

**The Making of Asian American
Community Democracy
Rebuilding Chinatown Post 9/11**

How did I get involved in the democratic activities in Chinatown?

- Witnessing the collapsing of the Twin Towers shocking, unbelieving, numbing
- I, victim of the trauma, Chinatown also devastated
- Do something healing for myself and Chinatown

Application of my amateur interest in art, architecture, design, environmental justice and my clinical experience in behavior therapy, group dynamics in Chinatown recovery as a silent partner, volunteer

Task members

- East River Water Front Project
- Canal Area Transportation Studies (CATS)
- Rebuild Chinatown Initiative
- Art/Culture Council
- Lower East Side/Chinatown Empire Zone
- Community Board 2, Manhattan
- Chinese Community Social Service & Health Council
- Asian American health Project - NYU Medical Center

Old Chinatown politics before 9/11

- community structure unchanged over many decades
- community power fragmented
- “Politicians like to see minority squabbling”
 - Ruth Messinger
- leaderships traditional - vertical
- distrust, unconnected, not sharing
- no pressure group

Several city plans designated for Chinatown bypassed

- lack accountable leadership
- lack pressure group
- lack grass roots participation
- the number of votes insufficient

- New Chinatown politics after 9/11
- First rescue project achieved beginning success several attempts I participated failed in the past three decades without governmental participation at initial stage
- Now, a new community structure emerging developed along the track of public funding requirement in the name of whole Chinatown instead of a single agency various recovery programs designed in accessing all funding available
- Partnership between community and government, old and new leaders
- new professional: city planners, urban designers, artists, MBA managers, developers, etc.

- New agencies, programs, and funding
- Mayor's Office for Community Affairs offices of Federal/City/State's legislators - the position of Asian liaison
- governmental agencies involved in Chinatown projects
- Lower Manhattan Development Corporation
- Rebuilt Chinatown Initiative - designed a master recovery plan
- Chinatown Partnership of Local Development Corporation -CPLDC
- Asian American Federation of New York - 9/11 Survey won approval from public /private sectors
- Coalition for AA Children & Families, advocacy for funding access
- Bridging the Gap Between AA Community & ACS - reducing child abuse cases
- families & children suffered less trauma in separation and court ordeal
- Chinatown Committee, Manhattan Community Board 2 - one month old, new acquisition of political property

All the above funding sources and requirement brought Chinatown:

- new culture, new space, new connections,
- new professionals, new development,
- more participation, headlines, momentum
- all program wrapped in the making of a democratic process

- From marginal community to mainstreaming community
- **Democratic process: sharing, participating, voter registration, fundraising for politicians**
- subgroup coalition achieving community consensus

Chinese American voters Federation

- Sponsoring the first Democratic Mayor Candidates Debate in Chinatown, 5/2/05
- Democratic Manhattan Borough President Candidates Debate
- First Governor/ Mayor (both Republicans) joint press conference held in Chinatown announcing the last \$800 million distribution of \$21.4 billions of Federal budget, 5/26/05
- Chinatown received \$32 million
- Historical demonstration in playing the political leverage game

Hardware and software services

- **Personal hardware:** house, car, Rolex watch
- **Personal software:** jogging, exercise, vacation
- **Community hardware:** housing, business development, parking
- **Community software:** social service, counseling, mental health, charity

When hardware and software services balanced

- linkage built between family and community
- family stable with quality of living
- family support for community projects
- community, solid and healthy
- participation in community activities - health fairs, festival celebration

Family dialogue - mutually updated talking about each other's feelings weekly, if not daily

- building individual's emotional muscle with family support means family healing
- community support means community healing
- community consensus means mainstreaming
- democracy means voting, participation, healing

When hardware service over-developed within community/family community mental health services neglected resistant to ask for help in counseling when individual or family in trouble less family together for dinner, less family dialogue, less mutual understanding individual feelings pent up, emotional pressure building up anxiety, depression, obsessive behavior increased negative impact on job performance and interpersonal relations vicious cycle intensified back/forth among individuals, family and jobs multiple/dynamic downing impact breakdown - individual or family tragedy anxiety, depression, suicide, homicide - by products of hardware overdeveloped

Subgroup coalition, community transformation, ethnic identity

- 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act
- 1963 Civil Rights Act, facilitated by President Lyndon Johnson, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - now Asian Americans pioneers' contribution in building America today, gradually acknowledged election of ethnic Asian members in New York City Council and State Assembly

Chinese American Voter Federation

- voter registration
- public education on democratic knowledge and skills

Community participation:

releasing and healing individual or family tension

Volunteering:

help others, help yourself - a natural way of learning, growing, and healing individual, family and community: mutually supportive, supplementary more energy, power, spirit/morale generated for individuals, family and community

subgroup coalition, regardless of dialects
community dialogue, consensus - facilitated
by/from interaction, group dynamics to group
cohesiveness protest radio/television racial
remarks - Broccoli Chicken, Wen Ho Lee,
Muslim Minister James Yee won the battle
of Park Row reopening in court silence no
more, action together

Image, uplifted, identity, assertive
community transformed post 9/11 for justice,
equality, democracy and quality of living

Challenges and recommendations though community progress made within 6 years since 9/11/01 still long way to go, unless

- a. Reform community agency board for accountability** – board member selection based on qualification, expertise instead of cronyism, favoritism
- b. Establish a community council** – organize all agencies as members election of an executive board
- c. Hiring a professional manager** – utilization of all community resources, private/public

Thank you for your participation/sharing in our recovery process for community democracy, enhancing our confidence heightening our spirit/morale lifting our image consolidating our identity being here is your self-healing

Respectfully presented by Edward Ma,
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