Introduction

Even though Chinese have achieved worldwide success, there are still misunderstandings about Asian culture which have lead to differing construals of Chinatown, notably between Westerners and Asians. To investigate the differences in views, I visited Chinatowns in Seattle, San Francisco, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Copenhagen. I also conducted substantial literature-based research.

Asian Imagined

- **Place of familiarity, belonging, and acceptance**
  - “Chinatown has been a kind of compass by which to find where I belong in this country… it was comforting to know that there was a place I could go in my city where everyone else looked like me” (Tsui 2009, 246).
  - I was immediately attracted to grocery stores filled with familiar items. It was even just comforting to hear Cantonese (Field note from Amsterdam).

- **Cultural Organizations for integration assistance, learning, and embracing culture**
  - Chinese language classes, drivers education classes, food sanitation classes, free clinics, cultural events, and libraries of Chinese publications (CCBA)
  - Seattle’s Chinatown Lunar New Year festival featured lion and dragon performances to bring good fortune and wealth to the new year (Field note from Seattle).

Western Imagined

- **Exotic playground**
  - “the general American public… [enjoy] a China-town weekend adventure” (Koetse 2012).
- Chinatown itself perpetuates this image though the copious amounts of red and yellow colors splashed across buildings, sometimes accompanied by bowed, ribbed roofs. While largely rooted in Asian culture, they are highly simplified and fail to acknowledge the substantial ethnic diversity among the Asian population resulting in a Disneyfication of Chinatown (Koetse 2012).

Asian Cross-Over Utilization

Asians operate within the Disneyland Chinatown utilizing this Western Chinatown to their advantage

- In a grocery/retail store, some items originated from Asian cultures, other items (yin si zhi (陰司紙), red lanterns) were marketed towards the Westerner’s ‘oriental’ imagination, serving a different meaning and purpose for Asians (Field note from Amsterdam).
- The food truck called “It’s Bao Time!” was stylized with Disneyland Chinatown images, also served an Americanized menu items such as “The Pig Lebauski” and “Bao Chicka Wow Wow.”

Conclusions

While Chinatown was created through Western influences, there is a Chinatown often missed by Westerners. Asians have extended upon the Western imagined Chinatown to create a place centered on belonging, social security, and community. Unlike many Westerners, Asians are able to see both Chinatowns and use both for business ventures.

References

- “Services.” Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) of Chicago