the later generations of migrants may nurture (perhaps subconsciously) the earlier generations' diasporic yearning to return to their original home, this yearning does not feature prominently in the later generations' lifeplans. The trend in their desires to maintain their heritage in terms of the Chinese culture, language, and traditions echo this. Fairly generally, it is less important to the younger generations of the diaspora to continue a lifestyle that is as focussed on China as homeland. The later generations are able to say "yes, the Chinese culture is important" (Ms Quyen, HCMC), yet at the same time pick and choose the traditions and customs that they decide to keep. Mr Quang believes that it is important to continue speaking a Chinese language (the specific Chinese dialect, whether Mandarin, Cantonese, or one of the others, depends heavily on the ethnic dialect of the interviewee) as a means to retaining and remembering one's roots, yet acknowledges that it is a matter of preference – certain people, particularly the older generation, feel it is important to be mindful of their roots and origins, and concedes, "I don't know how the second (next) generation would feel about this" (Mr Quang).

Having a distinct concept of homeland is still an important factor for the identity of the Chinese diaspora in the field sites. Identity, both individual and shared, is inextricably linked to a sense of home. Maintaining the Chinese identity through memorialising heritage and sustaining links is done via direct references with the home country. The present place of the Chinese diaspora, Chinatown, also has its roots in the

homeland of China.

Making Chinatown home

> *Wo men ye shi ben di r*en (我们也是本地人): "we are also local people"
> (Mr Fu, Rangoon)

As established, there are multiple meanings of home, as there can be multiple homes for

individuals and communities. In this section I explore the ways in which Chinatown in

the settled country and city are perceived as home. Chinatown can be home in its own

right as the overseas Chinese settlers make new homes there. Chinatown can also be

home in the way it is a landscape that represents the homeland of the overseas Chinese.

There are several ways of articulating this. Many of the respondents' initial reply to the

question, "where is home?", was "here", or they named their present country or city.

Chinatown as home can be seen in the way that affection is expressed for the place. I

examine the way in which my respondents negotiated a sense of place and their notions

of belonging in a location where they, as a community, are not native. In the context of

their Chinese ethnicity, what are the processes that make Chinatown home? Amid the

acknowledgement that they are Chinese, as Mr Fu asserts in the quote above, the settlers

are also resolutely local, by claiming their new home as home.

One of the ways home is made in the country of settlement is through

reconstructions of home in Chinatown. The strong cultural, ethnic, and even national

reference to China that Chinatown bears is testament to this. Chinatown is not merely a

cultural landscape shaped by postcolonial ideologies of ethnic enclavements; nor is it

only an economic landscape fashioned by the merchandising of migrant labour and

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commercial activitiy. Chinatown is also a landscape of home. It is home claimed by a large population of overseas Chinese. Even as the earlier migrants who originally settled the location were sojourners who may not have called this new place "home", it was a place that eventually grew to be a more-or-less permanent site of habitation, as the actual action of returning home to China increasingly became a concept, a vague, imagined desire. Chinatown is the site of the development of the Chinese diaspora – the process from sojourn to settlement.

A sense of place develops in a space one has continually experienced over a prolonged period. For the interviewees who moved to Southeast Asia when they were young, Chinatown has become a place with which they are familiar, and they further identify with it to the extent that it has become home. Many of the older respondents have grown used to the way of life in Southeast Asia, and find themselves unable to adapt to living in China, "there is *luo ye gui gen* (the desire to return to homeland), but a lot of us who have come here have stayed too long, and it's hard to go back" (Mr Quang). Home is inevitably produced at the place in which one is present. In essence, their experience refers to *luo di shen gen*, growing roots where they have landed on the ground.

Home is often the place where one was born. For the latter generations of Chinese who were born to the migrant parents who had settled away from China, their natal place is the only home they have experienced. Despite the acknowledgement that they are Chinese and have descended from a different homeland altogether, respondents native to Southeast Asia are adamant that this is home, and that they are local. As such, they claim home in the nation: "I was born here", "I'm used to Thailand" (Ms Ma). Mr Canh

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(HCMC) further explains their position, "Vietnam is homeland, because I was born in Vietnam. But my culture is Chinese". Assimilation to the local population is immanent, otherwise one feels displaced. As Mr Ung explained (quoted earlier), "I wanted to fit in". Dwyer (1996) notes that home is continually made in tandem with the renegotiation and re-making of identities. In order to "fit in", there is a re-positioning of the self, to make oneself at home.

For the diaspora, being and becoming local in the new home requires a shifting and a negotiation of identities, for identity is linked to home. One is ethnically Chinese, but also belongs nationally to one's country of settlement. This combination of multiple identities is supported by the presence of physical reminders of homeland within the hostland, namely Chinatown. As shown in Chapter Four, Chinatown landscapes refer to imaginations of China by reflecting imaginations of Chineseness in "Chinese style" and architecture. Diasporic communities produce literal homes away from "home" by constructing imaginations of "nationality", "country". Like Chinatowns, new and hybrid cultural identities are formed. Cultural institutions like these ethnic neighbourhoods aid in perpetuating the diaspora identity. These spaces are a reminder that the diasporan is not only their nationality (of the settled land), but also culturally part of another nation, another group identity that the locals are not involved with. Chinatown thus becomes a symbolic reproduction of home, a China space outside of China. The role of the homeland, China, is that it is the prototype modelled for the making of home.

Being in Chinatown in a country that is not China is a way of reproducing one's hybrid identity. It is almost a safe space in which one can be comfortable being part of

both one and the other, insider and outsider, local and foreign. One is in a place of cultural congruence, among other people of a similar background while still in a foreign land, that at times promotes hybridity more than it resists assimilation. Chinatown is a space of difference in the city of settlement. Chinatown's landscape is a hybrid creature, sited in one place yet reflecting another. The transference of landscapes and landscape identities from the original home(land) to the current home means that Chinatown is an extension of China. As such, since China is homeland, Chinatown can be home by that association.

In the interviews, there were several references to the fact that Chinatown heavily emulates China by virtue of the social environment: "Chinatown is like China, a lot of Chinese people live here" (Dr Zhen, Rangoon), and "there are a lot of Chinese people here" (Ms Quyen). Also, in Bangkok, Mr Lu noted that, "*Yaowarat* is like China, because a lot of Teochew and Chinese people live here". The critical mass of the Chinese population gathered in one place outside of China makes it an ethnic-oriented landscape. Home can be made where there is a sense of community gained from other people with like identities. As an insider identifying with the social group, one is also an insider with the landscape.

There are institutions that help to promote the feeling of home in Chinatown. The role of such organisations, in the form of Chinese associations and clubs lie in supporting the Chinese overseas community, aiding them in making Chinatown a place of settlement and a home. The Chinese clan associations, through providing social services such as religious support, financial and medical aid, and language classes, help to build networks

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and connections within the local Chinese community, thus providing a support network that reflects home, as well as maintain links between China and the host country. These institutions promote a community that emulates the social networks and support systems that makes one feel at home, and prevent the ethnic Chinese from feeling the isolation faced when away from home.

The continuation of performative events such as traditions and customs from the homeland to the new home in the form of festivals makes the association between Chinatown and China. For example, observing the Lunar New Year celebrations serves to transpose the ethnic culture of the original home to the new home, and is a manifestation of the transference of home from *there* to *here*. Interviewees focussed on the continuation of "traditional" Chinese cultural activities that separated them from the practices of the local population to define their ethnic identities. Mr Hieu (HCMC) described, "we celebrate the moon (mid-autumn) festival; we also have different ceremonies when people have babies and when we get married, different traditions... [During these ceremonies] we have special pastries (baked goods) that are different from the Vietnamese". The carrying over of such conspicuous cultural markers serves to label home. The layering of activities and societies over the landscape of the settled nation makes Chinatown a physical symbol of hybridity and incomplete assimilation.

There are many more ways the Chinese have made their homes outside of China. The Chinese diaspora is often categorised as an economic diaspora (see Safran 1991). Mr Nam explained how migrants establish new homes, "there's an old saying: when you come to a foreign country, once you get rich, you don't want to go home. When you are

old, you can't go back. It's not easy to go back". In other words, *ubi lucrum, ibi patria,*

my home is where I can make my living (Colic-Peisker, 2008). Home may be

functionally defined, and in this instance it is defined through an economic purpose. The

overseas Chinese community who left China and ventured abroad to make a living make

up a not insignificant portion of the Chinese diaspora. In fact, according to Wang

Gungwu (see *Asian Affairs* interview (n.d.)), the Chinese diaspora involves only those

who have travelled overseas in search of business and wealth.

> Home is here now. We built our business here, and this is where we made
> our money, and where our children were born. They don't know anything
> about China. We've never brought them back. They want to go to America.
> (Mr Saw, Rangoon)

Chinatown, as an economic space (among many other, layered landscapes as

shown in Chapter Four), functions as the home base at which business is conducted and

money is made. The investments that the merchant and trader classes of the diaspora have

made in these cities outside of China are part of the process that ties the migrants to their

new land. Compounded with the forging of family ties (such as marrying the locals)

and/or building of families in the host nations, home is grown around such home-making

activities.

There are also respondents who reject the idea of multiple homes. Having been

removed from China for too long and by too many generations, they have grown up in

their nations of settlement and perceive only these as home. An example of this is Dr

Zhen, who stated that "China is not home. Home is Burma. We're only Chinese because

of Chinese blood". The connection to China is made in acknowledging his ethnicity and

ancestry; however, the relationship stops there. In his role as a doctor working in a

medical clinic affiliated with the Hokkien Chinese association and temple, it would appear that Dr Zhen is a strong proponent of connections and relationships with China. However, this is not the case. Dr Zhen's clinic in Rangoon's Chinatown serves the Chinese in Burma, but it does not mean that he sees China as home.

In the absence of homeland, home can only be in one's present place. Mr Ung cites difficulties with identifying with China as a source for this: "It's not home if you can't speak the language, and I can't! You can't really communicate". The distance from cultural similarities, and the lack of identifying features disassociates the overseas Chinese from China. For migrants like Mr Ung, it is far easier to identify with Bangkok and Thailand as home than it is to conceive of a relationship with China.

In some cases, particularly in the Singapore fieldsite, Chinatown as home is observed in the way the respondents display affection for the way that Chinatown was in the past (then as compared with now). This is possibly seen as a reaction to the too-rapidly changing landscapes of Singapore, in which landscapes of the past are often erased through sweeping urban redevelopment projects and various clean-up initiatives. Many Singaporeans display a yearning for their home of the past rather than for a China homeland. Ms Hong (Singapore) was particularly reminiscent of the way "Chinatown used to be...", repeating the phrase quite often throughout the interview. Five more respondents in Singapore, Mr Tan, Ms Lee, Mr Chris, Mr Chan, and Mr Pang, more than the others, couched their memories of Chinatown "in the past" in rosier light and more positive terms than most:

"Apart from the food and my family, sometimes I go back to reminisce. This used

to be my community, where I grew up. It was different then. This kind of ambience, you can't get it anywhere, anymore. Maybe in China?" (Mr Tan)

"Chinatown used to be different, more warm. A sense of community." (Ms Lee)

"It used to be so fun. Growing up there I played in the streets, I knew all my neighbours. Don't know where everybody is now..." (Mr Chris)

"Chinatown used to be so rowdy! So many people, doing so many things. There were so many things to do, so many things to see. So much life!" (Mr Chan)

"Chinatown used to be so good. All the food. The ambience. It still has some good food, and sometimes it still has the ambience, that 'feeling', but maybe only during Chinese New Year? It's more quiet now. Like it's gotten old." (Mr Pang)

Additionally, some of the adjectives used to describe the earlier landscape were "more authentic" (Mr Chris, Mr Pang), "better" (Mr Tan, Ms Hong), and "more real" (Ms Lee). There is no question that Chinatown in Singapore is home to these respondents. The issue here is that it is a Chinatown that does not exist anymore. If the Chinatown of the past is home, the Chinatown of the present merely serves as a monument to memory, of what home, as they say, "used to be".

The concept of home in Chinatown is not a simple one. It is particularly important to diasporas because home is left (or even lost); yet home is also found, and re-produced in a new place. The recreation of home is often fraught with difficulty as diasporans negotiate spaces and identities with their new hosts. Chinatown can be home in the way it simulates China; it can also be home because it is not China, but rather a new city, a place of settlement where one was been born, made a fortune, or grown old.

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Chinatown and the places of settlements are home because no other home can be conceived of. There are two modes of making home. First, through loss. This occurs by emphasising ties to China through the emotional feeling of having left and lost a home. And second, through gain. A new home is found in a new place by abandoning intentions to return to the old home.

A Chinatown Diaspora

> There is a Chinese culture still here. But people don't think of China anymore (Mr Saw, Rangoon).

There is a distinctive juncture between what is home and what is not-home. Chinatown and the present location (the cities in Southeast Asia) are home. Yet whether China is home or not depends heavily on the definition of the term *home*. When home is used to mean homeland, and place of origin, and mythical land of return, then China may be conceived of as home. But when home is taken at its most basic definition, in the present, it is the place where one is immediately inhabiting. Thus Chinatown in the present city of settlement is home to the overseas Chinese. The creation of Chinatown may have been an effort to represent, or to recreate China in a new spatial context, but it is also a collective imagination of the China-home that has been created and exists today. Thus far in this chapter, I have shown that the idea of home is firmly embedded in the *here* and *now*, that is the present place of habitation in the country, city, and Chinatown of current settlement. I have also shown that while the idea of China as homeland is still strongly asserted, it is more often than not an unquestioned acknowledgement of heritage and lineage, as well as the source of ethnicity. Even where there is a desire to return to homeland, this yearning

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is not as intense as theorised of diasporas in general. As Mr Saw noted above, despite retaining the Chinese ethnicity and identity, there is a diminishing desire to relate to China as "home". Mr Lu, while still claiming a Chinese identity, noted, "I don't feel related to China at all". While homeland is important as the root of the overseas Chinese community's cultural and ethnic identity, it is not as significant as the experience of their present settlement as home.

In this section I propose a divorcing of China from Chinatown. While the creation of Chinatowns appears to be the recreation of *heimat*, or homeland, it is not. My argument in this section is that the Chinatown reconstruction of home has less to do with homeland China, and more to do with the migrant experience of the overseas Chinese. Chinatown, rather than a direct reproduction of China landscapes, is a reflection of the diaspora's hybrid nature of finding and making home elsewhere while maintaining their cultural ties and acknowledging ethnic heritage. As such, I suggest there is a need to draw a clear distinction between a Chinese diaspora and a Chinatown diaspora. The Chinatown diaspora is the creation and reproduction of landscapes of familiarity, all over the world. These diasporic landscapes support and maintain the population of overseas Chinese whose nationality is not Chinese, although their ethnicity is, and whose sense of kinship and community is to other overseas Chinese people rather than to the people of China. Chinatowns are not recreations of the China-home, but are recreations of Chinatown itself. The references to an 'otherness' or 'otherplaceness' which Chinatowns evince are not references to China but to Chinatowns and imaginations of compressed Chinese culture. Chinatowns are disconnected from China and the Chinese diaspora cannot be

conflated with Chinatown.

Diaspora space is a concept raised by Brah (1996), explained as the intersection of diaspora, border, and dis/location. The space is host to a myriad complexity of processes and interactions, the most important being the joint creation of place effected by the local people, the diasporans, and the hybrid mix of identities between the two. Chinatown is such a mixed space. Further, in the sense of diasporas, these spaces are also scattered: Chinatowns appear to offer a sense of home in disparate locations; they are landscapes of dislocalities (Flusty 2004), made up of and connected geographically through linkages and networks. In addition, Cohen's (2008) idea of "spatially dispersed communities" is echoed in Flusty's dislocalities, which are "communities predicated less upon proximity than upon common interests shared over vast distances", a process by which "disparate and distant places embody themselves within one another as cities continually swap pieces of themselves" (2004: 106). In the case of Chinatown, there is a physicality to the dispersed community that carries and appears to implant pieces of cultural homeland in the urban contexts of other city landscapes.

Chinatowns have their origins in Chinese history, specifically that of sojourn and migration from China, created and built by the corpus of migrants who have settled in the new city. Chinatowns are not direct representations of China. Chinatowns do not reflect the exact cultural complexity that China encompasses. They instead illustrate the complex integration of overseas Chinese migrants with the local population. Taken out of the local context, Chinatowns demonstrate an almost homogenised representation of the culture of the overseas Chinese as a completely independent entity in and of themselves,

through the amalgamation of various Chinese cultures come to cohabit a single, unifying identity of overseas Chineseness. Chinatowns are recreations of themselves – they are more like each other than they are like China – and are representative of the hybrid third-space that are encounters and negotiations between peoples (Chinese and otherwise) and places.

Chinatowns reference China in the abstract, rather than in the concrete. The descriptions that the respondents gave of how "Chinatown is like China" referred to the density of the Chinese population within the particular bounded area of the city, "because a lot of Chinese people live here" (Dr Zhen). The core issue to do with diaspora spaces is the way the space, like the diaspora community, adapts to making home in the newly settled nation. The diaspora is a hybrid mix of *here* and *home*; the space is likewise. I propose that Chinatown spaces, as diasporic landscapes, are simulacra, using Baudrillard's conceptualisation (see particularly 1983). Following the successive phases of the image (1983), Chinatown goes through the processes from being a reflection of basic reality, to masking and perverting that basic reality, to masking the absence of that basic reality, and finally to bearing no relation to reality, becoming its own simulacrum. In understanding that Chinatown landscapes (or images of Chinatown) are only representations of Chinatown and the immigrant Chinese, rather than a holistic concept of 'Chineseness' (Mitchell, 2000), or the compressed version of China, Chinatown and ethnic Chinese (immigrant) communities must be understood and conceptualised as an entity separate from China. The imaginations of China as home are but simulations of Chineseness. To call Chinatown a simulation of China and Chineseness is an indication

of a "distortion of 'representation' " (Baudrillard, 1983, in Caulfield, 1994: 21). Chinatowns are, therefore, a symbolic indicator of the interaction and the site of negotiation between the diasporic Chinese and their host communities. They are defined by local contexts; one of their main commonalities is their relationships with their host societies.

In the first phase, Chinatown can be seen as a reflection of basic reality in the way that its population mirrors that of China, viz. "a lot of Chinese people live here". The bulk of the population that makes up this neighbourhood is ethnically Chinese, having originated from China to form what appears, particularly to outsiders, as an ethnically homogeneous ethnic enclave. The various Chinese languages are spoken in this neighbourhood, and likewise the practices and customs originating from China are also performed and carried out here. The early Chinatowns (early *Chợ Lớn*) were like this.

In the second phase, Chinatown masks and perverts the basic reality of China by presenting a simplified and superficial image of what China appears to be like. By homogenising the population (into simply "Chinese", as opposed to the several different dialects, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, etc., that the Chinese population espouses, for example), Chinatown erases complexity, smoothing over differences and important variations. In Rangoon's Chinatown, as described earlier, the Cantonese inhabit the Upper blocks of the neighbourhood, and the Hokkien take up the Lower block. This geographic separation of the two dialect groups is not obvious from the landscape, unless one is especially attuned to the subtle differences in the food offered or industry specialisation of the two groups. Further, the basic reality of China is perverted by the

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dense manifestations of "oriental" artefacts and such physical imagery, artfully arranged within the urban landscape of Chinatown, offering an intense experience and perception of "China". This is especially obvious in Singapore's Chinatown, as shown in Chapter Four, where the architectural flourishes express a Chineseness.

In the third phase, Chinatown masks the absence of the basic reality of China by giving the impression that it is, or that it represents China in reality. As a progression from the second phase, in which the urban landscape is fashioned to reflect ideas of what China is like, the third phase begins to present the imagination of what China is like, in the form of Chinatown, as truth, or reality. In the midst of the Chinatown urbanscape, the actuality of China may be ignored or forgotten, and only the distorted image of Chinatown is left. In Shanghai, China, the Old Shanghai City area, sometimes known as the Old Town and comprising Xintiandi, has been casually named Chinatown. Here, a city block of old buildings have been conserved and restored as part of the Taipingqiao Redevelopment Project, an urban revitalisation project by the Shui On Group (Shui On Group, n.d.). The oddness of a Chinatown in China showcasing preserved and recreated ideas about Chineseness is reflected in the way Chinatowns around the world also offer images and experiences of this Chineseness.

In the final phase, Chinatown becomes an entity of its own, severing resemblances and relations with China. In many places, the population of Chinatown is mixed and hybrid, reflecting the diaspora status of the community. The tropes and images in the physical urban landscape that have come to denote and signify the Chinatown landscape now *only* refer to Chinatown, rather than to China. It has become a wholly

separate thing. Mr Fu (Rangoon) describes the process from the first phase to the fourth:

> Chinatown doesn't look like China. Although there are many Chinese still
> around here. Last time there was more of a China feeling because there
> were a lot of Chinese people around, and the boundary between Little India
> and Chinatown was very obvious. But now it's very mixed. Chinatown was
> really Chinese before, but it doesn't have that feeling anymore.

Chinatowns in the Western hemisphere tend to reflect the final phase. Tropes in the landscape, like the friendship gates and arches, convey a sense of Chineseness that serves to link Chinatowns to each other, rather than to China. The most elaborate and famous friendship gates around the world are located in San Francisco, Liverpool, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., to name a few. Each gate traces connections and linkages to these other gates, in other Chinatowns. Chinatowns do not look like China, they look like Chinatowns.

Chinatown as both a diaspora and a simulacra go hand in hand. The scattered landscapes that are imagined to reflect home in actuality do not do so; they reflect an accumulated, collective notion of overseas Chinese culture and heritage, and an ethnicity that is made homogeneous by its nature of being outside the land of origin. The complexity of the overseas Chinese ethnicity is stripped by their collective reckoning. As a group, all individuality is lost. Chinatown likewise cannot simulate either depth or breadth of China. The mythologised homeland that is yearned for is not China, nor can it be found in China. It is found in Chinatown, which has become a simulation of itself, over and over again, a monument of overseas Chinese heritage collected and paraded as Chineseness in the places of the Chinese diaspora.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that home is a complex thing, and that both China and Chinatown can be conceived of as home, but in several different ways. I have also shown that the way Chinatown functions as home to the overseas Chinese makes the landscape a diaspora in its own right. Diasporas are not limited to people, but expand to include places as well.

Ideas of home are constantly being readjusted and reinterpreted, and are definitely dynamic. Yet in one sense, home can be fixed: there is a home that may not be removed or changed, and that is the idea of the original home, motherland, homeland, and place of origin. For many people the concept of homeland may never change. At the same time home is also fluid: home can be where one has grown used to being, where one has built a history, a place where one has progressively spent more time, and with which one has subsequently formed relationships.

Chinatowns are images of fictive Chinas and mythologised home. I have shown that the homeland that is imagined (the *heimat*) is not in actual existence. The diaspora's collective recreation of homeland persists as a common bond-place (Yeoh & Kong, 1994) that ties together the dispersed Chinese migrant population. This common place is perhaps their claim to similarity and relation, that they share a place of origin, even as they are a diverse, heterogeneous, wide-ranging group. And it is this characteristic of shared origin, restless home, and imagined heritage that makes the overseas Chinese population unequivocally a diaspora. As Mr Prasong relates, "China [can never be] home,

there is no relationship there, because I was not born there. But there is a sense of familiarity with all Chinese people".

Perhaps the nature of the diaspora is that it is open to mutation, and may be constantly changing as the community is accepted and assimilated in varying degrees at different times. The nature and identity of the hybrid population at these zones of contact, these diaspora places of Chinatowns is always being negotiated and renegotiated. The main point of home is when the overseas Chinese population consider themselves to be nationality first, before ethnicity, as espoused by Mr Goh, "We're Singaporean first, then we're Chinese".

Chapter 6
CHINATOWN NAVIGATES THE NATIONSCAPE

> Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.
>
> (Anderson, 1991: 6)

> Dispersed across nation states, diasporic collectivities figure at the heart of the debate about national identity.
>
> (Brah, 1996: 239)

Nations are formulated of a complex network of political and social discourses. Benedict Anderson's (1991) nationalisms arise out of cultural roots and are based on religion and dynasty. The significance of *nation* to the essence of Chinatown is in the way Chinatowns not only function like Anderson's imagined communities but also depend upon the cultural roots and heritages that give rise to such social groups. It refers to a community of people who share a sense of commonality and culture, in terms of history, and ethnicity. Gellner's (2008) definition of nation defines this community not simply as having the same culture, but as one whose commonality also entails a recognition of other people who belong to the same nation and share the same culture. This shared sense of belonging tends to occupy and appropriate physical space, turning territory into national space. Nation can be understood as both a concept and a physicalised space. Thus, landscapes can be understood in the context of their surroundings; ethnic and cultural neighbourhoods are identified and distinguished by the differences they present relative to the rest of the city. In the process of understanding Chinatown in its larger, geographical context, I set out to consider Chinatown in the context of the post-colonial nation.

I refer to the nation as an entity that is working through processes of nationalism and participating in nation-building exercises, in order to construct an identity. These exercises are important to the postcolonial nation in its need to engage with its colonial past. In reaction to a period of colonial rule and influence, there is a struggle to recreate the nation as an independent body. Efforts to redefine the nation and determine a cohesive national identity, however, are often complicated by the enduring presence of difference within the country and its major cities. Brah (1996, above) addresses this by problematising the presence of diasporic groups within nation-states. The presence of such a distinct and cohesive group (that identifies itself with a nation-based ethnicity) within a nation can be a disruptive force to a peoples' ideals about their national identity. In the development and modernisation of Southeast Asian cities, the overseas Chinese, and markers of Chinese identity, like Chinatown landscapes, are alternately included or excluded within the nation.

The nation's ideological modernising discourse (for modernisation and development in Southeast Asia, see Dick & Rimmer, 1998; Rigg, 2003) entails a certain homogenisation of national subjects, where, ideally, cultural limits are administered upon the population and the space, and identity is affirmed through recognising differences beyond ones' borders. Cartier notes that "the role of cultural identity in panethnic nationalism is a critical one, because state nationalist ideology gels when builders of cultural forces align themselves with the paradigm of the state" (1997: 577). A homogenised national population presents a united national front that is different and unique from other nations. Through the definition of common cultures, languages,

traditions, histories, and even ethnicities, nations build an identity in order to strengthen

the boundaries of the nation-state. In the post-colonial context, nationalist narratives help

to unite a nation fragmented by colonial rule, and to cement an identity. Yet at the same

time, many ideas of modernity and economic development involve a capitalistic global

outlook, where difference and diversity is celebrated and valued for their networks, for

the continual development and progress towards global city status (see Sassen, 2001).

Diasporic subjects within the boundaries of the nation are celebrated for their hybridity

and flexibility, and help to solidify transnational linkages (Ong, 1997: 173).

The policies of the postcolonial state in building a national identity necessarily

affect the social and cultural milieu of the country. Large-scale Chinese immigration

occurred particularly during the pre-war colonial period, and contributed heavily to the

economic growth of the region. However, as noted in Chapter Two, in the newly-

independent, postcolonial era, the new states' reactions to the growing Chinese

communities were mixed, ranging from tolerance to outright discrimination. In many

cases, self-identified ethnic, racial, and cultural Chinese have been exiled or forced to

assimilate.

Much of the anxiety over the Chinese community in the Southeast Asian nations

concerned the amount of economic resources, and subsequently, power, concentrated in

Chinese hands. Strategies to limit these resources and power ranged from restrictions in

education and business activity to the expulsion of the ethnic Chinese. In many cases this

resulted in mass exile of the Chinese population, particularly from countries like

Vietnam. In others, like in Thailand, this resulted in the massive rapid assimilation of

Chinese to Thai, whereupon lengthier Thai-sounding names were appended to the end of Chinese surnames. In Burma, the ethnic Chinese were considered foreigners and outsiders even if they had been born there.

In the present, the situation is less dire, and the Chinese community is a significant group in the Southeast Asian nations' population. While they are firmly entrenched in the citizenship of their chosen places of settlement, owning their nationalities, they also firmly retain their Chinese heritage, culture and ethnicity, setting themselves slightly apart from the local communities. In this way, the presence of the overseas Chinese represents difference in the Southeast Asian nations. As settled migrants who have become a notable part of the population, they are at once foreign and native. They are also entrenched as part of the nation's economy and landscape.

The landscapes of the nation are often highly symbolic, giving and gaining meaning from their physical, geographical and cultural contexts. In Chapter Four I examined the identity of the Chinatown landscape through signs and symbols, and considered how the landscape is created and reproduced. Landscapes, like people, do not function in a vacuum. They are seen in relation to each other, and neighbourhoods in the city tend to be identified by difference. The nationscape is thus a highly diverse image, where distinct cultural landscapes, formed by the activities of cultural groups, contribute to national culture, and inherently, nationalisms. Cartier (1997) discussed how place-based identities are constructed by social imaginations of history and culture. The materiality of geographic sites is moderated by knowledges and conceptions of the place. The landscape of a nation, that is, its nationscape, is constructed at the intersection of

material space as well as socially constructed representations of that space. Appadurai (1996) discussed '-scapes' in terms of global cultural flows. These cultural flows are comprised of ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. Chinatowns are a part of these global cultural flows, in the way that the landscapes are globally ubiquitous and share economic and cultural flows that include heritage and ideologies (also see Flusty's (2004) landscapes of dislocalities). In this chapter I take the Chinatown-scape further to consider the nationscape. Chinatowns may be global phenomena, but they are also intensely local places, where their hybridities are constantly negotiated and navigated in terms of the way nations and nationalisms still play an important part in their identities.

Central to the identities of these four nations is their involvement in and with colonialism. The postcolonial nation grapples with national identity in several different ways, creating several different types of postcolonialisms. Yeoh explains that the postcolonial nation never removes itself completely from its colonial history, but rather moves on and negotiates its identities through categories passed down from its colonial past:

> The postcolonial city traces continuity rather than disjuncture from its colonial predecessor in the nature and quality of social encounters, which are shot through with notions of 'race' and 'culture' as markers of difference and bases for interaction (2001: 460).

It is in this context that the ideas of race and culture become important points from which concepts such as national identity and nationalism stem. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the nation is a colonial construct, and that nations and their major cities are thusly pressured to form a national identity that they can present to the world. This

national identity can be problematic. Although in many nations, nationality and ethnicity are the same for the core population, the presence of other ethnic groups and races that claim that nationality complicates the issue. As such, the postcolonial nation necessarily involves multiculturalism and the acceptance of other races and ethnicities that are part of the nation. Multiculturalism functions as an ideal trait, as it promotes cities and nations as open and global societies.

It is in this context, then, that I examine the role that Chinatowns and their Chinese inhabitants play in the way nations and their major cities negotiate their identity in the midst of rapidly developing global processes. The link between the image of the city and that of the nation is shown in Kusno's study on architecture and urban space in postcolonial Indonesia. Kusno argued that architecture and urban design in the city are physical displays of a nation's imagined identity: "the nation not only exists, but is also embodied in the space of the city" (2000: 97). The landscape of cities not only represents the (postcolonial) nation in its process of reconstructing and re-imaging itself, it also represents the identities that the nation is aiming to achieve. In the course of nation-building, Chinatowns and the ethnic Chinese are caught navigating between acceptance and diversity, and a united homogenising nationalism that requires assimilation. I also explore the myriad Chinese identities found in Chinatowns within the context of Burma, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Chinatown and Chinese identities are constantly being negotiated within the context of the Southeast Asian nation, particularly in these postcolonial periods where the struggle over self-definition and national identity is a main concern. There are identities that are unique to the Chinatown landscape. These

identities stem from the ongoing interactions between people and place. Place and social identities are mutually constitutive; however they are not made to the exclusion of all else. Unquestionably, the nation plays a critical role in the fashioning of the Chinatown identity.

In the previous chapter, I have suggested that Chinatowns, as a common place, represent a recreated homeland for the dispersed overseas Chinese community. Chinatown has become a shared space that unifies the Chinese diaspora. The leading theme in my research has been a query about the functions of Chinatown. This question can be made at several scales. In this chapter, it may be expressed as, "what does Chinatown do for the nation" or "how does Chinatown contribute to the nationscape", and "how is Chinatown perceived at the national level?" What I want to suggest, and attempt to show in this chapter, is that as the shared space of Chinatowns functions as a nation, drawing together and unifying the diasporic community, it complicates the cohesion and identity of post-colonial states. Simultaneously, the globality of Chinatown and the Chinese diaspora diversifies their host nation. Chinatown landscapes are meaningful spaces. In this chapter I examine the complex relationship Chinatown maintains with the nationscapes of these four cities in Southeast Asia and unwrap the spatial discourses surrounding landscapes of identities distinct from the rest of the nationscape.

The following section examines how Chinatown and its overseas Chinese community negotiate nationalisms with ethnic identity. I then discuss the way that Chinatowns expose the city to complex globalities and introduce modernities to the

nation. Before concluding the chapter, I present a case study of Singapore, in which I analyse how Chinese and Chinatown identities navigate the multicultural nation.

Negotiating Nationalisms

Plurality in the Southeast Asian city is not new, particularly in the light of colonialism. Furnivall noted, in relation to Burma, that during the colonial era, the Burmese, Indians, Chinese and Europeans "mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, culture... There is a plural society, with different segments of the community living side by side, but separately..." (1956: 304). Even so, Southeast Asia has always been comprised of many ethnic groups. One of the effects of colonialism in the region has been to bring into contact more groups of people (through a population of immigrant labour, traders, and even slaves). Another effect of colonialism has been the definition of races and roles in the organisation of the colonial cities, as well as the subordination of these cities to the European rulers. The colonial administration planned and developed many of the major cities in Southeast Asia (see Yeoh, 1996a), structuring them to best serve the needs of the metropole. In the wake of this, the now-autonomous Southeast Asian nations attempt to build their own national identities and define themselves. In defining itself, a nation includes and excludes the people and communities who live within its boundaries. Panethnic nationalism, in which ethnicity and nationality mutually reproduce, tends to be disrupted as the different groups in inherently plural societies struggle for legitimate citizenship. As such, this questions whether nationalism can be a homogenising force, or whether it simply excludes those who do not fall under the

auspices of panethnic nationalisms.

National spaces tend to mirror the nations' identities. Urban landscapes are carefully groomed to reflect the modernising tendencies of the nations (Kusno, 2000). Power over national spaces reflect the ability to prescribe the image of the nation and its identity. As spaces are invested with politics and ideology, and relations of power and discipline are an undeniable part of the spatiality of social life (Soja, 1989; Keith and Pile, 1993), nationscapes are an integral part of promoting and maintaining nationalisms. Spaces are produced from the social and political interactions between space and society, and the social entity that has power over a space defines and classifies that particular space. Spaces are also consumed by individuals and groups, requiring that we pay attention to these acts of consumption and experiences of space.

Chinatowns are conspicuously spaces of difference within the nation. The presence of an existing other, primarily identified by an ethnicity that is based on the nationalism of a separate state (China), threatens to disrupt an effortless, homogenising national identity. This is managed in many ways. As described in Chapter Two, the main attitude towards Chinese immigrants in the present is one of acceptance; while in the past the Chinese presence in many parts of Southeast Asia has been alternately accepted and unwelcome. During the colonial and pre-colonial periods, the Chinese were welcome both as globalising traders and merchants who contributed to the economic development of the cities, and as a corpus of labourers who provided skills and crude numbers to the population. Yet particularly towards the end of the colonial period, social unrest often included the exclusion of perceived foreigners, particularly the Chinese. Not only were

there fears of political instability due to political uprisings in China, but many of the local

businesses were Chinese-owned. As such, much of the local economy appeared to be run

by foreigners. In response to the hostility, many Chinese reacted by leaving the countries,

or assimilating with the local population. In the years immediately following

decolonisation, the newly autonomous nations prioritised local businesses and promoted

trade conducted by locals. After the initial waves of post-colonial nationalism, hostility

towards the Chinese gradually waned, and many of the local communities have begun to

accept and recognise the ethnic Chinese community in their midsts. Further, the

economic clout that the Chinese community possessed came to be seen positively and as

beneficial to the nation.

The way that these nations maintain complex relationships with the Chinese

'Other' within their boundaries can by seen through the treatment of the Vietnamese

Chinese (*người Hoa*) community in Ho Chi Minh City. I have provided an account of the

Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City in Chapter Two, but here I will emphasise the presence of

the Chinese Division of the Peoples' Committee in the city. The existence of this Division

illustrates the acknowledgement of the Chinese as a major ethnic group within the nation.

Further, having this group in the Peoples' Committee shows that there is a commitment to

the recognition and maintenance (or management!) of Chinese culture in the city.

The Chinese institutions in the city often emphasise the cooperative relationship

between the ethnic Vietnamese (*người Kinh*) and the ethnic Chinese. The "Traditional

Revolution House of the Chinese", or the Ho Chi Minh City Chinese-Vietnamese

Revolutionary Museum, located in Ward 1 of District 6, appears to chronicle and

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commemorate the involvement of the *Hoa* people in the revolution and liberation of Vietnam. The building that houses the museum was previously a residential dwelling inhabited by a *Hoa* Chinese family sympathetic to the Communist Party. The family concealed and protected leaders of the revolutionaries within their quarters, and provided a safehouse in the city. The museum was established in 1997 in recognition of the position the *Hoa* played in bringing about an independent and united Vietnam. The museum further marks the importance of the relationship between the *Hoa* and the ethnic Vietnamese, potentially denoting the acceptance of the *Hoa* within the Vietnamese nation.

The museum contains a restoration of the actual cubbyholes and hiding spaces used to conceal the revolution army leaders who sought and found protection at the house. It also holds historical artefacts and photos of the *Hoa* involvement in the revolution, including a printing press and print propaganda that were used to broadcast the messages of the revolutionary party. The histories and life stories of particular *Hoa* revolutionaries, both men and women, who sacrificed their lives for the nation are recorded and displayed, along with the history of Southern Vietnam's struggle towards independence. The museum also continually updates and keeps records of ongoing collaborations of the *Hoa* community in the city, displaying pictures and reports of current activities that involve the ethnic Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City. These are seen on the billboard displays of celebratory events and festivities attended by various important officials and bureaucrats. There are also lists of major companies and businesses run and owned by notable *Hoa* businesspeople, evidence of the economic contribution of the *Hoa* community to the nation, to emphasise the mutually beneficial economic cooperation

between the *Hoa* and the *Kinh*.

What is interesting about the Revolutionary Museum is that it appears to be relatively obscure. It is not a well-known landmark in Ho Chi Minh City, and has yet to turn up in any write-ups or travel guides of the city. The entrance to the museum further appears unmarked. When asked who the museum was for, or who frequented the museum, the caretaker indicated that it was mostly school groups that visited. This response suggests that the museum functions to solidify the position of the *Hoa* within the *Kinh* community in the city. It intends to assure the populace that the *Hoa* are a part of the community loyal to the nation, and that one can be ethnically Chinese, but no less Vietnamese. Further, in continuing to celebrate the achievements and involvements of the *Hoa* in the city, the museum emphasises the importance of the *Hoa* community's contributions to Vietnam. The overall tone of the museum is one of optimistic partnership – that there is a mutually supportive relationship between the *người Hoa* and the *Kinh* people.

Whether this optimism is actually reflected in the population remains to be seen. The presence of such a museum indicates that there is a desire for the *người Hoa* to be accepted and fully recognised as part of the Vietnamese nation. At a certain level, the Peoples' Committee of the city demonstrates this acceptance; yet the presence of the Chinese Division also suggests that there needs to be an effort to integrate the Chinese community. That they require separate representation within the city may be telling of a special membership, one that, again, sets the community apart in the eyes of the nation.

The members of the Chinese community I interviewed have had different

experiences with the alternating periods of acceptance and hostility in Vietnam, particularly those who were born in China and were first generation migrants. Mr Ly (HCMC) migrated to Vietnam when he was a child, but left for the United States when he was 33 years old immediately following reunification (1975) because he was uncertain about the nation's political and economic situation, which he felt was unpredictable and potentially volatile. In the late 1990s he began returning regularly in order to maintain ties with relatives, and assist them with their business. Since then, Mr Ly has preferred to do business in Vietnam. As he noted, "it is easier to do business here [than in the United States]. There are fewer regulations, and now it is easy for us [Chinese] to do business". He was also more comfortable working in Vietnam as he found business relationships easier to establish: "I have more friends here. They help me with my business, and I meet people [more easily] here. The relationships I build here are stronger". While he finds business partnerships between the *Hoa* and the *Kinh* different ("we have different philosophies when it comes to money! The Chinese save. The Vietnamese like to spend, they don't save."), he enjoys a mutually beneficial relationship with both communities. He negotiates their ethnic differences easily and uses them to his advantage. Mr Ly expects to spend his retirement travelling between Vietnam, the United States, and China.

Mr Ly's experience is not necessarily representative of the larger overseas Chinese community in Southeast Asia, but it provides an insight into the ways in which nationalisms are negotiated within the various communities. In some instances, Chinese heritage and history appear to have been adopted or appropriated by the host culture in a display of benign cooperation as part of a larger Asian community.

In Thailand, (again, as described in Chapter Two) the experience of the ethnic Chinese is not dissimilar to that of Vietnam, with the exception that the ethnic Chinese enjoyed close ties with Thai royalty. Despite the backlash over the Chinese presence and the political uncertainty in China that were – rightly or not – linked to riots and crime in the *Sampeng* neighbourhood, the respected Thai monarchy was still part-Chinese, and while a portion of the Chinese community did leave Thailand, many chose to stay and assimilate, picking up Thai as a main language and abandoning Chinese, as well as changing their surnames to reflect Thai-ness. This was in part aided by the closing of Chinese schools in Bangkok. Major resistance against the Chinese took form in the discrimination of Chinese businesses, via heavy taxation and strict regulation.

This discrimination and hostility toward the Chinese is missing in present-day Bangkok. Although the migrant Chinese who remained in Thailand have changed their surnames and assimilated into the local community, there is now no harm in revealing a Chinese (*chin*) background. In fact, many of the Thai people I have met in the course of my fieldwork in Bangkok enthusiastically offered up details of their Chinese ancestry as soon as I explained my research to them. The eagerness with which they claimed their Chinese lineage was an interesting phenomenon. Mr Pheng (Bangkok), for example, declared, "I am Chinese too! My grandfather was Chinese!", and later, "I am proud to be Chinese!" It appeared that having Chinese ancestors was a mark of pride, perhaps after decades of hiding their ethnic background as part of the assimilation into Thai-ness, there is a relief in being able to express it. Many of the informants were also keen to display their knowledge of the Thai-Chinese involvement in Bangkok, and claim an association

with the Thai monarchy by informing me that the Thai royalty were also part-Chinese. It is unclear whether Mr Pheng is as exuberant about his Chinese background with Thai people as he was with me; however, our interview was held in a crowded coffee-shop, and he did not seem to care, nor mind, that people overheard our conversation.

Chinatown in Bangkok is also a much-celebrated part of the city. As seen in Chapter Four, the fact that it is a *Chinatown* is much advertised. Signs and symbols clearly label the landscape, and the neighbourhood features prominently in tourist literature. In this sense, the conspicuous Chineseness of Chinatown is not dissimilar from the pride with which my interviewees declare their own Chineseness. Nationalism in Bangkok does not appear to preclude an additional identity (that of being Chinese). Like the landscape, in the present, it seems to be something that is celebrated.

Chinatown walking tours include the various temples, Chinese associations and the Chinese-language schools that centre the Chinese community in the neighbourhood. The Pei Ing Public School that was established in 1920 began as a Chinese school catering to the ethnic Chinese population in Sampeng at that time. The school was eventually placed under the authority of the Thai Ministry of Education following efforts to assimilate the Chinese, and Chinese-language (particularly Mandarin, in the wake of the nationalist sentiment following the Chinese Revolution in China in 1911), and then closed during World War II (see Van Roy, 2007). Towards the end of the twenty-first century, regulations on Chinese-language instruction were loosened, and although it still follows the Thai curriculum, the school has regained its leading role in Chinese-language education, and still plays a central role in the Chinese community.

Recognition of the school and its important role in the Chinatown community is a reflection of the way Chineseness is accepted in the Bangkok community, and as a. integral part of Thailand. There is heavy emphasis on the co-operation and close alliance between the Thai-Chinese and the local Thai community. Ms Ma (Bangkok), who managed the Cantonese *Kwong Siew* association and oversaw the temple, was also a Chinese teacher. She taught Mandarin in the school attached to the association, and remembers when she had to stop teaching. She felt that maintaining the continuation of Chinese languages in the community was important, but it was more crucial to obey the law. When the regulations were lifted, she was happy to return to teaching. It seems clear that in the present, Chinese involvement in the history of Thailand and Bangkok is not hidden or concealed, but expressed as an integral part of Thai community. Ms Ma felt that in the present there was no discrimination against the Chinese: "the government treats the Chinese the same as [they treat] the Thai – especially the Thai-born Chinese. We are the same". The historical Thai tradition of absorbing Chinese people and influence into their system has resumed after the Thai nationalist movement of the mid-twentieth century. The drive to assimilate is less intense than before, as the ethnic Chinese are still a part of the local community, but there is no need to deny or conceal their Chinese heritage in favour of completely adopting a Thai one.

The Bangkok example of Thai-Chinese nationalism is a highly inclusive one, possibly following from the long tradition of integrating the overseas Chinese community into the Thai nation. The inclusive example set by the early Thai monarchy carries forward into the present, with a brief period of discrimination and focused assimilation in

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the past century; and Chinese ethnicity is not seen as a departure from Thai nationality. Chineseness and Chinatown appears to be celebrated in Bangkok; the difference offered by the Chinatown landscape is one that demonstrates the tolerance of the Thai nation for diversity. Chinatown is as much a part of the nationscape in Bangkok as any other part, as is the history of the overseas Chinese. As Ms Ma noted, "Yaowarat is considered [progressive] and is seen as the 'head of the dragon' ", indicating that business in Chinatown and the Chinese-led economy lead the Thai economy.

The contemporary position of the Chinese community in Rangoon in the present day can be compared with those in Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City. The older Chinese respondents I interviewed in Rangoon commented on their limited opportunities for setting up businesses and working government jobs in the present day due to their lack of full citizenship, regardless of the fact that they are Burmese. There is also a noted difference in the sense of belonging between the older and younger Chinese-Burmese. The younger generation of ethnic Chinese do not feel as discriminated against as the older generation does. As Mr Ye (Rangoon) noted, "I am Chinese – my father is Chinese, but my culture is Myanmar." He chews betel, despite his father's disapproval of the practice. The older generation of Chinese migrants regard betel-chewing as something the Chinese do not do, and that sets them apart from the indigeneous Burmese.

Despite their persistent presence in the city, the ethnic Chinese do not appear to pose a threat to Burmese nationalism at this point in time. The low profile kept by the Chinese community is mirrored in the physical landscape of Chinatown. While there are more storefronts and signs in the neighbourhood displaying Chinese characters than in

any other area in the city, as Mr Can (Rangoon) mentions, "Chinatown doesn't look like China – there is too much mix. Last time there were a lot of Chinese signboards; now all the signs have English and Myanmar [language] only". In his opinion, contemporary Chinatown is completely different from Chinatown in the past, where a lot of the cultural street life and businesses were more obviously Chinese in nature. Working in the Cantonese temple on Latha Street, he feels that the Chinese festivals and celebrations are much subtler in the present than they used to be. The reason he gives is that "people are afraid"; of whom, he doesn't explain, but there is an indication that the Chinese community maintains inconspicuousness in an effort to avoid the attention of the nation-state. As such, the Chinese are cautious, but likely do not threaten Burmese nationalism because they tend to maintain a low profile. Chinese street festivals do still occur, and in the period running up to the Lunar New Year, the streets are still filled with stores selling festival paraphernalia. In comparing the past to the present, Mr Can feels that the celebrations of today are muted compared with the louder, more exuberant festivals of the past.

Mr Can also remembers when "all the signboards [on the storefronts] were all in Burmese" immediately following independence. While still under colonial rule, he recalls that most of the signboards in Chinatown were Chinese. As in recent years, Burma has been opening up to foreign investment from China, there are now signboards with more languages on them, most notably a combination of English and Burmese. Chinese is reappearing on the signboards of the Chinatown storefronts, although, according to Mr Can, not in the same quantity as prior to independence. For the more enterprising of the

China-born interviewees who had lived in Rangoon through the difficult decades of discrimination, the relaxation of economic regulation affords them opportunities to act as consultants for the businesses that are entering the country. At the same time, they find it hard to identify with the foreign Chinese businessmen, as they have lived too long away, and have become too different. Their roles as linkages between Burma and China are minor, simply jobs that keep them going. Unfortunately, tight regulations still mean that many of them cannot start businesses on their own. According to Mr Lao-Lee (Rangoon), " we [the Chinese] can only start businesses here if we partner with a Myanmar person. Otherwise, no. The government will stop you". Still, they have found a niche here, as Mr Nam (Rangoon) opines, their ability to communicate in the Burmese language and in the Chinese dialects gives them a specialised job that nobody else in Rangoon is able to do – many of them work in the import-export business, facilitating trade with China and Taiwan.

Negotiating nationalism in Rangoon in the context of the overseas Chinese community is markedly different from the nation-building exercises in Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City. Due to a number of factors, such as the comparatively smaller proportion of the Chinese in terms of the overall indigenous, migrant, and colonial population, as well as the relatively low profile of the community in the city, the Chinese in Rangoon do not appear to pose much difficulty to the nationalism and identity of the Burmese. The low profile was facilitated by the harsh regulations placed upon business initiatives led by the Chinese. Clearly, some of the Chinese community have worked around this issue by finding Burmese partners with whom to start businesses. However, it seems as though

ethnic Chineseness is generally played down by the younger interviewees. While acknowledging their Chinese lineage, they have by-and-large assimilated into the Burmese national identity. Mr Ye, who was 23 years old, had no interest in speaking Hokkien, nor learning any other Chinese language despite having Chinese parents who spoke Hokkien and Burmese at home. He speaks only Burmese. He takes part in Chinese festivals, but only because his parents do. Ms Yun, who is 26, spent her childhood in Mandalay and learnt Mandarin there, but has since lost much proficiency in the language after having moved to Rangoon. She has little interaction with other ethnic Chinese in Rangoon, and married a Kachin man. She would like to maintain her Chineseness and culture, which she felt she was losing, but saw no real way to do so, nor any practical need. For her, Chineseness was linked to the past, something to do with her roots, but no real impact on her current life. It seems that, to a certain extent, Chineseness is fading with the younger generation of ethnic Chinese who do not feel that it is crucial to maintain it. In the landscape, as well, where the signboards display fewer Chinese characters than before, instead now switching to English, Chineseness is subdued. Where the landscape is not clearly differentiated, nationalism is much more easily implemented.

The Global Nationscape: Chinatown and the World in the City

In exploring the nature of globalities in the nation, I begin with Appadurai's *ethnoscape* (1996), in which people and communities carry a portion of their landscape with them as they travel, mediated through their identities. These mobile identities negotiate complex relationships with the national landscapes of the places and localities that they meet with

and settle into. These interactions vary in scale, and produce new, hybrid identities, as well as complex cultural politics that take hold within cities, forcing them to negotiate new meanings as global and multicultural networks and connections are formed. As explored in Chapter Five, diasporas tend to (re)establish nationhoods. The Chinese communities in Southeast Asian cities are no different, tending to recreate new nations as Anderson's imagined communities travel the landscape. Nationscapes as a result become global, holding within them more, and other, national identities than originally imagined within their own boundaries. The presence of such ethnoscapes as Chinatown thus becomes representative of the idea of the world in the city, where cities are global spaces as a result of the diversity of nationhoods sited within them. Chinatown in the context of Appadurai's ethnoscapes would include the shifting landscapes that the Chinese overseas carry with them as they move across the world and maintain networks that create a community that not only features China, but also much of the rest of the world.

Following this, I consider Appadurai's *ideoscapes*, where ideas and images constitute some of the global flows that are translated through and across national boundaries. Chinatowns can be seen as ideas that have proliferated across borders, having been constructed and inhabited in similar ways. The rest of Appaduari's -scapes (*mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, and particularly *financescapes*) are no less important or relevant, but in the framing of this section, I will concentrate on the way culture and ideas come to rest in the nation via these specific -scapes. I also examine the way globalising forces act to reinforce the specific localities of the spaces that they settle in.

The way that the presence of Chinatowns in cities signals the occupation of

another nation (China) within that space is important. In their representation of another space which is also a nation, Chinatown space embodies a notion of a nation within a nation, that is simultaneously linked with other countries-within-countries. These complex dislocalities are illustrated in the idea that Chinatowns reflect the same kind of landscape in different localities. The *idea* of Chinatowns as *the* location where the overseas Chinese have settled, identical landscapes in differing cities and countries asserts the argument that Chinatowns are inherently global landscapes.

Chinatown neighbourhoods tend to reference other places directly. In Singapore, there are place names such as Amoy Street, Chin Chew Street, Nankin Street, Pekin Street, Hokien Street, and China Street. In Rangoon, Mahabandoola Road, one of the main streets in the Chinese quarters was previously known as *Guang Dong Da Jie* (Canton Boulevard), and Shwedagon Pagoda Road was previously known as China Street. The naming of these streets clearly recalls the sources of the people who inhabited the area, and suggests the idea of cities and places in China at this particular street, this specific locale.

The repetition of Chinatown landscapes in different cities illustrates its globality. Structures such as the "friendship" gates that are common in North American and European Chinatowns are mirrored in the Singapore and Bangkok Chinatowns. The Bangkok Chinatown gate at the Odeon Circle, at the confluence of Yaowarat, Charoen Krung, and Wat Trimit Roads, is a large, prominent structure declaring without a doubt that one is entering Chinatown. Erected as a symbol of unity between the Thai and Chinese communities in Bangkok in 1999, the gate features Thai script on one side, and

Chinese on the other.

In Singapore, however, the gate is less prominent. Typical Chinatown "friendship" gates, particuarly in North America and Europe, tend to be elaborate, complete with Chinese characters announcing the name of the area (variations of "Chinatown" in Chinese, for example 唐人街 *tangrenjie*, or "tang people street", occasionally "Heaven's gate"), or Chinese proverbs declaring prosperity and righteousness. The one gate I found in Singapore's Chinatown, cloistered between the Chinatown Complex and an apartment building, just off Keong Saik Road displays a plaque that simply reads, in English, "Chinatown Complex". It is, in itself, quite unremarkable, and there is no sign or indication of when it was erected, or who it was built by.

There is no Chinatown gate in Ho Chi Minh City, nor in Rangoon. Considering that these gates appear to be Orientalist constructs featuring heavily in non-Asian urban contexts, it is perhaps naive to expect them in the Chinatowns of Southeast Asia. Yet these gates are both symbolic of a collaboration and understanding between host and guest communities, as in Bangkok, as well as a prominent indication of difference in culture and landscape within a city, as seen in the North American and European contexts. It functions as a categorising label or a signpost that signals a border, or a break within the urban landscape. On the one hand, the presence of the Chinatown gates forge an association that links disparate landscapes and communities together; on the other hand, the gates also announce a discontinuity in the local urban space. The lack of gates in Ho Chi Minh City and in Rangoon, and the absence of a *significant* gate in Singapore suggests that it may be unnecessary to delineate the urban landscape so abruptly and

clearly, although in Ho Chi Minh City and Rangoon it is possible that the Chinese are simply trying not to attract undue attention, and to maintain a low profile. The ethnicity of the neighbourhood is seen as a continuation of the city itself, rather than an anomaly that needs to be physically identified. As such, without the gates, the globality of Chinatown and the Chinese community in these Southeast Asian cities are internalised, even as the presence of the gates represent an acknowledgement of the global linkages that Chinatowns bear.

Chinatowns are also linked through the networks of Chinese associations that are often situated in the Chinatown landscape, in conjunction with Buddhist and Taoist temples. The temples and associations are affiliated through dialects, or provinces and villages in China. The major dialect groups in Southeast Asia feature some of the prominent associations in the four cities, such as the Hokkien *Huay Guan*, and the Cantonese *Wui Koon*. These associations feature globally – not only are the major ones often represented in many cities all over the world, they actively cultivate branches in different cities, maintaining contact with visits and reports, and allowing the Chinese diaspora to communicate and keep in touch through activities (Sinn, 1997).

These associations have historically served to provide transborder networks for the overseas Chinese to keep in contact with family back in China. They supported the community by providing social services such as free or highly-subsidised medical aid, funeral arrangements, and education. By providing links through religious sources such as the temples, the associations also provided a means to ensure that the community was able to worship and maintain their faith no matter how far from home they were.

Additionally, as recounted by Mr Saw, these temples were often erected in thanksgiving to the gods for safe journeys over the sea as the Chinese migrants travelled between home and new land.

The position of the Chinese community in the cities of Southeast Asia also represents a globalising connection. Offering their services as merchants and traders from the precolonial period, to being intermediaries during colonialism, the overseas Chinese have functioned as agents facilitating the structure of the global network over these cities. In the present-day, it is the Chinese businesses in Chinatowns such as Bangkok that offer linkages to the international market. Mr Pheng, for example, runs a coffee trading company in Bangkok, importing coffee from Vietnam and exporting it to other countries in Southeast Asia.

Many of the overseas Chinese maintain transnational lives, continuously crossing borders to run businesses in some countries while supporting their family elsewhere. Mr Ly lives such a life, helping out at a family restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City even as his own family – wife and children – remains in the United States. Although past retirement age, he prefers to spend his time in Vietnam at the restaurant. His friends are in Ho Chi Minh City, and he enjoys the Vietnamese-Chinese culture in District 6. In his opinion, relationships are easier to come by in Vietnam – he finds doing business in Vietnam much easier than in the United States, and making business contacts and networking is more manageable in Vietnam, as well. He relishes his transnational life, appreciating his freedom and opportunity to travel in and out of the country. Mr Ly describes his family as global, "my children, they are so American, they come to Vietnam like tourists. But I still

remind them that they're Chinese, and they speak to me in Cantonese."

The presence of Chinatown and the Chinese community in these cities do not merely provide a global network of finances (Appadurai's *financescapes*), but also a global accretion of culture within a locality. What Chinatown offers is a landscape that is reminiscient of *other* places and a community that references *other* communities. The attraction of the Chinatown landscape is that in its difference it offers an experience of a culture, or a city, or another country outside of this particular locale. Further, Chinatowns are symbolic of the struggle of the Chinese diaspora to make sense of their hybrid identities. As a global people performing similar actions in different urban landscapes over the world, making home and meaning out of space, the experience of Chinatown crosses borders and grounds global experiences into specific localities. As such, the effect of Chinatown and the Chinese community on the nationscape is a globalising one.

Case Study Singapore: Placing Chinese Identities in the Multicultural Nation

With this case study I situate Chinatown in the larger context of Singapore. I ask, how does Chinatown inform Chineseness in Singapore? What does it mean to be Chinese in Singapore, where the majority (74 per cent, Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010) of Singaporeans are ethnically Chinese? And what is the purpose of Chinatown in a city and nation-state where, again, the majority of the population identifies as Chinese? This is a pertinent question as Chinatowns have generally been products of places where the ethnic Chinese population is a minority. Clearly, Singapore is the exception. In this case, then, I also explore the ways in which being in Chinatown, or having a Chinatown to relate to,

informs the Chineseness of the population.

In this section I pose the nation's concept of racial harmony against the potential irony of what Chinatown is supposed to be. How does Singapore deal with the diasporic space of Chinatown? Chinatown is – particularly in Singapore, and akin to concepts of Chineseness and identity – a dynamic, constantly shifting thing. Studies (see Henderson, 2000 for example) have shown the ways in which the image of Singapore's Chinatown is constantly being conserved, replanned, and remade by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and other government-led planning organisations. There is clearly a particular view of Chinatown and a top-down concept of Chineseness that is to be portrayed officially in Singapore. These can be found in the official language of the tourist pomotion material, in school textbooks, and the carefully orchestrated management of the urban landscape by the redevelopment authority and the conservation master plans. However, there are also on-the-ground perceptions and understandings of Chineseness and Chinatown that the local community has come to identify with the space, and within themselves. These are produced from the actual lived experiences of the people and the community, in their everyday lives.

From Singapore's National Day rallies, given by the prime minister every year, we find the nation's policy on the ideal of harmonious multi-racialism: the idea that the four main "races", Chinese, Malay, Indian, and "Other", can exist together in a harmonious whole with no conflict between the groups.

> We have a few restraints because we cannot afford to take chance [sic] with race and religion but by and large Singaporeans are free to engage, to talk, to mobilise, to influence one another, to do nearly everything...
> There is one remaining restriction and that is on outdoor demonstrations.

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We still do not allow this and our concern is law and order and security. It comes back to race and religion again because one incident could undermine our racial harmony and confidence in Singapore.
I think we should allow our outdoor public demonstrations, also at the Speakers' Corner still subject to basic rules of law and order, still stay away from race, language and religion.

(Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, National Day Rally 2008)

Critical to our long term success ... is maintaining our social cohesion and particularly looking after our racial and religious harmony.
[T]he most visceral and dangerous fault line is race and religion.
We have made a lot of progress over the last 40 years in building our harmony and cohesion.
We have integrated our people. We have enabled all communities to move ahead. We have built a stronger sense of Singaporean identity ...
I did not feel that Singapore had completely arrived and we still have to be careful because racial and religious conflicts can still pull us apart.
We can never take our racial and religious harmony for granted.

(Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, National Day Rally 2009)

It is clear that harmonious multi-racialism is key to order (and order is key to success, perhaps) in Singapore. The national day rally occurs annually, which highlights the importance and significance of these comments on how critical multi-racialism is to maintaining a socially stable nation. However, Prime Minister Lee contends, the way to successfully maintain racial harmony in the nation is to not talk about it, as race and religion appear to be sensitive issues. Permitting discussion of racial and religious issues may potentially undermine social security in Singapore.

Yet, the promotion and continual existence of heavily racialised landscapes like Chinatown persist in the harmoniously multi-cultural nation where discussions of race and religion are discouraged. In this context, maintaining such a landscape appears to directly contest and contrast the directives from the state. While multiculturalism exists by maintaining difference in a clear and open manner rather than ignoring difference

altogether and feigning its nonexistence, does the conservation and cultivation of clearly-marked racial spaces defy these directives? How can a society not discuss race and difference when it is present in very obvious ways in the environment? Can a society truly be multicultural if difference is not talked about?

The focus on race and religion at the National Day Rallies raises many questions. There are inherent difficulties in the nation. One of the main issues is that the ratio of Chinese to the other "races" is highly skewed, with the large majority being Chinese, 15 per cent Malay, and 9.2 per cent Indian (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010). The presence of a Chinatown landscape appears superfluous in a country where the visible ethnic majority population is Chinese. Equating landscape with society can be a sensitive negotiation where it is important that difference is seen and noted (since the majority of the Singaporean population is ethnically Chinese, would that not make the entire country Chinatown?), yet not deeply considered, discussed, or freely examined – and in fact, discussion about this is actively discouraged.

All of my interview respondents live, work, or have lived in Chinatown at some point of time in their lives. They all self-identify as ethnic Chinese. Although each seems to have a slightly different definition of what "being Chinese" means, for most of them, Chinese is a racial identification with which they were born, generally by virtue of having Chinese parents, that is, parents who were born in China, or who themselves had parents who were from China.

In previous studies, Yeoh and Kong (1994) (see also Kong and Yeoh, 1994; Kong and Yeoh, 1997; Yeoh and Kong, 1996b, for related studies) have discussed in great detail

the way national identity has been constructed through ritual and spectacle, and the way landscapes are shaped in order to construct the nation. Further, they discuss how the notion of place is used to build history, hostalgia, and heritage. Kong and Yeoh have laid out the groundwork to the complex, multi-layered landscapes of meaning in Chinatown. In this case study, however, I take the issue further: what has Chinatown done to, and for, Chineseness in Singapore, and how is the landscape relevant to the nation?

Yeoh and Kong tease out from Singapore's 1984 conservation plan (URA) that Chinatown "is a civic asset, 'a common bond place' for 'Singaporeans living in outlying new towns' " (1994: 29). Calling Chinatown a common bond place normalises the ethnicity of Singaporeans – that they all have roots in the heritage represented by that particular ethnic space. It also appears to exclude every Singaporean but the Chinese. In this sense, the conservation and maintenance of Chinatown can be seen as a divisive action.

Chinatown is a racialised landscape. This is clear from its formal creation in the 1822 Raffles Town Plan, and then again in URA's 1986 Conservation Master Plan. The Raffles Town Plan created ethnically segregated residential zones (cf. Henderson, 2000). It formalised the Chinese kampong, which later became Chinatown; the Chulia kampong, the now-defunct Indian village, at that time located just north of Chinatown; Kampong Glam, designated for the Malays; and a smaller area for the Arabs. These neighbourhoods were not completely new. The plan reinforced the racial majority that already inhabited these areas.

The Conservation Masterplan for Chinatown included these objectives:

To retain and restore buildings of historical and architectural significance;
To improve the general physical environment and to introduce appropriate
new features to further enhance the identity of the area;
To retain and enhance ethnic-based activities while consolidating the area
with new and compatible activites (URA, 1986).

Both the 1822 Town Plan and the 1986 Master Plan involved full-scale planning

of the communities on the island. Since then there have been smaller-scaled plans that

involve particular neighbourhoods on their own. One of the key ideas from the objectives

involves enhancing "the identity of the area" and "ethnic-based activities". In the context

of Chinatown, this constitutes intensifying the Chineseness of the landscape, promoting

and emphasising the relationship that the neighbourhood has with the ethnic group.

These objectives produce two effects; firstly, they ignore the presence of other

ethnicities that are located in the area and their involvement with the community (see, for

example, the Sri Mariamman Hindu temple in the middle of Chinatown that serves the

Tamil Hindu population, and the Jamae Mosque that serves a Muslim population);

second, they homogenise the Chinese experience and the history of the landscape.

Chinatown features, and has always featured, prominently in tourism material.

The Uniquely Singapore website (now defunct, but similar information can be found on

the New Asia Singapore website[1]; the new, official STB website featuring Chinatown[2]

does not display any history about the cultural landscape) published a succinct paragraph

summarising the history of Singapore's Chinatown. This paragraph has also been used

and reproduced by many other Singapore tourism and Chinatown-related websites.

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[1] http://www.newasia-singapore.com/places_to_go/chinatown.html
[2] http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/browse/see-and-do/culture-and-heritage/cultural-precincts/chinatown.html

Singapore's Chinatown evolved around 1821 when the first Chinese junk arrived from Xiamen, Fujian province in China. The passengers, all men, set up home around the south of the Singapore River which is known today as Telok Ayer. Chinatown's local name – Niu Che Shui (Bullock Cart Water) arose from the fact each household at that time had to collect fresh water from the wells in Ann Siang Hill and Spring Street, using bullock-drawn carts (Uniquely Singapore Website[3]).

Two issues arise from this text. First, that Chinatown historically and geographically is the place of the Chinese. Chinatown's Chineseness is placed in time and space. It is historical in that it was the main settlement of the Chinese at that point in time; and geographical in that a large community of Chinese migrants made Telok Ayer (one of the four main neighbourhoods in Chinatown) their home. Chinatown's historical construction has a specific history, as its geographical construction has a specific location.

The second issue is that Chinatown is a *Chinese* place. Endowing the landscape in official language with the name *niu che shui*, specifically in Mandarin Chinese, rather than any of the other Chinese dialects that are commonly used in Singapore, is an important point to note. All the interview respondents in Singapore noted that the common Chinese dialect used in Chinatown, until the recent decades, was Cantonese, not Mandarin, even if the speakers were not ethnically Cantonese. It was the common dialect used for transaction among the discrete dialect groups in the area. As such, the landscape has a particular Chineseness, a specific Chinese identity placed upon it. This is not much different from Singapore's general Chinese identity. The state has attempted to homogenise the Chinese population by requiring that all Chinese Singaporeans learn

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[3] http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what_to_see/ethnic_quarters/chinatown.html

Mandarin as a mother tongue, rather than their actual ethnic dialects. Chinatown is therefore, a very particular kind of *Chinese*. There is a very simple, almost monolithic Chineseness to Chinatown, as the complexity and the conflict between different Chinese identities have been erased and papered over.

The attempt at homogenising Chinese heritage in Singapore goes further with the Chinese Heritage Centre on Pagoda Street (Figure 6.1). The Centre is a museum that relates the history of the Chinese arriving in Singapore and their settlement in the now-Chinatown. Descriptions and illustrations present their way of life, and how the Chinese community functioned at that point in time. Within the restored shophouses, the centre also contains a life-sized model of a historically accurate old shophouse, complete with installations of the compartmentalised cubicles that families lived in, and artefacts that they owned. The centre also chronicles life-stories of the Chinese who lived in the area during the pre-conservation period, and presents a brief account of the demographics of the Chinese migrants in Singapore during the colonial period.

The museum functions to distil the experience of the Chinese community from a certain period in Singapore's history, and presents it in an attractive and easily comprehensible way to tourists and visitors. As collections of histories often do, the Centre simplifies, and "Disneyfies" (Zukin, 1995), the Chinatown experience. "Disneyfication", as Zukin notes, refers to the (re)fashioning of landscapes into theme park-like spaces using methods such as "historic preservation, imitation, or imaginative recreation" (1995: 69). In this manner, the landscape is fashioned for the quick and easy consumption of the casual viewer. One does not need to spend a lot of time in the space
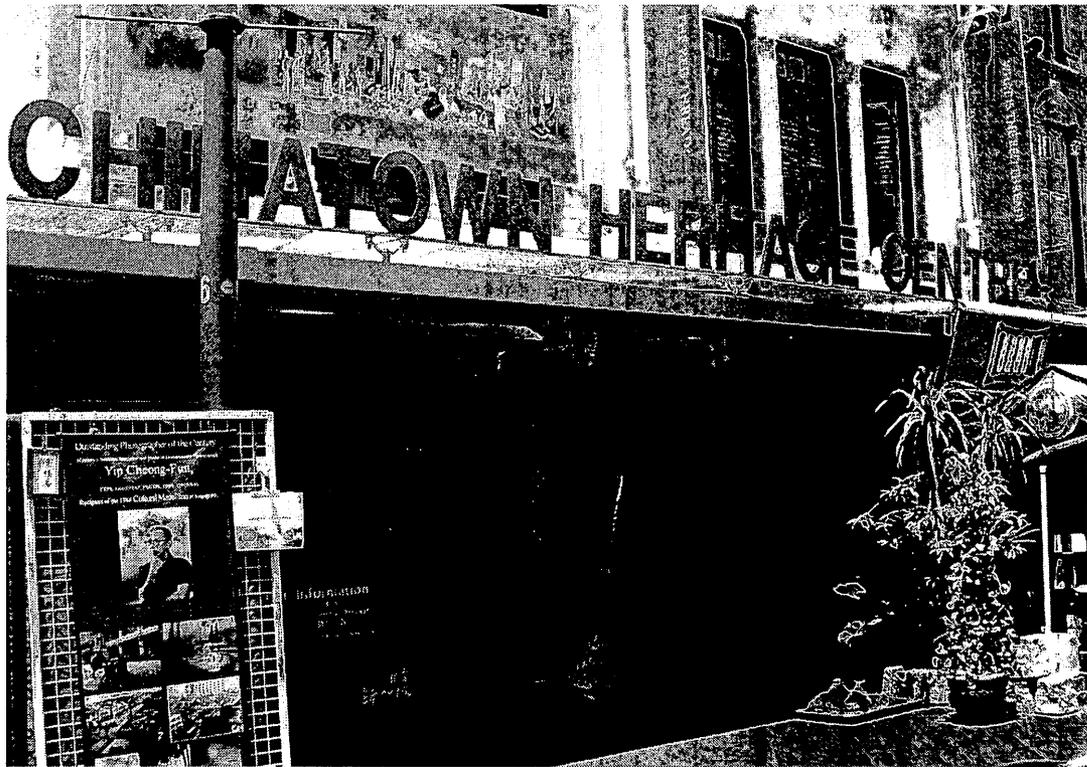
Figure 6.1: Chinatown Heritage Centre in Singapore

in order to understand and experience it. As such, the complexities of the neighbourhood

and community are left out. As a repository of history and heritage, as well as an exhibit

for the curious visitors, the Centre offers a pleasant, if superficial, summary of a

particular Chinatown experience (of which there are many more – see Chapters Two and

Four).

Similarly, the physical urban landscape of Chinatown (outlined in Chapter Four),

per the Conversation Plan, has been carefully conserved to retain and accentuate the

trappings of "Chinese culture". Close attention is paid to preserving the supposedly

authentic architectural styles, ornamentation, and original colour schemes of the buildings

to create a genuine likeness that accentuates the area's urban history. With the

implementation of attractions like the food street, where itinerant-looking food stalls are set up on a street converted into a pedestrian mall, there is an effort to create a reproduction of "old-time" Chinatown. The urban structure has been deliberately landscaped to reflect particular perspectives of its past.

As a result of the careful *culturing* of the landscape and the particular histories exhibited in the museum, Chinatown as a Chinese place has had a specific Chinese identity placed upon it, to the loss, and detriment, of other, and perhaps more complex, Chinese identities. This may be desirable for multiculturalism in Singapore, however, as the simplified culture and history of Chineseness in the nation-state is presented in a relatively straightfoward and easily comprehensible manner. Chinatown, as a "Disneyfied" representation of Chinesness in Singapore, is almost trivialised, rendering it benign and unthreatening, as a result helping to maintain harmonious multiculturalism in the city.

Yet this is not a completely ideal situation for most of the interview respondents. There is a tendency to compare Chinatown in its present incarnation to the past, which is endowed with idealised memories of greater authenticity and Chineseness. While the respective redevelopment and heritage boards have, to an extent, accomplished the conservation and retention of the Chinese history and identity of Chinatown in its physical form, to local users of the landscape, contemporary, "new" Chinatown is often a mere reminder of what "old" Chinatown is assumed to have been like.

> Even when I was there it had become a bit touristy. There were these refinements – the older shops are gone, and what replaces them are the souvenir shops. I would say it's superficial – our [Chinese] history and culture are very shallow in the first place. The only time [Chinatown] is true

to itself is Chinese New Year – and not now, but years ago, that was the only time when it was truly being Chinatown, with the noise and the crowd (Mr Chris).

I prefer Chinatown the way it used to be. It was a lot more fun. There were special things, like sweets, you could only find in Chinatown. Now it's changed, it's clean and boring. We had so many things, it was so interesting. There is less Chinese feeling [ambience] here. Chinese culture. A lot of tourists only. Maybe during Chinese New Year – but [locals] only come for the crowd, they don't buy anything. Just for the festivities. It's not the same as before, the crowded feeling. I don't really know why. It's not the same (Ms Hong).

Mr Chris and Ms Hong made comparisons between their experiences of Chinatown in the past and the present. They both addressed the ambience of place by noting the contrasts using opposing words such as "clean" and "boring" against "noise" and "crowd". Ms Hong focussed on the composition of the people who visit Chinatown: where the crowd was previously made of local people, it is now largely composed of tourists. Mr Chris described the way in which present-day Chinatown appears to cater to tourists at the cost of the seemingly more authentic old shops and businesses that served the neighbourhood. Something had been sacrificed to make way for the current incarnation of Chinatown. Further, by using the word *superficial*, he questioned the authenticity of the cultural neighbourhood, and makes a connection between the superficiality of Chinese history and culture in Singapore with its corresponding ethnic landscape. Even more, in discussing the way in which Chinatown can be "true" to itself, he seemed to think that there was a certain *Chineseness* inherent in Chinese Singaporeans that is not represented by Chinatown in its present incarnation.

Both respondents also mentioned the Chinese New Year celebrations in Chinatown, and they reflected upon the festival in the same ways. While recognising that

during the Lunar New Year, Chinatown and the people who visit it perform a spectacle that closely resembles what the area used to be like, they acknowledged that it is "not the same". Performing heritage and history does not make up for the meanings and practices that are lost to conservation and simplification. The performance is a reproduction, and cannot replace practice. It is inauthentic. Chinatown is thus reduced to a memorial commemorating the past.

Mr Chan reiterated the theme that Chinatown has changed: "Chinatown is pretty much the same as the rest of Singapore. It's not the same as before". This sentiment is revealing, too, in his assessment of the landscape and the people. It introduces a conundrum: the respondent either feels that Chinatown is similar to the rest of Singapore, in which it is multi-racial, mixed, and modern; or he feels that Singapore is like Chinatown: largely Chinese. In Mr Chan's opinion then, Chinatown *can* be representative of Singapore, because it is does not represent a different space that is not related to the rest of the city. Where Chinatown used to be a landscape distinct from the rest of the nation, a landscape that conspicuously embodies difference, it is now a marker of sameness and homogeneity in the country.

Ms Lee was clearer about the differences in Chinatown between past and present and how it had lost its identity over time: "Chinatown isn't very Chinese anymore, because the people here now aren't like me". Ms Lee identified as a specific type of Chinese, one that was perhaps more authentic to the local Chinese population that would inhabit Chinatown. She associated the Chinatown Chinese with people she was familiar with, and who were similar to herself, as people who primarily speak a Chinese dialect

and who are local in a vernacular Singaporean way. This sentiment was echoed in Mr
Chan's parting thoughts, "the younger generation [of Chinese] is less Chinese than the
older generation, particularly those who have moved away, or studied overseas, and those
of you who only speak English". The loss of the vernacular Chinese dialects that were
spoken in the heydays of Chinatown is felt keenly by the older generation of Chinese
who still inhabit the neighbourhood. There is a sense of connection between the speaking
of the various Chinese dialects and the real Chinatown. The present-day English- and
Mandarin-speaking Chinatown is not considered authentic. If younger generations of
Singaporean Chinese are considered less Chinese than the older generations, then the
newer incarnation of Chinatown is also less Chinese. There is a sense that the landscape
echoes the identity of the people.

Mr Goh offered an analysis of the way the conservation and modernisation of
Chinatown has failed to retain an authentic Chineseness, and that the overdevelopment of
a particular ethnic identity has ironically worked against the maintenance of a genuine
heritage, "I think STB (Singapore Tourism Board) and NHB (National Heritage Board)
wanted to revitalise the place, but I think they overthought the whole thing". Mr Goh was
of the opinion that neighbourhoods, in order to remain authentic, needed to develop
organically, without the overbearing structure of intense and too-detailed planning. He
noted that with the establishment of new towns and housing estates outside of the central
city area in the latter half of the twenty-first century, many long-established families and
businesses had left the neighbourhood, and the planning and conservation authorities had
acted to prevent the emptying-out of this downtown location. However, in working to

attract people, both local Singaporeans as well as tourists, back to the place, Chinatown has become an artificial landscape based upon a caricature of local Chinese heritage and history (full of sound and fury but ultimately signifying nothing much).

Ultimately, what Chinatown in Singapore is remains ambiguous. In the grand scheme of propagating and maintaining a Chinese identity, Chinatown's reconstructed heritage is a vague monument to nostalgia and memory. The implications are complex, however: in the larger context of race in Singapore, Chinatown, as an urban landscape, a bastion of Chinese ethnicity, exists as a non-threat to the harmonious multi-culturalism in the nation. The rendering of the landscape into a theme park makes it toothless as a marker of difference in the city. It remains a landscape that has little consequence on the mixed-ethnic nature of the rest of the nation's landscape, despite being part of the roots of the large majority of (Chinese) Singaporeans. As harmonious multi-culturalism is integral to building the postcolonial national identity of Singapore, Chinatown as a superficial landscape of simplified Chineseness fits well into the landscape that offers little discussion of race and religion.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered Chinatown and the Chinese community in the context of the postcolonial nation. I have looked at the way Chinatown and the overseas Chinese identities have negotiated the nation-building exercises of the host cities. Some Chinatown communities have been openly and publically accepted into the local community, such as in Bangkok. Others have been integrated into the nation in much

more subtle ways, such as in Ho Chi Minh City, and in Rangoon, where the Chinese are given a tiered citizenship. Still other communities, such as in Singapore, have presented a curiously ambiguous identity, where multiculturalism is celebrated, but conversations about difference are discouraged.

I have also explored Chinatown as a global empire. Nonini and Ong (1997) have referred to the Chinese diaspora as empire, based on the power of their capital economies. The overseas Chinese are hardly the powerless refugees of forced diaspora and exile. In most places, power and capital are exercised by the overseas community, creating and bending Chinese spaces to their whim. The transnational experience of the Chinese community reflects the transnational nature of Chinatown, expanding the experience of space beyond national borders.

Chineseness in Southeast Asia straddles the spaces between the modern nation-state and the colonial. The negotiation of identities throughout the changing periods of the four nations' journey through colonialism and into nationalism helps to re-establish the place, position, and identity of Chinatown and its community in these cities. Like its people, whose identities are sites of differences, Chinatowns are also a site of differences. Chinatown can be simultaneously Chinese, a nation, a city, a neighbourhood, local yet global, foreign and familiar, inside and outside. It can be motherland, or new home; it can be home away from home, and tourist destination. It can be real yet inauthentic. It is at once representational, yet fictitious. It is within Chinatown that the overseas Chinese find and remake their identities; it is also through the migrant Chinese that Chinatown realises its multiple identities. Chinatown contributes to the nation by allowing it to by identified

through and against it; it further adds a globality to the nationscape.

Chapter 7
CONCLUSION

On the eve of every Lunar New Year that I lived in Singapore, I visited Chinatown as part

of an annual pilgrimage to the festivities that transform an entire city block of streets into

a pedestrian mall of colour, light, and sound. In the summer of 2003, I stood on a street in

Singapore's Chinatown watching a poorly-attended arts performance as part of my

Masters research on the performing arts in public spaces. It occurred to me that despite

the similarities in the two performances – one a massive festival of culture and

commerce, and the other a small theatre production that occupied a corner of the

neighbourhood, both producing no small amount of sound and sight – the contrasting

differences between the two events were significant. Chinatown is experienced

differently in separate contexts, different times of the year or of the day.

These personal experiences of Chinatown, in addition to experiences of other

Chinatowns in other cities around the world, have contributed to the questions that frame

and focus this dissertation. Further, the existence of Chinatowns in cities with large and

significant ethnic Chinese populations is a project requiring investigation. Where much of

the Chinese population is not confined solely to the Chinatown neighbourhoods, as in the

four research sites, what are the functions and purposes of the Chinatowns? What are the

implications of the representations of culture and identity that Chinatowns present? With

this research project I intended to initiate and extend conversations on Chinatowns: first,

to contribute with knowledge about Chinatowns that are little researched, or have yet to

be studied; and second, to explore new ways of thinking about Chinatowns. The diversity

inherent to urban areas stems from countless determinants; the regional specificity of

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Southeast Asia, in particular from historical and political factors such as colonialism, as well as its geographical context, is a significant influence on the development of these diversities.

I introduced this dissertation with a number of ideas about Chinatown. Central to these ideas is the idea that Chinatown is a large, complex field. It is intrinsically multi-faceted, and can be approached in a variety of ways, as shown through the wealth of existing literature. In Chapter One, I examined the theoretical concepts that underlie the themes in the dissertation. Chinatown has a highly recognisable place identity, one that is tied to ideas of heritage and concepts of nationhood and ethnicity. While Chinatown has been studied extensively through the framework of race (see Anderson, 1991), which is clearly a crucial component of Chinatown, in this dissertation I have focused on factors that contribute to a distinctive Chinatown identity and landscape. The concept of heritage is a significant factor in the production of a Chinatown identity through visible and tangible aspects of the physical landscape. Likewise, the concepts of home and diaspora, themselves interrelated, forge additional meanings in the geographies of Chinatown through imaginations of home and their influences on reproductions of these homes upon the landscape. The following concept of nationalism is equally significant as cities negotiate the meanings of the Chinatown identities within their nationscapes.

In Chapter Two I outlined the history of Chinese emigration. The main circumstance under which the Chinese travelled away from China is marked by the concept of sojourn – in which *emigration* was not conceived of, but travel away from homeland was always considered a temporary condition, and there was always the

intention of returning. Sojourn has been widely discussed in literature, following Wang's (1996) deliberation on the political implications of the term, particularly in Chinese history regarding the perceived status of the *overseas Chinese* – whether they were still considered to be a part of the nation. I also explored the economic and imperial impetus that drove Chinese migration, as well as the subsequent events in European exploration, trade, and eventual colonisation of parts of the world – in particular the majority of Southeast Asia. The chapter also discussed the nature of the Chinese communities that settled in the region, noting in particular the uneven possession of power in Chinese hands. The economic and political power, as well as a measure of self-autonomy commanded by the Chinese settlements in Southeast Asia under the European colonial administration, contrasts heavily with the experiences of the overseas Chinese in the more well-studied parts of the world (Europe, North America).

Simultaneously, the wide range in social class exhibited by the Chinese settlements in the region illustrates the extent of the large migration of the Chinese population that had emigrated from China to settle in Southeast Asia. The Chinese communities comprised not only wealthier traders and merchants, but also a large proportion of labourers. The significance of the Chinese presence in Southeast Asia is the leading motivation for siting this study in this geographic region. As noted earlier, the Chinese in Southeast Asia are by no means under-researched, yet the *spaces* of the Chinese communities in the cities of the region have so far been largely ignored.

I also outlined the histories of the Chinatowns and the Chinese in the four search sites – Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, and Singapore. In each city, the growth of

the Chinese presence over time traced recognisable and similar patterns of settlement; yet they also differed in ways related to the development of the city, as well as the political, economic, and social trajectories of the respective nations. The histories and geographies of the sites are important as they provide a context for the circumstances and the issues that I negotiate in the framing of this research project. Issues such as colonialism are significant to the subject of the study; equally, postcolonialism is a core concept through which the research can be approached.

With the historical backgrounds and geographical contexts of the research sites, in Chapter Four I considered the physical landscape of Chinatowns. I argued that the urban landscape of Chinatown is produced and maintained through a propagation of ideas and repetitions of images and practices. As Anderson (1988) mentions, the idea of Chinatown, shaped and formed through political interactions and social practices, helps to shape its physical landscape. Several discrete representations of Chinatown contribute to its identity. The existence of neighbourhoods and enclaves based upon racial differences mark a critical issue in the urban landscape. The complex interaction of racial definition and categorisation helps to produce these differences, and appear to create urban delineations of race and culture. The colonial concept of Orientalism is significant here in what appears to be a representation of Chinatown: Chinese culture and landscape as seen, comprehended, and imagined from the outside. At the same time, and as explored by Anderson (1991), this representation is complicated by the identities and images presented and defined by the community itself, that is, from the inside. These systems of representation (Blunt & McEwan, 2004) work together to produce multiple and complex

ideas of, and about, Chinatown. Social imaginations are physically reproduced upon space, and further help to construct its identity. Chinatown is possessed of an undeniable spatial and cultural identity, created by imaginations of its social and cultural background. As such I also argued that the concept of heritage plays a significant role in the development of the Chinatown landscape. Heritage is physicalised in the landscape, and myriad types of Chineseness and Chinese identities become associated with the Chinatown identity. This includes ideas and imaginations of China-centric Chinese identities, histories and perceived memories of the migrant Chinese as they settled in their new homes, as well as hybridised identities of the ethnic Chinese in these Southeast Asian cities.

The Chinatown landscape, in functioning as a repository of the past and a constant expression of cultural heritage, also serves as home to a large community. In Chapter Five, I examined the ways that the Chinatown community articulated home, and I argued that Chinatown could be considered home in multiple ways, to the ethnic Chinese community. The Chinatown landscape functions as *home* because it is the place where the community lives and works; it is also home because it represents another home, the homeland. The Chinese diaspora, comprised of the overseas Chinese and the ethnic Chinese outside of China, draws its identity through a shared sense of homeland – China, its national source, and the roots of its heritage. Thus the complex nature of home – home as the place where one lives and spends one's time, and home as a place of belonging, affinity, community, and identity – is exemplified in Chinatown. A further intricacy of home is displayed through not only the multiple meanings and layers, but also the

multiple scales that home manifests. I have shown that Chinatown as home expresses the way in which Chinatown is that hybrid space that represents the complex relationship that the ethnic Chinese community has with its host society – as a community of migrant origins, but also one that retains attachments to its home, in the form of ethnic culture and heritage.

In dealing with issues of identity linked by nationality and ethnic heritage, I turned to concepts of nationhood in Chapter Six. Nation-building and national identity are salient issues in light of the postcolonial state of the Southeast Asian nations. With large ethnic Chinese populations located in the major cities of this region, nation-building based on cohesive social and cultural composition presents a difficulty whenever national identity is considered. Nations have dealt with the presence of non-homogenous ethnic populations in many ways, from exclusionary policies to general acceptance of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural national make-up. I have shown that the Chinatowns and their communities have presented challenges and complex relationships with regards to ideas of the nation. Over time, however, these Chinatowns have also come to constitute part of the nationscape. Further, what Chinatown contributes to the nation is an element of globality, the landscape at once a representation of, and a repository for, transnational experiences and exchanges.

In this way, the ethnic Chinese, Chinatowns, and the Chinese diaspora serve as a network of transnational links that extend the nation beyond its borders. The transnational linkages fostered by the Chinatown community and landscape not only promote global exchanges of capital in the world economy, but also facilitate complex cultural

movements and interactions. Chinatown grounds a separate and discrete space of culture, ethnicity, and nationality in a different and sovereign geographic context, a place of one country within the space of another. The presence of Chinatown on the nationscape augments the identity of the nation.

I have set out to explore the identity of Chinatown in the intersection of the relationship between heritage and the urban landscape, home and diaspora, and nationalism. The negotiation of the Chinatown identity with its host landscape closely mirrors that of the ethnic Chinese communities with their host communities in these cities of Southeast Asia. The relationship is a complex and dynamic one. For both the ethnic Chinese and the Chinatowns, identities are created and reproduced in the continually shifting negotiation of socially constructed meanings and symbols, meanings of home and feelings of belonging, as well as within inclusionary and exclusionary national policies. I argued that diasporic social practices help to shape Chinatowns and their identities, and have shown this in three main ways. First, the physical and imaginary landscapes of Chinatown continue to be reproduced through negotiations with ideas about Chinese identities overseas. Second, for the Chinatown community, ideas of home are complex, forged by the intersectionality of the Chinatown community having roots from China as well as having developed roots in their current places of settlement or birth. The resulting hybridity in origin and multiple homes is an underlying facet of the Chinatown community and the Chinese diaspora. Third, and finally, the hybrid and global identities of Chinatowns, based on their diasporic natures, are not only a contributing factor to national identities, but also a spatial representation of the multiple identities

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ensconced within their communities and nations. The hybrid and diasporic nature of these Chinatowns and their communities are clearly exhibited in their urban landscapes, their conceptualisations of home and homeland, and their places in their nationscapes.

Comparisons were inevitable when not only considering four discrete fieldsites, but also in contributing to the Chinatown body of literature a region that had been previously little considered. As established, the Chinatowns in this study are made distinct by their geographical, historical, and political contexts. The display of a particular Chineseness in the landscape is regulated through their interaction and their place within their host countries and cities. I have noted contrasts, for example, between the landscape of Singapore's Chinatown, where the display of signs and symbols of a Chinese culture is established by the state looking to promote its multiculturalism, to that of Rangoon's, where the signs are subtler, and the state has little to do with displaying such cultural symbols.

In this research, I made comparisons between "Eastern" and "Western" Chinatowns by reviewing the latter in the existing literature with the four fieldsites that I studied. Further, I compared Chinatowns and China through exploring the landscapes, the ideas of home, and the concepts of nation, and made the conclusion that Chinatowns mostly reflect Chinatowns, drawing from specific ideas of China and Chineseness.

There are many limitations to this study. The framework used to explore these Southeast Asian Chinatowns only presents them from the few perspectives, explained above. Chinatowns encompass much more than landscape, home, and nation. There are extensive ways of understanding concepts like Chineseness, China, and Chinatown; and

their range of possible definitions. Chinatowns can be understood through identities other than Chineseness and contexts such as China – they may, for example, be examined through the context of the specific nation in which they are located. In a potentially wide field, I have explored a range of concepts, like language and symbology, home, and global identities that can be examined in further detail and depth. There is much potential for future research.

Future Research

This dissertation contributes to existing literature on Chinatowns by foregrounding some of the issues and concepts that are fundamental to this urban phenomenon. More significantly, it addresses a dearth in the current geographical literature on Chinatowns by focussing on a regional specificity. Chinatowns in Southeast Asia have been, as mentioned earlier in the dissertation, under-represented in existing Chinatown research, and with this dissertation I have endeavoured to remedy this omission. By presenting a Southeast Asian perspective to a body of work that has been previously occupied by "Western" examples and case studies opens the field to further possibilities. Studying Chinese migrant communities that inhabit regions far from their initial homeland (China) is a limiting factor to a global phenomenon. With their proximity to China, and in cities where they are a significant "minority" group (except in Singapore), the overseas Chinese and the Chinatowns in Southeast Asia may present different perspectives of such ethnic spaces than the "Western" Chinese communities.

This project has also attempted to ground the widely-researched fields of the

Chinese diaspora, the overseas Chinese, and Chinese migration worldwide and in Southeast Asia within the context of the urban neighbourhood in these four major cities in the region. I have examined the urban landscape with heritage as a key theme, addressing some of the ways in which the diaspora and the ethnic Chinese community imprint their identity upon the city. I have also examined the way home is negotiated and realised by the Chinatown community in the city. I have, additionally, looked at the way the physical spaces of the diaspora affect the national identity of the places in which the Chinese community has settled.

This dissertation, in addressing issues of the urban landscape, heritage, diaspora and home, and nationalism and identity, merely scratches the surface of the issues involved with Chinatowns in Southeast Asia. The range of possible research in the field of Chinatown geographies is vast. My research project has, however, helped to initiate avenues for further research.

In the field of Chinatown geographies, I have limited the scope of this research in the interest of management and time, by focussing the project on only four major Southeast Asian cities. Further research, therefore, could focus on the other leading cities in the region, such as Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila, just to name a few. The issues that Southeast Asia Chinatowns face vary; however, the cities in the region have also experienced many similar processes, for example, colonialism. Such processes have had long-lasting effects on the landscape and the social and cultural make-up of the nations involved. On a larger scale, this project has also contributed to the development of Chinatown research in locations outside of North America and Western Europe, where

most Chinatown studies have been carried out to date. Aside from Southeast Asia, there are Chinatowns in many other regions that have yet to be studied. The persistence of Chinatowns in urban areas worldwide is a phenomenon that has potential for much more research.

Ideas about Chinatown as a simulacrum can be taken much further. The duplication of similar landsapes all over the world based on the migrant heritage of the Chinese people is a phenomenon that should be explored. What role does the Chinese diaspora play in distributing these landscapes in every major city of the world? Over time, Chinatowns will continue to change, increasingly making more references to other Chinatowns. They are disjointed local spaces referring to a global community that have more in common with other places (other Chinatown) than they do with the cities they are situated within. Chinatowns also represent particular aspects of Chinese-ness, effecting a hyperreality (Eco, 1986) where what is real becomes indeterminate.

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APPENDIX A

Aide-mémoire for Qualitative Interviews

BANGKOK, THAILAND

Establish background
Occupation, age, place of birth, current nationality/citizenship, languages spoken, places lived.
Family.
How long have you lived/worked in Chinatown?

Personal Identity
Why do you call yourself Chinese? / What makes you Chinese?
What dialect/ethnic group are you (Guangdong? Fujian? Chiuchow?)
Where is "home" for you?

On being Chinese and Chinese Culture
How does being Chinese in Bangkok make you different?
Is there a difference between the Thai-Chinese, and the Thai?
What does it mean to you that you're both Chinese and Thai?
Do you interact with mostly Chinese people?
Do you maintain your Chineseness? Why/not?
What makes you Chinese? (How do you maintain your Chineseness?)
Is it important to maintain Chineseness in your family? Through your children?
How do you do so?

On links with China
Do you consider China "home"?
Have you been to China?
Do you feel that, by being Chinese, you have some connection to China?
How do you feel connected to China?
What would you say is your relationship with China?
Would you move to (live in) China?

On Chinatown
Do you consider Yaowarat especially "Chinese"?
(Do you feel that Yaowarat is more Chinese that other parts of Bangkok?)
How has Yaowarat changed in the time that you have lived here?
Would you live in other parts of Bangkok? Why/not?
Do you think Chinatown is like China? (does it represent China? At all?)
Have you visited other Chinatowns?
How do other Chinatowns you have visited compare with Yaowarat?

HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

Establish background
Occupation, age, place of birth, current nationality/citizenship, languages spoken, places lived.
Family.
How long have you lived/worked in Chinatown?

Personal Identity
Why do you call yourself Chinese? / What makes you Chinese?
What dialect/ethnic group are you (Guangdong? Fujian? Chiuchow?)
Where is "home" for you?

On being Chinese and Chinese Culture
How does being Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City make you different?
Is there a difference between the Vietnamese-Chinese, and the Vietnamese?
What does it mean to you that you're both Chinese and Vietnamese?
Do you interact with mostly Chinese people?
Do you maintain your Chineseness? Why/not?
What makes you Chinese? (How do you maintain your Chineseness?)
Is it important to maintain Chineseness in your family? Through your children?
How do you do so?

On links with China
Do you consider China "home"?
Have you been to China?
Do you feel that, by being Chinese, you have some connection to China?
How do you feel connected to China?
What would you say is your relationship with China?
Would you move to (live in) China?

On Chinatown
Do you consider Cholon especially "Chinese"?
(Do you feel that Cholon is more Chinese that other parts of Ho Chi Minh City?)
How has Cholon changed in the time that you have lived here?
Would you live in other parts of Ho Chi Minh City? Why/not?
Do you think Chinatown is like China? (does it represent China? At all?)
Have you visited other Chinatowns?
How do other Chinatowns you have visited compare with Cholon?

RANGOON, BURMA

Establish background
Occupation, age, place of birth, current nationality/citizenship, languages spoken, places lived.
Family.
How long have you lived/worked in Chinatown?

Personal Identity
Why do you call yourself Chinese? / What makes you Chinese?
What dialect/ethnic group are you (Guangdong? Fujian? Chiuchow?)
Where is "home" for you?

On being Chinese and Chinese Culture
How does being Chinese in Rangoon make you different?
Is there a difference between the Burmese-Chinese, and the Burmese?
What does it mean to you that you're both Chinese and Burmese?
Do you interact with mostly Chinese people?
Do you maintain your Chineseness? Why/not?
What makes you Chinese? (How do you maintain your Chineseness?)
Is it important to maintain Chineseness in your family? Through your children?
How do you do so?

On links with China
Do you consider China "home"?
Have you been to China?
Do you feel that, by being Chinese, you have some connection to China?
How do you feel connected to China?
What would you say is your relationship with China?
Would you move to (live in) China?

On Chinatown
Do you consider Chinatown especially "Chinese"?
(Do you feel that Chinatown is more Chinese that other parts of Rangoon?)
How has Chinatown changed in the time that you have lived here?
Would you live in other parts of Rangoon? Why/not?
Do you think Chinatown is like China? (does it represent China? At all?)
Have you visited other Chinatowns?
How do other Chinatowns you have visited compare with Chinatown in Rangoon?

SINGAPORE

Establish background
Occupation, age, place of birth, current nationality/citizenship, languages spoken, places lived.
Family.
How long have you lived/worked in Chinatown?

Personal Identity
Why do you call yourself Chinese? / What makes you Chinese?
What dialect/ethnic group are you (Guangdong? Fujian? Chiuchow?)
Where is "home" for you?

On being Chinese and Chinese Culture
How does being Chinese in Singapore make you different?
Is there a difference between being Singaporean-Chinese, and just Singaporean?
What does it mean to you that you're both Chinese and Singaporean?
Do you interact with mostly Chinese people?
Do you maintain your Chineseness? Why/not?
What makes you Chinese? (How do you maintain your Chineseness?)
Is it important to maintain Chineseness in your family? Through your children?
How do you do so?

On links with China
Do you consider China "home"?
Have you been to China?
Do you feel that, by being Chinese, you have some connection to China?
How do you feel connected to China?
What would you say is your relationship with China?
Would you move to (live in) China?

On Chinatown
Do you consider Chinatown especially "Chinese"?
(Do you feel that Chinatown is more Chinese that other parts of Singapore?)
How has Chinatown changed in the time that you have lived here?
Would you live in other parts of Singapore? Why/not?
Do you think Chinatown is like China? (does it represent China? At all?)
Have you visited other Chinatowns?
How do other Chinatowns you have visited compare with Chinatown in Singapore?

APPENDIX B
List of Interviewees

HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

		Name	Interview Date	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Birth
1	Mr	Canh	14/07/08	81	M	Businessman	China (Guangdong)
2	Ms	Quyen	14/07/08	21	F	Student	Ho Chi Minh City
3	Mr	Thang	14/07/08	24	M	Export Manager	Ho Chi Minh City
4	Mr	Quang	15/07/08	57	M	Accountant	Malaysia (Penang)
5	Mr	Dat	15/07/08	54	M	Teacher	Can Tho
6	Ms	Thy	15/07/08	34	F	Teacher	Ho Chi Minh City
7	Ms	Nguyet	15/07/08	22	F	Waitress	Nha Trang
8	Mr	Vu	15/07/08	63	M	Import/Export Business	Ho Chi Minh City
9	Mr	Thong	16/07/08	28	M	Teacher	My Tho
10	Mr	Thinh	16/07/08	74	M	Tax	China (Fujian)
11	Mr	Cao	16/07/08	75	M	Textile	China (Fujian)
12	Mr	Ly	08/08/08	62	M	Retired/Restaurant Shareholder	Ho Chi Minh City
13	Ms	Lee	08/08/08	27	F	Marketing	Ho Chi Minh City
14	Mr	Hieu	08/08/08	29	M	Administrative Assistant	Ho Chi Minh City

BANG KOK, THAILAND

		Name	Interview Date	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Birth
1	Mr	Chin	20/10/08	65	M	Merchant	Bangkok
2	Mr	Prasong	20/10/08	31	M	Monk	Chiang Mai
3	Ms	Plaa	20/10/08	68	F	Fishball Maker	Udon Thani
4	Mr	Sae	20/10/08	72	M	Retired	China (Guangdong)
5	Mr	Bu	20/10/08	67	M	Shopowner	Kanchanaburi
6	Mr	Pheng	26/10/08	55	M	Odd-jobs	Bangkok
7	Ms	Ma	26/10/08	77	F	Association Director	China (Guangdong)
8	Mr	Lu	26/10/08	72	M	Retired	China (Guangdong)
9	Ms	Aom	26/10/08	57	F	Admin Assistant	Bangkok
10	Ms	Kam	24/11/08	40	F	Researcher	Kanchanaburi
11	Mr	Ung	24/11/08	50	M	Lecturer	Bangkok

RANGOON, BURMA

		Name	Interview Date	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Birth
1	Mr	Fook	13/01/09	67	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
2	Mr	Saw	13/01/09	70	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
3	Mr	Maung	13/01/09	74	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
4	Mr	Kian	13/01/09	71	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
5	Dr	Zhen	13/01/09	57	M	Doctor	Rangoon
6	Mr	Oo	14/01/09	80	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
7	Mr	Aw	14/01/09	78	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
8	Mr	Lim	14/01/09	76	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
9	Mr	Lao Lee	14/01/09	64	M	Retired	Rangoon
10	Mr	Nam	14/01/09	79	M	Retired	China (Guangdong)
11	Mr	Can	14/01/09	70	M	Association Manager	China (Guangdong)
12	Mr	Sin	16/01/09	90	M	Retired	China (Fujian)
13	Ms	Yun	16/01/09	26	F	Cook/Waitress	Uplands Burma
14	Mr	Ye	17/01/09	23	M	Shopkeeper	Rangoon
15	Mr	Fu	17/01/09	70	M	Chinese Teacher	China (Fujian)

SINGAPORE

		Name	Interview Date	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Birth
1	Mr	Tan	17/02/09	33	M	IT	Singapore
2	Ms	Lee	18/02/09	62	F	Retired	Singapore
3	Ms	Chay	18/02/09	59	F	Retired	Singapore
4	Mr	Chris	19/02/09	30	M	Banking	Singapore
5	Mr	Chan	20/02/09	86	M	Retired	Singapore
6	Dr	Wong	21/02/09	66	M	Doctor	Singapore
7	Ms	Hong	24/02/09	51	F	Cook	Singapore
8	Mr	Goh	24/02/09	45	M	Self-Employed	Singapore
9	Mr	Pang	24/02/09	32	M	Teacher	Singapore
10	Mr	Chow	25/02/09	33	M	Architect	Singapore
11	Mr	Phua	27/02/09	60	M	Retired	Singapore
12	Ms	Lin	27/02/09	30	F	Lawyer	Singapore
13	Mr	Han	27/02/09	62	M	Teacher	Singapore