Sydney’s Chinatown in the Asian Century
From ethnic enclave to global hub
Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2012-2015 (ARC LP120200311)

Industry partner: City of Sydney

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Partner Investigator (City of Sydney)
- Steve Hillier, Research Manager
Research Method

- **Qualitative methods:**
  - 56 interviews, 2 focus groups, participant observations at various locations and events, content analysis of public/social media

- **Quantitative methods:**
  - Analysis of City of Sydney Floorspace and Employment Survey data, 362 survey questionnaires, census, immigration and tourism statistics
What makes a really good Chinatown?

*It has to provide a distinctive enclave otherness...*

*It has to have history, heritage and culture*

*The best Chinatown must be authentically Chinese...*

*The best Chinatowns are in-your-face Chinese.*

*They aren’t polite, pretentious or pretty, but have strange sights and happy energy...*

*Convivial restaurants are jammed, shop elbow-jostling and everywhere daily life unfolds...’*

Traveller, SMH, 20 July 2013
Australia in the Asian Century

‘Australia is located in the right place at the right time—in the Asian region in the Asian century’ (Australia in the Asian Century White Paper, 2012, p.1)
Sydney as a global city

- Sydney as a centre for international investment, tourism, trading, transportation, education and culture
- Significant transnational flow between Sydney and Asia

Key facts:

* 634,000 Asia-born people living in greater Sydney, 16% of total population (ABS, 2011)
* 166,000 Asian international students in NSW (YEDec14), 75% of total international students (AEI, 2014)
* 1.3 million Asian tourists visited NSW (YE Sep14), 42.5% of total international visitors (DNSW, 2014)
Distribution of Asia-born population in greater Sydney (ABS, 2011)
Top 10 Sydney suburbs with highest density of Asia-born population (2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>No. of Asia-born</th>
<th>No. of population</th>
<th>% of Asia born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Haymarket</td>
<td>3442</td>
<td>5378</td>
<td>64.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Homebush West</td>
<td>3377</td>
<td>5783</td>
<td>58.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Harris Park</td>
<td>2858</td>
<td>5069</td>
<td>56.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rhodes</td>
<td>3041</td>
<td>5680</td>
<td>53.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cabramatta</td>
<td>11013</td>
<td>20779</td>
<td>53.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Westmead</td>
<td>7274</td>
<td>14171</td>
<td>51.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hurstville</td>
<td>13296</td>
<td>26038</td>
<td>51.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Burwood</td>
<td>6236</td>
<td>12469</td>
<td>50.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Parramatta</td>
<td>9690</td>
<td>19745</td>
<td>49.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Campsie</td>
<td>10410</td>
<td>21221</td>
<td>49.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The boundary of Haymarket

* Haymarket Village Centre

* Haymarket (state suburb)

Source: profile.id.com.au
Demographic change of Haymarket

Population in Haymarket
(ABS enumerated account 1991-2011)
In 2011, 5378 people live in Haymarket, increased 34% since 2001, 35.5% have Chinese ancestry (ABS usual residence account 2001, 2011)

**Demographic change of Haymarket**

Chinatown Unbound

- Growing number of Asian migrants in Haymarket, emergence of Koreatown, Thaitown
- Transformed Chinatown from a Cantonese-speaking Chinese enclave to a hybrid Asian precinct

Photo by Alpha, flickr.com, creative commons license 2.0
Chinatown Unbound

Example of sites in Sydney with Asian interest:

- Greenland Centre
- The Quay
- World Square
- Capital Square
- Regent Place
- Chinese Garden of Friendship
- Dr Chau Chak Wing Bldg
- Central Park
- World Tower by Meriton
- No 1 Dixon Shopping Centre
- Dixon House
- Sussex Centre
- Chinatown Centre
- Hing Loong Apartment
- City Mark Centre
- Market City
- Peak Apartments

- China Cultural Centre
- Korean Cultural office
- BreakFree on George
- Inmark Tower
- Kien Hay Centre
- 750 George St
- 399 Sussex St
- 615 George St
- Cinema Centre car park
- 6-12 Dixon St
- Cassia Garden
- Sun Tower
- 22-26 Goulburn St
- 4B Druitt St
- China Southern Airlines
- 190 Kent St
- Hainan Airlines
- 20 Hunter St
- 89-113 Kent St
- Chung Shan Society
- Chinese Masonic Society
- ACCA
- White Rabbit Gallery
- 713 George St
Importance of Chinatown

- A popular gateway for new immigrants from China/Asia
- A starting point for new businesses targeting Asian/Chinese customers
- An important hub for foreign Chinese/Asian investment (e.g. property development, restaurants)
- A popular tourists destination for international and domestic visitors (top 3 most visited precincts in Sydney)
- A successful food hub for a variety of Asian ethnic cuisines
- A popular social place for the young people with Asian background
- A growing hub for Chinese/Asian professional & business services
- A symbolic hub for Chinese culture and societies
Chinatown as a business hub

* 2012 Floorspace and Employment Survey (FES) of 9 blocks in core precinct of Chinatown (City of Sydney 2012)

Key figures (2012 & 2007 FES, City of Sydney)

- 998 businesses, up 10.6% from 2007
- 7748 workers, up 29.2% from 2007
- Top 3 sectors: Retail, Food, Professional services
  - accounted for 62% of total businesses
  - employed 72% of total workforce
- 99% SMEs, average business size 7.8 people
- Biggest growth: Retail & personal service
- Biggest decline: Manufacturing
Chinatown as a business hub

- Business in Chinatown core precinct was dominated by three major sectors (2012 FES, City of Sydney).

Distribution of business count in core Chinatown precinct in 2012:

- Retail & Personal Services: 29%
- Food & Drink: 20%
- Professional & Business Services: 13%
- Health: 7%
- Finance & Financial Services: 6%
- Higher Education & Research: 5%
- Others: 6%
- Other 12 sectors combined: 3%
Employment in core Chinatown precinct has grown 29% compared to 14% of overall City of Sydney LGA in 2012 (2012 & 2007 FES, City of Sydney)

Percentage of employment change by block in core Chinatown precinct (2007-2012)
Chinatown ethnic culinary sector

* Key facts: over 200 food and drink businesses in core Chinatown precinct, employing over 2000 workers (City of Sydney, 2012)

* Key trends: growing number of high end/niche/speciality/regional Chinese/Asian restaurants
  * Chinese hotpot
  * Japanese izakaya/karaoke
  * Asian dessert/bubble tea
  * Korean BBQ
  * Thai street food
  * Malaysian, Indonesian, Filipino

Photo by smalljude, flickr.com creative commons license 2.0
A tale of four restaurants

* Case 1: The young entrepreneur

* ‘Our food is more spicy than other restaurants because I want to offer the authentic taste of Szechuan food to our customers’
  –Owner of a Szechuan restaurant
A tale of four restaurants

* Case 2: Korean in the laneway

* ‘Being down in a driveway in the back has a bit more Korean feel, because in Korea there is a lot of alley ways and things like that’
  –Manager of a Korean restaurant
Case 3: Sweets for Thaitown

‘I start to build the front kitchen for dessert in my restaurant with the main kitchen at the back. That’s a hard job because I don’t know whether people like it or not but I like to present [the Thai dessert]’

– Owner of five Thai restaurants
Case 4: Fine dining in Chinatown

‘In terms of food, we do have support from Singapore and Hong Kong. In terms of design, we do have this décor which is very Chinese oriented, but in a way you can tell they are not very typical Chinese decorations. So I believe we reflect a way of very sophisticated mixture of Asia flavour’

–Sales manager of an upmarket Chinese restaurant
Chinatown Youth Market

* 50.8% of residents between 20-29 years old (ABS 2011)
* 42% of international visitors, 34% of domestic overnight visitors between 15-29 years old (Destination NSW 2013)

Survey with 362 university and college students with Asian background in Sydney in 2013

Key findings:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92% have visited Chinatown, 73% visited Chinatown at least once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most popular activities:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining and drinking (82%), shopping (45%) and meeting friends (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most popular cuisines:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese (43%), Chinese (35%), Korean (25%), Thai (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90% enjoyed visiting Chinatown. Top reasons:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian food, Asian culture (sense of home), vibe and atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for improvement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve cleanliness, extend the area, enhance cultural elements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Photo by Pigeon Poo, flickr.com creative commons license 2.0
Where do you eat and drink most frequently in Chinatown? (please select all that apply)
Chinatown Youth Market

* Please rate the importance of the following features in making Chinatown a popular destination for you?

- History and heritage of the area
- Location and accessibility
- Cheap eats and goods
- General atmosphere of the area
- Asian style architecture and shop front
- Variety of Asian restaurants, goods and services
- Job options

![Bar chart showing ratings from not important to very important]
What the students say about Chinatown:

‘That is the only place within Sydney that reminds me of home, and New Year... the festival kind of stuff. They have that atmosphere there’

−International student from Hong Kong

‘Chinatown should keep their own culture, because if you don’t like Chinatown’s noise during the night, you can go somewhere else to enjoy—which is a major difference from the CBD, not like all the quiet places, they don’t have any character’

−International student from China

‘The trend is that it’s all commercialised, it doesn’t make sense, so I feel like from a shift from a commercial area to more a cultural area, I’d really love to see’

−Local Chinese-Australian student
Chinatown as a character precinct

- Chinatown heritage and culture

- ‘It’s all changing, now more modern, computerised and now more young people coming... but now there was less culture. I am here to maintain the culture by holding events with the City of Sydney Council, to promote Chinese New Year, to promote the Moon Festival’
  
  –King Fong, Chinese community leader

- ‘There used to be lots of negative aspect in the past, the way that the Chinese used to be portrayed... I’m trying to build bridges between the Chinese community and the mainstream... I try to promote and show some of the positive things’

  –Daphne Lowe, Chinese community leader
Chinatown as a character precinct

* Haymarket Chamber of Commerce

“When they plan development, when they do things, in particular when its relating to Chinatown, they should have somebody that they can talk to in a collective way, and hence the Haymarket Chamber”

—Shah Yee, founding member of Haymarket Chamber

* Chinatown tour

“We get a lot of letters that come back to us and say “We learnt so much about Chinatown, We didn’t expect to hear so much””

—George WingKee, tour guide for Chinatown tour
Chinatown as a character precinct

* Chinatown Public Domain Plan—Public Art with distinctive ‘Asian flavour’

* In-between-two worlds

‘I’m paying respect to the cultural impacts on Australian culture, I wanted to acknowledge every other culture as well including the local culture, all international cultures that have merged with Chinese culture.’

—Jason Wing, Artist

* New Century Garden

‘Chinatown is very dynamic because it allows... other Asian cultures... we have a bit of Korea-town, we have a bit of Thai-town... so that makes it even more exciting to me, so not to preserve it just this yum cha place, but kind of this place where lots of Asian cultures hang about it.’

—Lindy Lee, Artist
Inter-Asian Urbanism

* Rapid growth of population in Sydney CBD, pressure on space for commercial and residential buildings
* Tensions between low-rise and high-rise, tradition and modern, eastern and western style development
* Emerging of new ‘Inter-Asian urbanism’ reconfigures Chinatown
Inter-Asian Urbanism

* Asianisation of shopping malls
* Sanitisation of Chinatown?
The Road Ahead

- What will be the future of Sydney’s Chinatown?
- What will be Chinatown’s role within Sydney’s aspiration to be a global city?
- How to maintain Chinatown’s distinctive character in view of the urban development in its surrounding area?
- What will be the future of inter-Asian engagement in Chinatown?
- How to maintain Chinatown’s heritage and culture in view of all the changes?
- What will be the role of different levels of government in the development of Chinatown?
Thank you