

**Traveling Chinatowns:
Mobility of Urban Forms and Asia in Circulation**

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Introduction

Contemporary cities are increasingly interconnected through various means of formulating and circulating ideas: investigation trips, conferences, exhibitions, publications, study tours, and even urban-ranking systems. A growing body of scholarship explicates these urban phenomena, recognizing these border-crossing urban practices as “mobile urbanism,” “urban modeling,” “inter-referencing,” or “worlding cities” (Healey and Upton 2010; McCann and Ward 2011; Roy and Ong 2011). Such dynamic urban processes reshaping contemporary Asia are at the heart of this theoretical focus. Asian cities, once considered to be recipients or followers of urban models imposed by Western cities, have become new models of urbanism themselves, shifting and compounding the conventional spatial coordinates in which built forms and urban imageries are expected to move. For instance, over the last few

decades, Singapore, Shanghai, and Seoul have distinguished themselves as points of reference for other aspiring cities in and beyond Asia. How have Asian cities moved beyond their former “imitator” status to serve as models of urbanism? How are urban experiences from other Asian cities transformed and translated in new contexts? How does this translocal travel of urban form and ideas provide ways to think about Asia, both as an ideological construct and as a material reality?

This article traces travel trajectories of Chinatowns to provide a historical reading of this “Asian ascendancy” (Hoang 2015) as manifested through urban form. Chinatowns are more than fixed spaces in a particular locale; they function as landscapes of global urbanism that tie together discrete geopolitical entities. Building on the growing body of scholarship on the interconnection and interdependence of cities, this article examines how specific urban forms have crisscrossed and configured different cities while reshaping relations among them. Moving beyond cities as endpoints of exchange, I track routes by which Chinatown has traveled across cities and intersected with the shifting dynamics of the political economy in the Asia Pacific region. More specifically, I focus on the case of Chinatowns in two contexts: the Japanese city of Yokohama in the 1950s under US global hegemony, on the one hand, and on the other, with the rise of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as its leading economic partner, the Korean city of Incheon from the 1990s through the 2000s. The periods in question served as crucial junctures for both cities as they positioned themselves within new global flows, creating room for different urban imaginations and practices to evolve.

The term *urban form* encompasses a wide range of spatial elements that constitute a city, including individual buildings, streets, and urban blocks. These physical features are also shaped by nonphysical factors, ranging from density and land use to policies and programs. While the term has multiple implications and usages in various contexts, I am using *urban form* in the way Henri Lefebvre conceptualizes it. According to Lefebvre (1996: 103), the specificity of urban form lies in that it is both “a practico-material and architectural fact” and “a social reality made up of relations.” Though “the urban” cannot be understood without its material base, urban form remains

neither “a simple material product” nor “a production of objects” (ibid.: 101). Instead, it is a historical and social product that is manifested through the built environment.

This article is divided into three sections. Expanding on Edward Said’s discussion of traveling theory, the first section sets forth a theoretical framework for investigation of traveling urban forms. The second section examines the travel of Chinatown from US cities to the Japanese city of Yokohama during the Cold War years. The third section analyzes the travel of Chinatown to the Korean city of Incheon in the post–Cold War years, factoring in the country’s growing economic connections with the PRC. In conclusion, I delve into implications of these Chinatown travels and the problematic presence of “Asia” therein. From archives housed in Japan, South Korea, and the United States, I studied documents as varied as conference proceedings, chamber of commerce records, memoirs, local newspapers, grants records from the Ford Foundation, and travelogues. Drawing upon these sources in addition to interviews with city officials, residents, and developers, I provide a cross-cultural reading of urban form that has always been at the intersection with broader global processes.

Traveling Urban Forms: The Global Production of Space

In his 1983 essay titled “Traveling Theory,” Edward Said raises important questions about the “travels” of theory and ideas and their mutations across new circumstances. Tracing how Georg Lukács’s idea of theory and consciousness was adopted and employed by Lucien Goldmann and differently, via Goldmann, by Raymond Williams, Said refuses to call such transmutation either misreading or misinterpretation but sees it as an indispensable part of traveling ideas. For Said, it is neither misinterpretation nor misreading that should come into focus but, rather, “a specific social and historical situation of which an intellectual occasion is a part” (ibid.: 237). His approach to traveling theory, as James Clifford (1989) rightly acknowledges, is influential in that it challenges theory’s disposition to distance itself from a particular time and space. However, unlike “theory,” which is transmitted through mobile media such as texts, imagining the travels of urban forms

seems to generate cognitive dissonance because a conventional understanding is that architectural and urban forms are material entities fixed and grounded in a physical locality (Cairns 2004b).

Quite the contrary, architectural and urban spaces have in fact often been the product of moving ideas and things that migrate across different cultural and geographic contexts.¹ Though the movement of architectural forms and images across different regions is not a phenomenon peculiar to the modern period, the radical development of communications and transport technologies in the nineteenth century—railroads, telegraphs, newspapers, photography, and steamships—accelerated the pace and widened the scope. Most of all, the nineteenth-century expansion of the capitalist mode of production, or what we commonly refer to as colonialism, opened up new routes through which architectural and urban forms were moved around by colonial settlers, architects, building contractors, and urban planners (King 1984; Wright 1991; AlSayyad 1992; Kusno 2000; Avermaete 2010). In the post–World War II years, and with the onset of the Cold War, an important shift occurred in the global flow of planning ideas and built forms as the former colonial relations were reconfigured by new international agencies that promoted technical aid and cultural exchange programs (Castillo 2010; Ward 2010; Wakeman 2014; Hein 2014). The movement of architectural and urban forms has now become even more complex and multidirectional than ever before. Not only has the pace and scope of traveling urban forms expanded but also the flow has significantly changed in direction and intensity.

A recently growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship on circulation of urban models, imageries, ideas, policies, and built forms indicates the importance of this subject matter. These studies can largely be categorized according to their units of analysis: (1) different historic agents that form and transform spatial interconnections (colonialism, the Cold War, neoliberalism); (2) urban policies, programs, or ideas (Singapore’s green urbanism, Britain’s Garden City movement, Barcelona’s museum policy); or (3) specific built forms (bungalows, neighborhood units, waterfronts). The emphasis on these interrelated urban elements offers a new framework within which we can trace divergent ways that cities “articulate with global flows” (Shatkin 2007: 4). Furthermore, it provides a methodological strength in assessing

the global production of space because its cross-scale reading goes beyond the conventional understanding of nation-states as the only agents of urban transformations.

The new attention to flow and scale reorients scholarly focus from unidirectional traffic of ideas (moving from “developed” to “less developed”) to ever-increasing internal flows, especially among Asian cities. In this regard, the language of “diffusion” is inadequate for describing the diverse and dynamic urban processes reshaping cities on a global scale. Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward (2013: 7) point out that concepts such as transfer and diffusion are obfuscating because they connote “a very flat and straightforward process.” They instead argue for the use of “assemblages, mobilities and mutations” in discussing the movement of urban ideas, which suggest more complex and nuanced processes of ideas in circulation. There are no universal norms or models that are waiting to be exported elsewhere, but different positionalities of cities in the world economy, and local actors therein, create different travel trajectories of built forms. As Jennifer Robinson contends (2011: 30), urban ideas and knowledge are not simply “imposed from outside” but gain purchase in local contexts “when they are seen to benefit local agents or when local agents purposefully seek them out.”

The term *travel* delivers this fundamental aspect of local agency and contingency as the word sheds light on the indispensable role of its associated actors—travelers—in translating their experiences in different contexts. Moving around with not-so-structured sentiments and expectations, travelers are poised to compare new environments with what they left behind back home. They collect “souvenirs” as they travel, ranging from curios and pamphlets to postcards and images, which shape their urban impressions. Urban forms and ideas do not just move around. They are enmeshed with specific historical situations and with these “physical, embodied activities” (McCann 2011: 106) of travelers, who mediate between home and abroad. Travels of urban forms are thus to be understood as constituted by two interrelated elements: broader political and economic conditions that shape meanings and routes of travels, on the one hand, and the constitutive role of individual actors as travelers transporting and translating ideas and forms, on the other.

An investigation of travel trajectories of specific urban forms offers an

understanding of how places are produced on a global scale. Chinatown, in particular, provides a clear example of dynamic connection to this global system because, as will be discussed in the following sections, its translocal movement reflects the political and economic restructuring of the Asia Pacific over the last century. More important, Chinatown is by no means an abstract urban entity but a lived place with distinct and material dimensions of migration, race, and culture. Therefore, to look at how Chinatown has traveled in different circumstances and for new uses can help illuminate global interconnections as manifested in urban space while at the same time revealing social, historical, and geopolitical situations of which the travel of Chinatown is a part.

Yokohama: New Pacific Relations within the San Francisco System

With the end of World War II and the subsequent Allied occupation, Japan underwent a rapid transition in status from colonizer to colonized. This transition was felt most acutely in Yokohama, where 42 percent of the city was demolished by US air raids in May 1945 and 74 percent of its central business district was taken over by the Eighth United States Army Headquarters (Ishida 2003: 18–21). General Douglas MacArthur, the supreme commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), described Yokohama of this period as a “ghost town” with shops built of makeshift materials and very few people on the street (Yokohama Shōkōkaigisho 1981: 555). Unlike the rest of the city, however, Yokohama’s Chinatown experienced the postwar era as “golden years” of prosperity. Recognized as Allied nationals, Chinese residents were privileged over their Japanese neighbors and employed by the US military as cooks, who resold food scraps to starving Japanese (Sugawara 1996: 150). In Japanese eyes, the prosperity of this black market underscored the nation’s devastation by war. Though many Japanese residents were also involved in the operation of the black market as consumers, regulators, suppliers, and retailers (Tsu 2011: 138), they perceived it as a specifically “Chinese” phenomenon. The prosperity of the Chinatown’s underground economy, its bustling alleyways, and its seedy character were all attributed to the peculiar racial traits of the Chinese.²

The “reverse course,” which reflected a conservative shift in US policy

as the Cold War intensified, changed this urban landscape. Surrounded by “an unbroken arc of communist territories” (Cumings 1993: 43)—that is, communist China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union—Japan and its geopolitical importance as an anticommunist bastion in East Asia came to be considered critical by Washington toward the end of 1948. From a former war enemy deserving punishment, Washington saw the need to transform Japan into an ally, in this case, a showcase of the US model of democracy and capitalism (Dower 1993: 4). Since the changed US policy was part and parcel of the Cold War political climate, the “red purge” was carried out with the concerted effort of the Japanese conservative elite and the SCAP. By the time the PRC was established and, subsequently, the consolidation of the communist bloc in Asia was considered to be a major threat to US interests, most “privileges” Yokohama’s Chinese residents had enjoyed were “stripped away” (Tsu 2011: 139). Chinese residents were put under daily surveillance by the SCAP, and activities and key individuals relating to Chinese political organizations were meticulously scrutinized to ferret out supposed anti-US and pro-PRC movements.³

While the post–World War II era is regarded as the formative period of Japan’s democracy, US hegemonic control during this period also transformed Japanese society. The political climate of the period following the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in September 1951 has been described by John Dower (2015) as the “San Francisco system.” Within this system, especially in the wake of the Korean War, the United States needed Japan as “an ally, a military base, and a producer of industrial goods” (Hein 2003: 2–3), aims that played a significant role in the growth of Japan’s post-war economy. This system catalyzed an important change for Japan, especially because it gave Japan an opportunity to seek out a new identity as a nation. It also made a tremendous impact on its neighboring Asian countries. With China and Korea—two of the countries most affected by Japan’s expansionism—excluded in the 1951 treaty, the San Francisco system virtually condoned Japan’s “deflection” from Asia (Dower 2015: 229), paving the way for its alliance with the United States and radically changing the political and economic gestalt in the region.

In August 1953, Japanese delegates from major cities, including Yokohama, crossed the Pacific Ocean to attend the Second Japan-American

Pacific Coast Conference of Mayors and Chamber of Commerce Presidents. Held in Seattle, the conference was designed to provide an environment for Japanese and US city politicians to discuss the common issues of Pacific cities such as municipal administration, industry, trade, and tourism. The “Mayors’ Conference Project,” as framed by the Ford Foundation, held contrasting implications for both sides. For Japan, it was an opportunity to see the inner workings of US cities as well as seek US financial aid and guidance in city management and foreign trade.⁴ By contrast, the United States used the conference as a means of promoting Cold War propaganda, touting “the American way,” and advancing its leadership in the Pacific. Throughout the conference, US city officials lauded “a closer relationship” and “friendship” between Japanese and US cities, both terms that sugar-coated Washington’s political and economic agenda in East Asia (Japan-American Mayors Executive Committee 1953: 8).

The National Tour of US Cities and Chinatown

After the end of the conference, with the Ford Foundation covering all travel expenses, Japanese city officials took a month-long trip to US cities, including Chicago, Washington DC, New York, San Francisco, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Honolulu. The national tour was a well-orchestrated event designed to make the Japanese delegates learn from “American business and factories and return home better able to plan for American orders” and “gear products for American markets” (Strack 1953: 22). Orchestrating this close-up look at port facilities, oil refineries and plants, police academies, fire departments, and housing construction sites, US officials believed that the Japanese would be able to see how US cities and industries worked. But inspection of industrial sites was not the only way the visit worked to inspire the Japanese delegates. The tour also offered them “informal contact” with US cities (Japan-American Mayors Executive Committee 1954). Many of the programs during the tour were cultural, reflecting a desire on the part of the mayors’ conference executive committee for the Seattle conference to achieve a deeper level of inculcation.

Among the thirty-seven Japanese delegates, only ten had already visited the United States before August 1953. The executive committee was well

aware of this fact. “Had it not been for the conference,” they wrote in the final report to the Ford Foundation, “few of them would have ever had a chance to visit this country.” The Japanese delegates from key cities were “in positions of authority and responsibility who stood to gain much from the trip” (ibid.), and to maximize the impact of their visit, the executive committee invested in the arrangement of travel itineraries outside the scope of inspection tours. In December 1952, eight months before the conference, Mayor Lorraine L. Cross of Berkeley, who chaired the executive committee, approached the Ford Foundation for help financing the event. Mayor Cross emphasized how critical the conference would be “not only for the Japanese people, but for the cause of Democracy versus Communism, to which Japan may hold the key” (ibid.). His initial idea was to take a tour of the West Coast only, but the Ford Foundation suggested an extension of the tour to the East Coast, if it were a “valuable experience” for both sides (Cross 1953: 15). In March 1953, as the conference planning progressed, the Ford Foundation made another suggestion regarding the travel itinerary of the Japanese delegation by insisting they go to Honolulu on the way back to Japan because, “in view of the more nearly oriental environment,” the visit to Honolulu will show that “what they have seen in the U.S. can be adapted successfully to the oriental environment” (Thurber 1953).

It is “one of the ironies of history,” as Stefan Tanaka (1993: 44) would put it, that what the Japanese delegates imported back into “the oriental environment” was the Orient itself. During the national tour, Kiyoshi Nakarai, then president of the Yokohama Chamber of Commerce, discovered the existence of Chinatowns in US cities. Especially in San Francisco, he collected a number of documents, including city maps, pamphlets, magazines, and newsletters, that exhibited the problematic presence of the city’s Chinatown. According to one of the city maps, in striking contrast to the greater city of San Francisco, which represented “unending faith in the future of Western Industry,” San Francisco’s Chinatown, with its “gaudy red and gold temples” and “ancient idols that seem to brood with the wisdom of the centuries,” was a place where “today is forgotten” (Crocker First National Bank 1949). Published in 1949, this pictorial map includes a subsection titled “One Meets Such Interesting People,” introducing the Chinese alongside other “interesting” people, including cable-car drivers, a San Francisco fisherman,

flower vendors, a financial worker on Montgomery Street, bohemian artists living on Telegraph Hill, sailors docked at the Embarcadero, short-order cooks at diners, and hotel doormen. In this array of characters, the Chinese are the only category presented not by occupation but by race. This Orientalizing view of Chinatown, even while condescending, also connoted economic benefit, as reflected in a local magazine that described Chinatown as a place “full of the bizarre [and] the mysterious” for the tourists and as a crowded district “in need of modernization” for the “‘Old World’ Oriental” (Campbell 1949: 16).

A settlement form originally developed with the onset of maritime trade and commerce in sixteenth-century Southeast Asia, Chinatown has spread farther over the last century to East Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa in tandem with the global expansion of the capitalist mode of production. While its specific layouts vary by region, discriminatory immigration policies and racist practices of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century provided conditions for its Chinatowns to develop into self-contained ethnic enclaves whose possibility to horizontally expand residential boundaries was strictly limited. This confined situation led to the creation of a unique landscape with vertical development of shophouse-type buildings, and the confinement of residential, religious, and commercial functions within a very limited geography. Particularly in US cities such as San Francisco, Chinatowns’ congested sidewalks, narrow alleys, multifamily units, and unsanitary housing conditions stood in striking contrast to orderly US boulevards, public parks, and brightly lit stores (Wong 1995). Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the city’s Chinese entrepreneurs and landlords as well as the San Francisco Real Estate Board took to the idea of “sinicizing” new buildings to be erected in the area as a means of boosting the city’s economy through tourist promotion (Yip 1985). By the time the Japanese delegates visited San Francisco, these distinctive spatial arrangements of Chinatown had become “stock elements” of the city, which would provide “local marks of distinction” as the source of municipal tourist promotion (Cairns 2004a: 18). It was this idea of Chinatown—an exotic landscape that would generate tourism revenue and thus fuel economic recovery—that captured the minds of the Yokohama politicians.

Upon their return from the conference in September 1953, two major

Yokohama city politicians, Kiyoshi Nakarai and Ryozo Hiranuma, were invited to a reception held in Yokohama's Chinatown. The rebuilding of Yokohama was an urgent issue for the city, especially after the procurement economy came to an end upon the armistice of the Korean War. "To rebuild the city," Nakarai announced during the reception, "we need to rebuild our Yokohama Chinatown" (*Kanagawa shimbun* 1953). Reflecting upon their national tour of US cities, Nakarai stated, "In the great cities of America, I learned that Chinatowns were popular places beloved by Americans. I strongly feel the need to revitalize our Yokohama's attraction [*metibutsu*—Chinatown" (ibid.). Among the attendees were local Chinese entrepreneurs as well as the Yokohama consul of the Republic of China (ROC), Sun Binggan, who promised to collaborate with the city's Chinese residents in the effort of reconstruction.

In November 1953, the Chinatown development committee was organized to develop the area into a tourist destination along with an adjacent shopping district called "Motomachi." The committee agreed on revitalizing Chinatown as a tourist spot comparable to its US counterparts and as part of a symbolic step toward the revitalization of Yokohama. Yet they had no idea how to create a "Chinese-style" ambience. After a series of meetings, they came up with the idea of erecting a traditional Chinese archway at the entrance because they believed that it would make Japanese visitors feel safer and more familiar with the neighborhood. Two years after the submission of several design ideas by local architectural firms, the first Chinese archway, not only in Yokohama but also in Japan, was erected in February 1955 (Sugawara 1996: 156–64). The Chinese archway played a role in spatially demarcating Chinatown from its neighboring areas. One observer commented that the archway created an "exotic atmosphere different from the prewar years" (ibid.).

Though the Cold War had also encroached on the everyday lives of the Chinese community, which divided them into two ideological factions and left indelible scars on both of them,⁵ Yokohama's Chinatown gradually became saturated with shops having "a Chinese front" (*Japan Times* 1955) that resembled the eclectic architectural style of San Francisco's Chinatown. By the late 1950s, the "exotic" Chinatown had become the city's major attraction, and an English-language newspaper in Japan recommended a

visit to its Western readers (*Japan Times* 1959, 1960). By the late 1960s, Yokohama's Chinatown had become a place where foreigners, especially US soldiers and seamen, sought to enjoy nightlife in a Japanese city, as there were a number of bars and snack joints that served Western clients (*Japan Times* 1965). Starting in the 1970s, with another significant political event in the Asia Pacific, Chinatown came to be brought to the fore of public attention. Yet this time the attention was not just local but national. After President Richard Nixon visited Beijing in February 1972, Japan finally normalized diplomatic relations with the PRC in September 1972. "I never thought I would be able to live until the day our country established diplomatic relations with Japan," said one resident in Yokohama's Chinatown the next day, when the joint statement was signed (*Japan Times* 1972). Asia was on the verge of another transformation.

Incheon: An Integrated Economic Space in the Post-Cold War

Deng Xiaoping's open-door economic policy starting in the late 1970s heralded the beginning of remarkable economic growth for the PRC. The economic development of postreform China also brought a huge impact on its neighboring countries, reshaping their political and economic landscapes in an unprecedented way. Concomitant social changes were particularly significant in South Korea, not only because of its geographical proximity to China but also because of its political economic regime, which had severed connections between the two states during the Cold War. This historical change in global trade and travel culminated in the 1992 diplomatic normalization, which signified the end of antagonistic political relations between the two states and signaled the rise of China as a new trading partner. A number of international newspapers reported that shared economic interests between the two states had finally brought an end to the long-held antagonistic relations that had existed and were exacerbated after China's military involvement in the Korean War (*Dong-A ilbo* 1992). This political negotiation thus seemed to indicate that in this "global" atmosphere, "nationalist" resentments had lost ground to economic ambitions. The normalized relations brought about regional economic reintegration, which finally opened up what Giovanni Arrighi (1996: 28) has termed "an integrated East Asian

economic space” in the post–Cold War era by bringing political stability and security to the region.

The burgeoning interest in the Pan Yellow Sea economic region enabled attempts to increase connections between the western coast of South Korea and the northeastern coast of China. The most significant change was felt in Incheon, which had the closest port to mainland China. Even before the 1992 diplomatic normalization, the city of Incheon was bubbling with expectations that the port city would reemerge as a trade center reconnecting to the previously cut-off Chinese market. The late-1980s catchphrase *sōhae’an sidae* (era of the West Coast) was very indicative of the growing aspirations for renewed trade with the once-estranged country across South Korea’s West Sea (*Kyunghyang shinmun* 1988b). A thriving port that played a major role in trade with China before the Cold War, Incheon began to reconnect to the Chinese port cities of Shandong Province, including Weihai and Qingdao, from which the majority of Chinese immigrants in South Korea came. A Chinese resident in Incheon expressed his hopes that the resumed trade could eventually enable people to move freely between the two states (*Kyunghyang shinmun* 1988a).

As a response to increasing links to and interest in China, Chinatowns in South Korea accordingly began to receive public attention: municipal governments turned toward their Chinese settlements to transform the built environment to accommodate tourists. Incheon spearheaded this municipal effort not only because the city still had a distinctive Chinese settlement, established in the late nineteenth century, but also because it faced mainland China right across the sea. In 1992, the city government began to develop the area, a neighborhood with worn-out houses and few people on the streets, into a tourist destination by encouraging the development of Chinese-style restaurants, cultural centers, shops, and the like (*Kyunghyang shinmun* 1992). In 1997, the Chinese cities of Qingdao and Weihai joined hands with Incheon’s city government to further develop the Chinatown plan by building cultural centers named after each city (*Hankyoreh* 1997). In 2000, a Chinese archway donated by the City of Weihai was erected at the entrance to Chinatown, which became the first of its kind in Korea (*Incheon ilbo* 2000). City officials also approached a few local ethnic Chinese residents to seek advice about the development of Chinatown, but this did not create positive

outcomes. After all, the English word *Chinatown* as a tourist destination was an unfamiliar concept among ordinary residents, who had already seen many of their better-off neighbors leave the country for Taiwan, Japan, and the United States because of discriminatory economic policies against Chinese residents during the Cold War years.

It was Yokohama's Chinatown that became a point of reference when local officials of Incheon formulated images for its own Chinatown. They went on several study tours and researched physical elements of Yokohama's Chinatown, ranging from lampposts and signs to museums and facades of buildings. Yokohama's Chinatown had already become a major tourist destination in Japan, promoting itself as the largest Chinatown in Asia. Yokohama being a historic port city also assured Incheon's city officials that Incheon's Chinatown could be adapted to its urban context. What concerned them were not different historic experiences of the Chinese communities but merely morphological conditions of the two port cities—Yokohama's Chinatown being located on a flatland versus Incheon's on a hillside—which they feared would hinder successful adaptation of physical elements.

Toward a New Chinatown

In the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, Chinatowns came to take on different meanings. The International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment policies restructured the economy along neoliberal lines while transforming urban spaces into investment-friendly environments. Though debates regarding the causes of the financial crisis varied, the fostering of an overseas Chinese economic network was proposed as a solution to the financial problems of South Korea. After the crisis, the rising power of the overseas Chinese economic network was emphasized, and it came as a lesson that the South Korean state should have learned earlier. After all, the introduction of Chinese investment capital had been discussed as an alternative way to bring about diversification, as the South Korean economy's heavy reliance on US and Japanese capital was recognized to be one of the major catalysts of the financial crisis (Kim 2000).

The idea of Chinatown as an economic stimulant began to gain more momentum, especially among developers and business experts. Utilizing

various means, ranging from publishing reports to establishing firms particularly suited for Chinatown development, these parties advocated for Chinatowns as new economic platforms on which to build financial capital. In 1997, a private developer founded a committee to construct a new type of Chinatown; in 2004, a leading economic research institute published a book titled *A Country That Has No Chinatown*, which provided a historical account of the supposed absence of Chinatowns in South Korea; and in 2006, the promarket Federation of Korean Industries issued a report on how to revitalize Chinatowns in South Korea. In this new discussion, historic Chinatowns in South Korea were not considered “real” because they did not conform to the normative images of Chinatowns elsewhere, especially those in San Francisco and Yokohama. Research institutes, academics, and newspapers fueled the fever by publishing a spate of stories highlighting the economic and social benefits of new, large-scale Chinatown developments, framing such projects as a matter of economic expediency, as if the nation’s economic hardship originated in the absence of Chinatowns (Chang 1999; Li 2001; Lee 2005).

Instigating this fever was a former professor in Chinese history and now developer. He organized a Chinatown development committee, hosted an international symposium titled “The Overseas Chinese Network and Chinatown,” went into partnership with China’s investment firm to build a new Chinatown, and subsequently made a substantive impact on nationwide Chinatown development projects by providing municipal governments with consultancy advice. When he first began to develop the idea of Chinatown in the aftermath of the financial crisis, his academic training was neither in the history of overseas Chinese nor in Chinatowns but in the history of rural China. He thus traveled to get a sense of Chinatowns around the world, including those in Yokohama, Vancouver, Toronto, San Francisco, and New York. He also became acquainted with a range of professionals on the road, from developers and architects to academics, who came to influence his Chinatown project. Though Yokohama served as the initial model of a successful Chinatown, he later recognized that if a Chinatown remained solely “traditional,” it would fail to attract large capital. “Old Chinatowns”—such as in downtown areas of Yokohama, San Francisco, and New York—where small shops and restaurants were densely packed on the streets, were no

longer ideal types for him. After all, these old Chinatowns were, in his own words, “ghettos” that would attract only low-paid workers and petty merchants. He instead turned toward “new Chinatowns,” which referred to suburban Chinatowns such as the ones in Monterey Park in California as well as Richmond in British Columbia, where wealthy Chinese migrants are likely to congregate. He began to invest in the notion of a “modern Chinatown,” giving his new Chinatown development project the title “Modern and Green Chinatown.”⁶

Incheon’s old Chinatown was not a good candidate for this new plan. It was located in an old downtown area of the city with little possibility of future development. The aspiration to have a “real” Chinatown materialized elsewhere, in a newly developed residential area in a suburb of Seoul. In 2005, ground was broken for a new Chinatown in a seventy-thousand-square-meter area with an estimated construction budget of US\$740 million (Li 2001). The new Chinatown aspired to be “the most modern architectural accomplishment,” accommodating five-star hotels, cultural facilities, and trade centers targeting Chinese businesspeople and tourists (Yang and Yang 2005: 33). Two of the main projects were a shopping mall named Park Avenue and a research institute named Tsinghua’s Window. Modeled on Asia’s premier high-end shopping mall, Shanghai’s famous Xintiandi, Park Avenue was designed to replicate its eclectic architectural ambience. The architectural aesthetics expressed in urban images of Xintiandi, being modern and traditional alike, appeared to fit well into the developer’s intention that the new Chinatown should become a platform to attract both Chinese people and capital. Meanwhile, Tsinghua University Science Park (TUS Park) and other Tsinghua-related research units were expected to join Tsinghua’s Window, which would “redefine the stereotypical Chinatown” (ibid.).

Owing to a lack of capital, the plan for the new Chinatown came to naught. Yet the developer began another Chinatown plan in Incheon, not in Incheon’s old Chinatown but in a new location named Songdo, one of Incheon’s free economic zones established on reclaimed land after the financial crisis. In 2014, Tsinghua Holdings, in partnership with the developer, revived its plan to launch TUS Park in Songdo. With construction of inter-

national schools, museums, Chinese gardens, and condominiums for Chinese resident employees in Songdo, this new project heralded a new kind of Chinatown. The developer stated that the key to garnering Tsinghua investors' support for the development was his framing of Songdo as "Korea's Pudong," referencing Shanghai's symbolic space for financial capital. He predicted the replacement of Korea's old Chinatown in Incheon with Songdo's new Chinatown (Lee 2014).

The growing importance of Asian capitalist economies and the global circulation of capital by Chinese entrepreneurs played a significant role in transmuting the idea of Chinatown. While the increasing presence of Chinese overseas capital in the form of urban investment exacerbated nativist sentiments and anxieties over neoliberal encroachment into North American cities such as San Francisco and Vancouver (Ong 1999; Mitchell 2004), the urban aspiration to secure overseas Chinese capital is so pervasive that a range of cities across the globe have endeavored to transform their built environments to accommodate transnational Chinese entrepreneurs. In particular, Shanghai, a city reflecting vibrant Asian urban economies with its status as "a growing service center" incubating educated labor, provides these new urban projects with glaring urban imageries that symbolize China's emergence as a major economic power (Liu and Chen 2012: 141). This recent embrace of Chinese mobile subjects capable of connecting local sites to global capital circuits is reflected in Chinatown development in a variety of cities across the globe,⁷ but nowhere are these aspirations more manifest than in South Korea. Incheon was not alone in this Chinatown "fever": as of 2016, almost a dozen other local governments have undertaken or are considering Chinatown projects. It is hard to explain the intensity of Chinatown fever without considering it in light of South Korea's antagonistic relations with the PRC during the Cold War years. That antagonistic relationship, which made Chinatowns disappear from public view as a consequence, paradoxically led to the development of Chinatowns during the post-Cold War period. The "new" Chinatown in South Korea is an urban embodiment of the regional and global restructuring taking place in Asia. At the same time, it is none other than distinct historical configurations that generated such a mutation.

Conclusion

This article has examined how Chinatowns as an urban form travel through different time and space dimensions, tying together discrete cities in a shifting global context. By looking at Chinatowns in Yokohama and Incheon, I have argued that the travel of urban forms reveals broader political and economic processes even as it is integral to specific topographies of cities of which the travel is a part. Ideas, theories, policies, and built forms inevitably entail significant mutations as they travel, and they undergo localizing processes as they land in different contexts. It is particularly so when they are confronted with situated elements embedded in the host societies, such as domestic politics, past patterns of local institutions, and aspirations of local actors who have different ways of articulating with global flows. These two Chinatowns should not be read in isolation, however. Yokohama and Incheon are related through the urban form of Chinatown as modeled by San Francisco, which, in turn, connects them to contemporary Chinese cities such as Shanghai. Each Chinatown does not and cannot have an insular identity, not least because, without the exchange between Yokohama and San Francisco, contemporary imaginations of Incheon's Chinatown would have been impossible.

The travel of Chinatowns over the last eight decades propels us to a set of important questions regarding the problematic presence of Asia therein. As the San Francisco system unburdened Japan from its war responsibility for its neighboring Asian countries, it also deprived Japan of a decent opportunity to discuss what "Asia" would mean in the formation of post-war Japanese identity. By the time the idea of developing Chinatowns gained momentum in South Korea in the late twentieth century, Asia had undergone a substantive transformation, which prompted the country to redefine its identity within changing relations with neighboring countries; however, the key question of what Asia means beyond the mere economic expedience remains unanswered. Arguably, the idea of Chinatown is deeply entangled with the problematic representation of Asia, which is itself a reflection of the political and economic restructuring of the region

over the last century. In this regard, Yokohama's and Incheon's Chinatowns present two different cultural politics circulating in and beyond Asia. In Yokohama's Chinatown, following Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Asia is fixed in a particular time and space, providing a backdrop against which the idea of the modern city can be experimented with. In Incheon's, Asia is equated with a global urban utopia associated with urban landscapes like Shanghai's, where colonial heritage can also be capitalized on. The transition of Chinatown in urban space from traditional, fixed, and static to modern, innovative, and utopian paradoxically leads to the question of Asia itself. Asia is still a contested territory, torn between the Cold War Orientalism and the allure of its economic ascendancy.

Notes

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- 1 Anthony King's study of the global transfer of bungalows is a great example, in which he illustrates how a Bengali peasant dwelling called "*banggolo*" in colonial India was adopted by the British community and traveled as a global urban form to contexts as varied as Britain, North America, Africa, and Australia. See King 1984.
- 2 Local newspapers of the time delivered this sentiment toward Chinatown during the occupation period (*Kanagawa shimbun* 1946a, 1946b).
- 3 For further information on the surveillance, see the police report by Director Mitsusada Yoshikawa (Yoshikawa 1951).
- 4 This was reflected in a memoir by Yokohama mayor Ryozo Hiranuma, who wrote that his primary motivations for attending the conference were to learn from the US *senpai* (mentor) how to manage urban space and to receive US financial aid and guidance to reconstruct postwar Japan. See Hiranuma (1954: 4).
- 5 The so-called School Incident (*gakko jiken*) signified the impact of the Cold War on the Chinese community. In 1952, the ROC Navy, stationed at the harbor of Yokohama, joined forces with the Japanese riot police to raid a Chinese school located within Chinatown and expelled teachers on the charge of involvement in communism. For detailed explanations of this incident, see Han (2014: 164–75).

- 6 Based on an interview by the author, Seoul, South Korea, October 10, 2014. It was in fact a Japanese geographer renowned for his research on Chinatowns in Japan and beyond who informed the developer of the difference between old and new Chinatowns.
- 7 These cities include Las Vegas, Dubai, Belgrade, and Dobroiesti (Onishi 2007).

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