



Reimagining Chinatown: An analysis of tourism discourse

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Received 13 April 2007; accepted 8 January 2008

Abstract

Ever since Chinese immigrants began to move into big North American cities in the late nineteenth century, their ethnically segregated neighborhoods have been referred to as *Chinatown* and layered with negative and demeaning imagery. Through an analysis of the discourse circulating in neighborhood tours organized by the Chicago Office of Tourism, this paper illustrates how current tourism representations of Chicago's Chinatown are constructed through a process of negotiation with the infamous past imagery of this ethnic enclave. The paper identifies two discursive themes that work to exoticize this neighborhood, while simultaneously attempting to render it familiar and comfortable for tourists. It is argued that such an analysis illuminates how the process of touristification is governed by an ideological shift toward diversity in the globalized city. Moreover, it also illuminates the ways that present tourism discourse, which is produced within an ideological milieu that is celebratory of diversity and multiculturalism and within a political-economic milieu that recognizes the marketability of diversity, draws upon traditional characterizations of Chinatown as Other, while reconstructing this Otherness in a way that appears friendly to tourists. It thus contributes to our understanding of how discourse about an ethnic urban enclave evolves with changing ideological and political-economic conditions, such that traditional imagery is both reinforced and revised.

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Keywords: Chinatown; Discourse; Representation; Ethnicity; Urban tourism

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, cities all across the world have devoted considerable resources to developing tourism as a vital component of the local economy (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Judd & Simpson, 2003; Law, 1993; Newman, 2002; Page, 1995). Such urban economic development initiatives have underscored culture and cultural products as pivotal to their success. Given this demand, ethnic neighborhoods, which operate in an increasingly economic and socio-culturally competitive environment, view their potential to take part in tourism as a strategy to enhance the prosperity of their residents and stakeholders. One of the methods through which tourism is utilized to help such neighborhoods thrive is the establishment and development of ethnic tours—tours which specifically capitalize on the

cultural products of the neighborhood. An increasingly popular phenomenon in contemporary North American tourism, such tours introduce tourists to ethnic neighborhoods by offering entertaining representations of their culture and history and drawing attention to charged relations between ethnicity and the American urban landscape (Conforti, 1996).

The ethnic neighborhood tourism phenomenon occurs in the broader context of the commodification of ethnicity for tourism and leisure purposes. While tourism to ethnic neighborhoods in western countries clearly differs from ethnic tourism to “Third World” countries, they share the same underlying logic: each is premised on the desire to gaze at Others who are viewed as being different from the western self. Just as western discourse constructs the non-western world in the shape of the European imaginary (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998), so too does a dominant White cultural imaginary exist regarding “First World” ethnic enclaves. Thus, this study holds that ethnic

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urban neighborhoods can be regarded, in Anderson's (1987, p. 583) terms, as a "western landscape type" that signifies the way "White" residents perceive the segregated settlements of Chinese immigrants in North American cities. Therefore, even though ethnic neighborhood tours are often targeted at residents living in the same city (and surrounding suburbs) in which the ethnic neighborhoods they are visiting are located, the process can still be seen as a tourism phenomenon, because it is premised on the underlying mechanism of the tourist gaze.

The current study aims to examine discursive themes surrounding tourism to Chinatown as manifested in the Chicago Chinatown neighborhood tours offered by the Chicago Office of Tourism. It explores neighborhood tourism as a site of discursive change by analyzing and comparing past and present imagery of one ethnic site, with the aim of examining how this imagery has changed with evolving ideological and political-economic conditions. Such an analysis can illuminate the process of touristification through which ethnic enclaves come to be perceived in different ways by the dominant society over time. This paper is thus unique, both in its engagement with the relationship between touristification and discursive production in the context of American urban ethnic enclaves, and in its specific focus on Chinatown as a discursive construct. It illuminates the ways that present tourism discourse, which is produced within an ideological milieu that is celebratory of diversity and multiculturalism and within a political-economic milieu that recognizes the marketability of diversity, draws upon traditional characterizations of Chinatown as Other while reconstructing this Otherness in a way that appears friendly to tourists. It thus contributes to our understanding of how discourse about an ethnic urban enclave evolves with changing ideological and political-economic conditions, such that infamous notions the dominant culture has traditionally held about particular ethnic minority groups can be simultaneously reinforced and revised.

In order to explore changing discourse surrounding Chinatown, the study first provides a history of this neighborhood and discusses the way it was traditionally portrayed by the American government and media, through a survey of extant literature on this topic. It then explores discursive themes circulating in the experience of touring Chinatown, through participant observation of the tour offered by one municipal organization, Chicago Neighborhood Tours; through an analysis of this tour's informative and promotional materials; and through an analysis of tourists' reception of the tour's content. Through this process, it illuminates the dynamics between past and present representations of Chinatown in the wake of the touristification of urban ethnic enclaves.

To evaluate these representational dynamics, the study operates within a methodological framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is a methodological approach that illuminates the ways that discursive constructions support particular ideologies and power rela-

tions in society (Parker, 1990). Unlike other sociolinguistic approaches (e.g., conversation analysis, narrative analysis, rhetoric, ethnography), CDA does not aim to merely analyze the use of language and the meanings embedded in the analyzed texts. Instead, CDA employs a critical perspective through which the researcher tries to understand and expose the manner in which social inequality is expressed and reinforced in society through linguistic practices (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This particular study is most closely allied with the CDA research tradition pioneered by Van Dijk (1993, 1998, 1999, 2002) whose work seeks to understand and expose dominant group members' attitudes toward ethnic minorities. As Van Dijk argues, language is a social resource through which dominant groups reinforce their attitudes and values. Van Dijk's work examines various forms of cultural racism as expressed in conversation and in the media. This study expands the use of CDA in a racial/ethnic studies context by demonstrating the way that tourism, and its attendant language and organizing frameworks, can serve as a vehicle for power relations, but arguing that the way tourism functions toward this end changes with regard to changing societal ideological and economic conditions. As such, this study not only illuminates the central role of tourism-related discourses in the way minorities are gazed upon by tourists but also shows the applicability of CDA to the study of an important contemporary social and economic activity through which ethnicity is transformed into an exotic and inviting commodity.

While this study specifically highlights the role of the ideological shift in US society toward the celebration of urban ethnic diversity in the commoditization of ethnic neighborhoods for touristic purposes, it is important to note that this societal attitude change is not the only factor at work in the reshaping of urban enclaves. Clearly, other social, economic, and political forces are afoot as well. For example, the choice made by some Chinatown residents to open Chinese restaurants is not only the result of increased visitation to this neighborhood, but also an adaptation to other active market forces, such as the growing popularity of convenience food in contemporary consumer culture. Such forces are clearly intertwined with the touristification process, but none is uniquely deterministic over the others. Thus, it is important to note at the outset of this study that the role of forces beyond expanding tourism is not fully acknowledged in our discussions of change in Chinatown. Rather than focusing on the relationship between touristification and physical, economical, and social development within Chinatown, this paper focuses on the relationship between touristification and discourse about Chinatown by examining the way that tourism brokers have "repackaged" this ethnic enclave to make it appear desirable to visitors, while in some ways still continuing to engage with earlier dominant White American societal discursive constructions of Chinatown as a space of the Other.

2. Chicago's Chinatown

Chinese urban enclaves like the one located in Chicago can be found in many large North American cities, including Boston, San Francisco, New York, Washington, and Vancouver. The history of Chicago's Chinatown can be traced back to the late 19th century when Chinese immigrants arrived in Chicago to build the transcontinental railroad. After the completion of the railroad, many Chinese individuals decided to remain in the region. Many initially settled in the area around Van Buren and Clark Streets; however, the enclave was soon displaced to the area near Cermack Road and Wentworth Avenue, where it has continued to exist for more than 100 years. The 1882 passage of the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act, the first ethnic-based immigration law in the United States, helps to explain the development of a distinct Chinese residential district in Chicago. The Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese workers for 10 years, and after several modifications and renewals, it was finally repealed in 1943 (McClellan, 1971). In the decades following the 1940s, Chicago continued to witness an influx of Chinese immigrants, and it is estimated that by the 1960s, Chicago ranked fourth in Chinese population in the United States.

Ho and Moy (2005) report that interviews with Chinese-Americans who experienced life in Chicago during what can be labeled as the "Exclusion Acts period" show that they had mixed feelings about their Asian-American heritage, as they felt proud of their families' achievements, as well as those of other Chinese immigrants, but preferred to emphasize achievements that had occurred outside of Chinatown (2005, p. 7). Ho and Moy (2005, p. 7) suggest several reasons for Chinese Chicago residents' shame over Chinatown, including its reputation as a site of illegal activity, due to its role as the center of production of false identity papers to elude immigration officials during the Exclusion Acts period, and due to its "ghetto-like" reputation.

To some degree, Chinatown, like most ethnic enclaves, was always an object of touristic interest (for examples of early visitor's accounts of Chinatown, see Lee, 2001; McClellan, 1971; Wong, 1995). As Conforti (1996, p. 831) notes, ethnic urban neighborhoods have always been places where members of the dominant society can go to see "somewhat...alien places that are quasi-foreign, where interesting food can be found, exotic people can be observed, and even a lurking danger can be sensed." Tourism to Chicago's Chinatown became especially popular in the late twentieth century, though, with the neighborhood revival of the 1970s, which resulted in the construction of the famous Chinatown Gateway in 1975. Since this time, large North American cities like Chicago have become increasingly aware of the potential of ethnic neighborhoods to serve as markers of urban identity (Conforti, 1996), as well as of their potential to generate revenue as tourist attractions. Today, Chicago seeks to market its ethnically diverse identity through slogans like

"Travel the world, in Chicago, one neighborhood at a time," "Discover the world in our backyard," and "Wander the Orient, only minutes from downtown," and civic organizations like the Chicago Office of Tourism and the Chamber of Commerce offer tours of ethnic enclaves to empower ethnic groups to use their cultural resources to increase neighborhood economic vitality (Chicago Neighborhood Tours, 2003).

A recent interview with Dorothy Coyle (Powell, 2006), the director of the Chicago Office of Tourism, reports that in 2005, more than 3200 people participated in the "Chicago Neighborhood Tours" series offered by this organization, which includes tours of Chinatown, Greek Town, Little Italy, Ukrainian Village, Humbolt Park (Puerto Rican neighborhood), Devon Avenue (Indian neighborhood), Milwaukee Avenue (Polish neighborhood), Pilsen and Little Village (Mexican neighborhoods), Bronzeville (African-American neighborhood), and Bridgeport (Irish neighborhood). According to Coyle, most of the participants in these tours live in the Chicago metro area, and this was the case with the Chinatown tours analyzed here. Participation in the Chicago Neighborhood Tours' Chinatown tour during the time of this research (2003–2004) averaged about 40 participants, the vast majority of whom were residents of the Chicago suburbs and surrounding areas. At this time, the Chinatown tour was combined with the Greek Town tour (as of 2007, Little Italy has been added to this package as well). All eight tours attended by the first author revealed a strictly Caucasian, middle to upper-middle class clientele and featured slightly greater female than male participation.

Today, in the wake of ongoing gentrification of many urban neighborhoods (Clay, 1979; Gale, 1984; Santos & Buzinde 2007), most of Chicago's ethnic enclaves have established museums dedicated to immigration and settlement of the city, and of the United States more generally (e.g., the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center, the Polish Museum of America, the Irish American Heritage Center), in order to reinforce the connection between the physical space of neighborhoods and specific ethnic traditions. Chicago's Chinatown now boasts such an institution, as well, known as the Chinese-American Museum of Chicago; however, this museum had not yet opened at the time of data collection for this study.

2.1. Traditional Chinatown imagery

While little specific information about early representations of Chicago's Chinatown exists, much work has explored public perceptions of North America's Chinatowns more generally. In keeping with Anderson's (1987) notion of Chinatown as a western landscape type, past representational themes noted across various North American Chinatowns can be argued to articulate something of value about the way Chicago's Chinatown was likely perceived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wong (1995) notes that ever since Chinese

immigrants moved into big North American metropolitan areas in the late nineteenth century, their ethnically segregated neighborhoods were referred to as “Chinatown” and were layered with negative and demeaning imagery that was promoted in various forms. Wong suggests an intriguing historical analysis of images and representations of the American Chinatown as manifested in American and Chinese sources, such as official governmental transcripts, labor pamphlets, travel diaries, popular films, and magazines. In short, Wong suggests that a careful examination of the negative imagery of Chinatown that appears in these sources indicates that Chinatown functioned metaphorically as a neighborhood “forever foreign to American sensibilities and completely unacceptable” (1995, p. 4).

Extant studies suggest several common narratives that characterized early discourse about Chinatown, such as Chinatown as an immoral hotbed of opium smoking, gambling, and prostitution; Chinatown as the domain of secret societies (known as *tongs*) and thugs, who wielded power in the drug and sex trades; Chinatown as a dilapidated neighborhood with unsanitary living conditions and bad odor; and Chinatown as a pagan and non-Christian district (Anderson, 1987; Chen, 1992; Lin, 1998; Wong, 1995). As such, as Wong argues, Chinatown symbolized the exact opposite of what a White American neighborhood was supposed to be (see also Lee, 2001). A pertinent example of the negative imagery that surrounded Chinatown in the past is provided by historian McClellan (1971, p. 32), who quotes Elodie Hogan, a nineteenth century travel writer, who described San Francisco’s Chinatown as “an agglomeration of Oriental paganism, reeking sidewalks, foul with unknown trash, the nauseous odors vomited from black cellars; the wilderness of alley ... and sphinx-like crafty yellow men who glide along the narrow pavement.” Similarly, in his examination of Vancouver’s Chinatown, Anderson (1987) argues that the word “Chinatown” was constructed by “Vancouver’s ‘White’ European society, who like their contemporaries throughout North America, perceived the district of Chinese settlement according to an influential culture of race” (1987, p. 594). In other words, the label “Chinatown” signified all the characteristics that led Chinese immigrants to be considered inassimilable to Western culture.

2.2. Current tourism discourse surrounding Chicago’s Chinatown

This study contends that current tourism discourse about Chicago’s Chinatown exists as an outcome both of previous discourse about Chinese urban enclaves and of changing ideological and political-economic conditions that govern the production of representations in tourism. Current Chinatown imagery was determined through participant observation of the Chinatown tour offered by Chicago Neighborhood Tours in conjunction with the

Chicago Office of Tourism; through an analysis of this tour’s informative and promotional materials; and through an analysis of tourists’ reception of the tour’s content, as accessed through focus groups.

Participant observations were conducted in 2003–2004 on combined organized tours to Chinatown and Greek Town. In 2002, the first author established a rapport with the then manager of the Chicago Neighborhood Tours, as well as with other personnel, including tour guides. Permission was granted to the first author to take part in all tours to Chinatown conducted between 2003 and 2004 (a total of eight tours). During each tour attended, the first author observed tour guides’ behavior; tourists’ behavior; and tourists’ interactions with one another, with tour guides, and with Chinatown residents and workers. Participant observation was chosen to observe the exposition that was offered to tourists by the guides and also to allow for a better understanding of the process of touring this specific neighborhood with this specific tour program, in order to facilitate a greater contextualization of findings from the focus groups.

Promotional materials distributed to participants of the analyzed tours were also assessed in order to further identify discursive themes surrounding tours to Chicago’s Chinatown. The analyzed promotional materials included an informational pamphlet produced by Chicago Neighborhood Tours (Chinatown & Greek Town, 2003); a booklet from the same organization (Chicago Neighborhood Tours—Travel the World, 2003); a visitor’s guide to Chinatown produced by the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce (Chinatown Visitor’s Guide, 2004); and the Chicago Neighborhood Tours official website (www.chicagocitytours.com). The informative pamphlet of Chicago Neighborhood Tours was used in the May 31, August 23 and October 18 tours conducted in 2003. The pamphlet consists of three double-sided pages dedicated to an essay about the “two neighborhoods that contribute to the collaboration of ethnicity that make Chicago the great city that it is...” and includes a review of the historical development of the two neighborhoods. In addition, it contains two pages of advertisements for shops and restaurants in Chinatown and Greek Town. The Chicago Neighborhood Tours booklet includes a short description of each of the tours offered by the Chicago Office of Tourism, including the tour to Chinatown and Greek Town. The visitor’s guide includes a map and various pieces of text about visiting Chinatown.

Focus groups were chosen in accordance with Labov’s (1997) premise that much valuable data gathered on narratives are drawn from the reactions of audiences; thus, focus groups’ reactions to presented material were engaged to further extend the authors’ understanding of the discursive themes surrounding Chinatown tourism. Focus groups were chosen because they encourage interaction among participants, replicate the social setting in which participants would normally discuss their travels experiences, and allow participants to build upon each other’s

answers, enhancing, in the process, the depth of the examined discourse (Greenbaum, 2000). Moreover, they provide an excellent opportunity to “explore issues in depth, and obtain insights that might not occur without the discussion they provide” (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 196–197).

At the end of each tour, during the drive back to the Chicago Cultural Center, the first author attempted to approach all tourists on the bus and invite them to participate in an upcoming focus group. This, however, did not result in focus groups from each tour attended because, as expected, in some of the tours, the first author was not able to assemble a large enough group, mainly due either to scheduling conflicts or to a lack of participant interest. In total, four focus groups, ranging from 6 to 10 participants, were conducted. Participants ($N = 31$) were all Chicago-suburb and greater-Illinois residents, aged 25–67; 19 were women, and 12 were men. Each focus group consisted of individuals who had taken the Chinatown tour together. By dividing focus groups this way, the power of their “interpretive communities” was maximized, as members were surrounded by a social group that, at face value, collectively shared the same information provided by the program (i.e., brochures, tour guide accounts) and visited the same sights in Chinatown.

Focus groups were conducted between June 2003 and August 2004. All four focus groups were conducted by the first author, and each lasted, on average, for 2 h. Focus group discussions followed a semi-structured format, which allowed for variation in the order of questions, while the main topics covered remained unchanged. This format encouraged participants to explore a variety of forms of participation without leading their responses. Questions posed were concrete, focused, simple, and open-ended; they began with the more general and progressed to the more specific (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Among others, questions included “What information provided to you by the tour did you find most relevant and why?”, “How would you describe Chinatown?”, “What did you find most interesting about Chinatown?”, “What would you prioritize in a tour of Chinatown in regard to what to see and what to do?”, and “What did you come away with from this experience?” For verification and feedback purposes, two volunteers from each focus group agreed to comment on the authors’ identification and interpretation of the main themes in their specific focus group discussions.

To analyze the data collected through these three methods, CDA was conducted, with the goal of identifying central themes circulating about Chicago’s Chinatown. Methodologically, CDA can be described as an attempt to bridge the gap between macro- and micro-levels of society, by focusing on specific instances of language usage and broader relations of power (Van Dijk, 2002). Van Dijk suggests that there are various ways to bridge this gap, such as analyzing social processes like legislation and news-making or focusing on understanding language use in

specific social contexts. In this case, we considered the specific social context of tourism. In terms of practical application, discourse analysis involves unpacking the content of text in order to understand the way the meaning of a given object (in this case, Chinatown) is being constructed through that text (Fairclough, 2003; Schwandt, 2001). As Rose (2001) argues, discourse analysis is more a “craft skill” than a strategy involving a definitive set of procedures (p. 149). Conducting discourse analysis involves the use of subtle cultural “common sense” skills that render the analyst able to read the iconography of his/her own culture (p. 149). Rose argues that effective discourse analysis involves exploring both the rhetorical organization and the conditions of social production of texts. In analyzing the rhetorical organization of visual texts, scholars can ask, for example, how their iconography argues for particular notions of social difference or how it constructs blame and responsibility. In terms of procedural advice, she suggests trying to look at images with “new eyes” (p. 150). She cites the work of Foucault (1972, p. 25), who argues that pre-existing categories “must be held in suspense. They must not be rejected definitively, of course, but the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed.” She then suggests searching for key themes. Again, she cites Foucault (1972, p. 29), who neatly expresses this idea, stating that the analyst’s task is to examine:

relations between statements (even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each other’s existence); relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the same, or even adjacent fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges); relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, political, social).

Next, Rose notes that one must consider how the examined text works to persuade or to produce “effects of truth” (p. 154). How does it claim authority and/or naturalize its constructions. Additionally, one must pay attention to the complexity and contradictions of texts, because discourses are not necessarily logical or coherent. One must also consider what has been left out of the text under consideration, as well as what has been included; Echtner and Prasad (2003) refer to such omissions as “significant silences.”

Analysis of each of the three forms of data thus commenced with the researchers attempting to hold preexisting notions of Chinatown in abeyance and asking, “What understandings of Chinatown are being communicated in this text (e.g., brochure, tour guide monologue, focus group participant comment)?” Then, identified imagery was compared across data sources, to determine central discursive themes existing in more than one source

of data. It was assumed that by triangulating various sources of data regarding the examined tours, the authors could recognize themes and ideas that govern the discourse about Chinatown as a tourist attraction.

It is important to note, however, that discourse analysis is an inherently interpretive process. Thus, the phenomenon of touring Chinatown can never be finally deconstructed into permanent “correct” themes. As Packer and Addison (1989, p. 35) note, “a self-consciously interpretive approach to scientific investigation does not come to an end at some final resting place, but works instead to keep discussion open and alive, to keep inquiry under way.” Thus, the discursive themes noted here are certainly not claimed to constitute the only way of abstracting the experience of touring Chinatown. Rather, they should simply be regarded as an organizing mechanism for discussing the way that discourse about an ethnic enclave changes with changing ideological and political-economic conditions. These interpretations, like all interpretations, offer but one window into this process.

The combination of participant observation notes, brochure analysis, and focus group transcript analysis revealed an overarching representation of Chinatown that can best be stated as “Chinatown: An Exotic, yet Comfortable Place to Visit.” This representation was thus comprised of the combination of two discursive themes: Chinatown as an exotic site, which is highly different from the neighborhoods generally populated by members of dominant White society, but also Chinatown as a place that is not too different—a place that is familiar and similar enough to White neighborhoods in certain key ways, such that tourists can feel comfortable to visit it. The first discursive theme, “Exotic Chinatown,” was communicated largely through an emphasis on the food available in Chinatown, on instances of visual symbolism in the neighborhood (such as architecture and festival displays), and on elements of Chinese heritage that can be accessed by visiting Chinatown. The second discursive theme, “Comfortable Chinatown,” was communicated through a three-part emphasis on safety, convenience, and the friendliness of Chinatown’s residents.

At first glance, it may appear that the themes of exoticism and familiarity blatantly contradict each other. However, upon closer inspection, it is easy to see that they actually function in tandem to render Chinatown an acceptable destination for tourists from dominant US society. As Cohen (1972) argued, tourism always involves a tension between the quest for the excitement of the novel and strange and the desire for the comfort of the familiar, with different tourists seeking to balance these elements in different ways. Unlike Cohen’s analysis, however, which sought to create a typology of tourists based on their goals and strategies for achieving novelty and familiarity, we seek here to highlight the tension between these two factors, as revealed empirically through tourism discourse surrounding Chicago’s Chinatown, in order to show how their dialectic can illuminate the urban enclave touristifica-

tion process and function in combination with ideological shifts occurring in the dominant culture to help produce a state of affairs in which traditional imagery of a minority ethnic neighborhood can be both perpetuated and altered. The themes of exoticism and familiarity are thus discussed in greater depth below and then analyzed, regarding their relationship to historical narratives of Chinatown, so as to illuminate the ways that discourse about this ethnic neighborhood has evolved over time, in the face of changing social and economic ideologies and prerogatives which have spurred the touristification process.

2.2.1. *Exotic Chinatown*

The first discursive theme emphasized Chinatown as an exotic place of difference. A key phrase used to market the neighborhood reads, “Isn’t it time you experience a glimpse of another world?” (*Chinatown Visitor’s Guide*, 2004). Food was the most prominent element used to exoticize the neighborhood, and this was not considered surprising, given the globalization and popularity of Chinese food in America and beyond (Wu & Cheung, 2002), and given that culinary themes are part and parcel of most tours of ethnic enclaves and are employed heavily in tourism in general (Au & Law, 2002; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Long, 2004; Telfer & Wall, 1996). The centrality of food in the exotification of Chinatown was also not surprising, given that culinary encounters are a convenient and non-controversial way for people to engage with foreign cultures, as they do not require much in the way of previous knowledge or understanding and allow tourists to gaze into the world of the Other without becoming overtly embroiled in messier politically or ideologically oriented interactions. With regard to this specific tour program, restaurants were stressed in great detail in the descriptions provided in brochures, websites, and guides’ accounts. As one tour guide explained, “Chinatown is a unique cultural experience for your taste buds...” (May 31, 2003 tour). During the walking portion of the tour, tourists are taken past scores of restaurants, and guides repeatedly make reference to the great cultural experience of eating an authentic Chinese meal in Chinatown, where often, as noted by the tour guides, the host does not “speak your language.” Similarly, passages of text employed in the brochures consistently mention the smells and tastes of Chinatown (“No doubt, the delicious smells from the amazing number of authentic restaurants will be the first to greet you”; *Chinatown Visitor’s Guide*, 2004) and describe Chinese food as “exotic” (*Chicago Neighborhood Tours*, 2003). They exhort tourists to “Explore Chinese grocery stores stocked with Oriental ingredients—from live seafood and poultry to the most exotic vegetables and spices” (*Chinatown Visitor’s Guide*, 2004). Focus group participants also emphasized the importance of experiencing exotic food and food-related practices. As one tourist noted, “I thought it was so interesting when we walked by the grocery stores and meat market...it had meat hanging...you saw the ducks just hanging there...it’s very

different...very unique. We don't have that. Our meats are wrapped, and you don't see the heads and stuff...[laugh]."

Furthermore, focus group participants directly associated and described Chinese culture in terms of Chinese food. Therefore, the food served as an opportunity to guide the interchangeable use of Chinese culture and Chinese food when discussing Chicago's Chinatown. As two participants in focus group 3 explained:

Participant 1: Well...I went [on the tour] because I want to know more about Chinatown and their culture. When I have visitors I always want to take them there...Now, I can take them to have a great Chinese meal. I know where to go...this [tour] is a great way to find out about a place because they show you the area...

Participant 2: But there are other places in Chicago you can go to have a Chinese meal...some are excellent.

Participant 1: Sure, but that's not the point....the point is to have a cultural experience. Eating Chinese food in Chinatown is a cultural experience...you're experiencing the culture. The other places are more just...food.

Taken as a whole, then, the tours emphasize food in order to produce Chicago's Chinatown as an exoticized cultural product existing outside of the usual boundaries of American culture, despite the obviousness pervasiveness and banality of Chinese food in mainstream US society today (Gish, 2005).

The theme of Chinatown as an exotic place to visit was also communicated through an emphasis on visual symbols of Chinese ethnicity in the neighborhood. Chinatown contains several architectural features which mark the neighborhood and give its physical space meaning as an ethnic place. Such features include a typical Chinatown gateway, in the style of those found in Chinese urban enclaves across the United States; buildings which feature pagodas, ornamental tiles, vases, and lion sculptures and which make liberal use of the color red; and street signs that are printed in Chinese as well as English script. These architectural features are noted by guides during the tours and are prominently pictured and mentioned in the brochures as being unique ethnic characteristics of the neighborhood. For example, the text of one brochure, which devotes an entire section to architecture, reads, "In the shadows of downtown Chicago, a world of traditions and old world architecture draws visitors to the landmark Chinatown Gate..." (*Chinatown Visitor's Guide*, 2004). The cover of this brochure features a photograph of an ornate building of traditional Chinese design, with the Sears Tower rising directly behind it, thus communicating the idea of an exotic landscape contrast. Non-architectural visual symbols of ethnicity, such as costumed festival performers, Chinese calligraphy, red lanterns, and rice paper parasols, are also emphasized in the brochure imagery. Such visual cues communicate the idea that Chinatown is a unique place, different from the neighborhoods that surround it, and, therefore, worth seeing.

Finally, the tours construct Chinatown as an exotic and different place through references to unique elements of Chinese heritage, typically by offering discussions of Chinese holidays, their meaning, and the ways they are celebrated. While the tours attended by the first author did not take place at a time when any Chinese festivals were occurring, the brochures made prominent mention of several Chinese holidays and festivals, inviting visitors to return to the neighborhood when celebrations were underway.

Taken together, then, the components of food, visual symbols, and heritage comprise a discursive theme of exoticism that is used to commodify Chinatown as a place of difference. This representation of Chinatown as Other is, in some ways, continuous with the neighborhood's early reputation as a place "forever foreign to American sensibilities," as discussed by Wong (1995, p. 4) and others (Anderson, 1987; Lee, 2001; McClellan, 1971). What has largely shifted, however, is the normative judgment accorded to the idea of "foreignness." In the past, Chinatown's difference was viewed as dangerous and undesirable; this idea can be seen in its depiction as a dirty, backwards, crime-ridden neighborhood filled with residents whose "pagan" sensibilities were considered threatening to the dominant White Christian society. Today, the imagery of Chinatown's difference, as manifested in tourism discourse, bears little relation to the derogatory characterizations of Chinatowns in decades past, and is instead at worst ambiguous and at best celebratory.

Ambiguity can be seen in the discourse surrounding food in the neighborhood. While much ado was made about the wonderful smells and tastes that could be encountered in Chinatown, references to food handling and storage practices, such as the presence of live seafood and poultry in grocery shops and the open-air display of meat "with heads" (i.e., still attached), illustrate the perception of Chinese culture as less developed and modern, in terms of sanitation and treatment of livestock. Such sentiments, in some sense, harken back to earlier images of Chinatown as unsanitary, odorous, and backwards. Conversely, discussions of visual symbols of ethnicity as sights to experience in Chinatown are wholly positive. The neighborhood's unique architectural pieces are celebrated in the tours for their beauty and fine detail, and in some instances, such as the case of the Chinatown Gateway, they are overtly associated with noble human characteristics and pursuits, in this case "peace, harmony, and the spirit of cooperation between people..." (*Chicago Neighborhood Tours*, 2003). Heritage is also exoticized in a positive way. Interestingly, Chinese religion is presented in a broader way than it was constructed in the past, when its superstitious and "pagan" dimensions were most heavily emphasized. There continues to be some emphasis on superstition in explanations of Chinese holiday celebrations, such as statements in the *Chinatown Visitor's Guide* (2004) which note that for the Lantern Festival, "lanterns are hung up high so the

celestial spirit can see them and protect the communities,” and for Chinese New Year, that it is believed the gesture of giving gifts to a man dressed in a papier mache lion headdress will “fend off evil spirits in the coming year”; however, the tours also present the more social and cultural functions of Chinese religious holidays, such as bringing families together to commemorate the completeness of the year or to celebrate their bond (*Chicago Neighborhood Tours, 2003*). Regardless of the way Chinese religious traditions are presented, though, the depictions are always celebratory. Chinatown continues to be seen as a place with ethnic and religious traditions that differ from mainstream White America, but rather than being feared, as in the past, this difference is now lauded as a valuable part of Chicago’s urban cultural landscape.

In general, then, while some ambiguity toward Chinese culture can still be seen in the ways that food and food practices are emphasized in Chicago Chinatown tours, for the most part, the idea of difference is no longer employed to denigrate Chinatown, but to celebrate it. This transition in the way Chinatown’s Otherness is manifested is obviously related to the need to market Chinatown for tourism purposes, which entails the need to attract tourists to Chinatown. It could be argued, therefore, that the touristification of Chinatown signifies an important ideological shift regarding the way isolated ethnic neighborhoods are perceived by the dominant group.

2.2.2. *Comfortable Chinatown*

The second discursive theme constructed Chinatown as a place that is convenient, safe, and friendly. Thus, while Chinatown is exotic, it is similar enough to mainstream society in important ways, which ensure that tourists will feel comfortable visiting it. Chinatown’s convenience was emphasized through key phrases in tour brochures, such as “Wander the Orient, only minutes from Downtown: By cab, car, bus or ‘El’ (red line),” “Rising out of the shadows of Chicago’s urban landscape... Chinatown is...easily accessible,” and “Parking is easy and convenient” (*Chinatown Visitor’s Guide, 2004*). The neighborhood’s safety was also stressed, both in brochures and in tour guides’ accounts. The *Chinatown Visitor’s Guide (2004)* describes the neighborhood as “small and secure,” and makes mention of its recently constructed modern retail center and performance venue, Chinatown Square, as well as its more traditional structures. During the walking portion of the tours the first author attended, participants were informed that the neighborhood is very safe—so safe, in fact, that the area is witnessing the return of many Chinese residents who had formerly moved to the suburbs, but are now choosing to return to make Chinatown their home. To demonstrate this idea, tourists are shown the new high-rise condos currently under construction in the heart of Chinatown. This perception of the neighborhood as a desirable place for well-off Chinese Chicagoans to live stands in interesting contrast to the legacy of shame which the neighborhood’s residents in previous generations were

noted to have experienced (*Ho & Moy, 2005*). The tourists in the study’s focus groups also commented on the neighborhood’s safety. One woman offered the following thoughts in this regard:

I have to admit...I took the tour because I was nervous of going by myself...you always hear about crime in some of these places. I left knowing that it is a pretty safe place... I would be comfortable going back.

A woman from a different focus group expressed similar sentiments:

You have this idea of Chinatown as seedy and dangerous. It’s very exotic...like, in movies, there’s fights and drugs and illegal factories. I know it’s the movies, but it creates an idea. And, you don’t go around thinking this, but I’m sure they have to work to make sure people know that’s not true...at least, not here. Listening to what [the guide] had to say...reading what they give you makes you realize that it’s safer.

In addition to being promoted as comfortable, due to its convenience and safety, Chinatown is also presented to tourists as a friendly and welcoming place. As the *Chinatown Visitor’s Guide (2004)* notes, “As the words of the Gateway say: ‘The world is for all.’ Chinatown is for all.” The front cover of their brochure further features the slogan “Chinatown: Always an Open Door.” Similarly, its inside text describes Chinatown as “a bustling, friendly village” and states that “Everyone is eager to give you directions and assistance, and just in case—the street signs are in English as well as Chinese Characters.” This quote illustrates the desire to construct Chinatown as familiar and comfortable to non-Chinese visitors, who may hold an image of the neighborhood as an exclusionary Oriental ghetto that is not welcoming to strangers. This may explain the need to mention that the street signs in Chinatown are printed in English, a fact which would seem to be quite obvious, given the neighborhood’s location in an American city.

The depiction of Chinatown as friendly can also be seen in the narratives of tour guides, who presented the neighborhood as a place where “anyone can join in.” As a guide on one of the attended tours explained:

Chinatown is a very friendly place. They really enjoy having tourists. You’ll find it to be very welcoming...You will be given the last hour or so to explore on your own. If you see something that interests you, check it out...people are very helpful.

As these quotes illustrate, the emphasis on safety and friendliness seems to effectively counteract earlier views of Chinatown in the American popular imagination. As noted previously, in earlier eras, Chinatowns were frequently depicted as overcrowded, dilapidated and plagued with major social problems, such as organized crime, sweatshops, illegal immigration, and poverty. These characterizations contributed to notions of Chinatown as a mysterious and

dangerous place. In order to successfully touristify Chicago's Chinatown, brokers have had to work to overturn earlier discursive patterns by emphasizing the neighborhood as the exact opposite of what its historical reputation would suggest, in terms of safety and comfort. Thus, the image of Chinatown as convenient, safe, and friendly, with very little crime, lots of modern development, and plenty of open and welcoming residents waiting to lend tourists a hand, stands in stark opposition to past characterizations of the neighborhood and illustrates an important discursive shift regarding this ethnic place, in the wake of a new ideological and economic era.

It is important to anchor the discursive theme of Chinatown as comfortable and familiar, through its convenience, safety, and friendliness, within the context of the need to exotify Chinatown. Combining the oppositional expressions of familiarity and difference allows for the creation of the overarching representation of "Chinatown: An Exotic Yet Comfortable Place to Visit," which can invoke excitement and adventure in the minds of tourists, while also preserving their sense of security and ease. Such an emphasis is logical, as current tourism strategies are greatly dependent on the "uniqueness" of destinations, events, and people, but must also demonstrate that toured spaces are safe, comfortable, and entertaining so as not to scare away potential tourists. Tourists to Chinatown seemed to respond positively to this idea of promoting difference within a safe environment. As one focus group participant stated, "It felt really safe. And maybe it's because we had a guide and he was familiar with the place and the culture. That makes you comfortable—and if you feel comfortable, you can appreciate how different it is."

3. Conclusion

Extant investigation into urban ethnic enclaves, such as Chinatown, have traditionally centered on issues related to tourism development and urban planning. This study, rather than focusing on the relationship between touristification and physical development/policy, focuses on the relationship between touristification and discourse about Chinatown, by examining the way that tourism brokers have "repackaged" this ethnic enclave to make it appear desirable to visitors, while in some ways still continuing to engage with earlier discursive constructions of Chinatown by the dominant white American society as a space of the Other. In taking this discursive approach, we attempt to engage with Britton's (1991) call for a more critical tourism scholarship which moves beyond tourists and their flows, impacts, and patterns to challenge and question the cultural assumptions of society.

Specifically, this study focused on the relationship between past and present discourses surrounding Chinatown, in which a dialectic between the notions of exoticism and familiarity is manifested. Findings from the participant observations, focus groups, and related documents demon-

strate how modern tourism discourse about Chinatown is formed out of a process of negotiation with the infamous past imagery of this ethnic enclave. Such an examination not only enables a better understanding of the construction of Chinatown as a tourism attraction but also illuminates the dynamics between changing socio-economic conditions and evolving discourses of place as Chinatown undergoes touristification. Some theoretical and practical implications of this analysis are discussed below.

First, we suggest that the tours to Chinatown signify the institutionalization of visits to urban ethnic enclaves, in which symbolic and visual aspects of ethnicity are emphasized and developed to be gazed upon and consumed by visitors (Conforti, 1996). As such, the tours to Chinatown are informed and shaped not only by the past imagery of Chinatown but also by the consumer culture of which they are a part. As noted, this study emphasizes that it is important to pay careful attention to the changing socio-economic conditions under which narratives about tourism destinations are produced. This outcome yields a larger lesson for the act of CDA in general: one must not only consider relationships between statements, images, etc., circulating through different sources in a particular era; one must also read language intertextually across time periods, in order to understand how productions of ethnicity, and attendant relationships of power, change with changing conditions.

In considering the touristification of ethnicity and urban ethnic enclaves as pertinent contexts to this study, the celebration of diversity as a declarative ideology behind these tours can be understood as a market force that helps to determine the way ethnicity can be effectively sold for tourism purposes in the current historical moment. The manner in which diversity is celebrated, however, is not significantly different from what can be seen in other examples of ethnic tourism, since the practice of "Othering" is still central. In other words, the findings of this study illustrate that similar to other cases of ethnic tourism, in tours to Chinatown cultural and visual differences of the Orient are emphasized in order to render it an object of touristic value.

Previous studies on representations of the Other in tourism argue that tourism is a cultural site where hegemonic ideas about the superiority of the tourist's sending culture (typically the West) and the inferiority of the Other (typically the Orient) are manifested (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998; Santos, 2006). Therefore, in some sense, it can be argued that tours to Chinatown reflect yet another example of such an ideology, in which residents of the non-ethnically affiliated suburbs are invited to "Wander the Orient, only minutes from downtown," as suggested in the *Chinatown Visitor's Guide* (2004). In this context, the past imagery of Chinatown functions both as a quality that attracts visitors to the neighborhood in which the exotic Other can be viewed and consumed and as a reason to take an organized tour, which reduces the perceived risk associated with visiting a possibly dodgy neighborhood.

However, the need to dismantle particular negative stereotypes (e.g., Chinatown as dilapidated, crime-infested, and unwelcoming) clearly exists, in order to prevent tourists from avoiding Chinatown altogether, even as participants in a guided tour, and this discursive change is clearly manifested in the modern narratives perpetuated by Chinatown tours. Therefore, it can be argued that just as in other ethnic tourism examples, the practice of Othering is clearly embedded in tourism to this urban enclave; however, the idea of difference is now spun in a much more positive way. Such a modern construction of difference clearly reflects the influence of a liberal ideology, in which ethnic diversity is framed by the City of Chicago as a positive urban characteristic that should be celebrated; indeed, “Diversity represents the new guiding principle for city planners” (Fainstein, 2005). At the same time, characterizations of Chinatown as “different in a good way,” help to reinforce this ideology and help diversity to remain a positively viewed, and thus marketable, phenomenon.

One unfortunate limitation of this study is that it does not explore the biographies of individual tourism providers and visitors to Chinatown, thus leaving them faceless. To some extent, our analysis essentializes both the tourist and the tourism brokers. However, the purpose of the research was not to undertake an ethnography of tourism practices in Chinatown, but rather to understand the changing discursive production of Chinatown in the context of the touristification of ethnic enclaves. Thus, we sought to illuminate broad social discourses and their relationship to external conditions, not to attempt to affiliate these constructions with the understandings held by specific individuals. The limitation of this approach, however, is that it does not allow for a deep analysis of how individual tourists, tourism brokers, and Chinatown residents negotiate within these dominant discourses to make sense of the phenomenon of Chinatown’s commodification for leisure or of the tourist experience of visiting this enclave—a pursuit which would clearly be valuable in future research that seeks to illuminate the urban ethnic touristification process.

Finally, the touristification of Chinatown has policy consequences, since the ethnic identity of the neighborhood must be preserved, if tourism to the neighborhood is to flourish. In this regard, the current study is not attempting to argue against the commodification of Chinatown as a tourist space. Conversely, the authors hold that the commodification of ethnic enclaves is an unavoidable outcome of turning neighborhood touring into a leisure/tourism product. In line with Ryan and Aiken’s (2005) approach to indigenous tourism, the authors of this study hold that urban ethnic districts should be managed and preserved, due to limited resources in ethnic communities in the globalized urban space and in the wake of gentrification and homogenization of the post-industrial city. In the case of Chicago’s neighborhoods, this means that the uniqueness of its ethnic neighborhoods should be

seen as a cultural asset that should be preserved by the municipality or other organizations, if economic benefits are to be gained from the uniqueness of these spaces. Moral dilemmas regarding how to preserve ethnic communities, which will inevitably arise, should be addressed and studied by those who seek to promote ethnic tourism.

Acknowledgments

This study was made possible by a University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Research Board Grant. We are also indebted to the Chicago Neighborhood Tours and all of those who willingly and patiently assisted us.

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