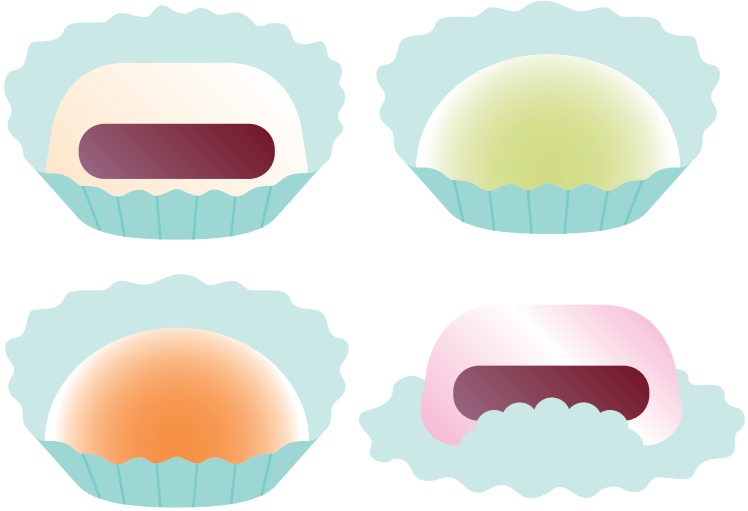
Protecting Ibasho:

The Impact of the Arts and Culture in Little Tokyo



Prepared by Jonathan Crisman, PhD
for Sustainable Little Tokyo

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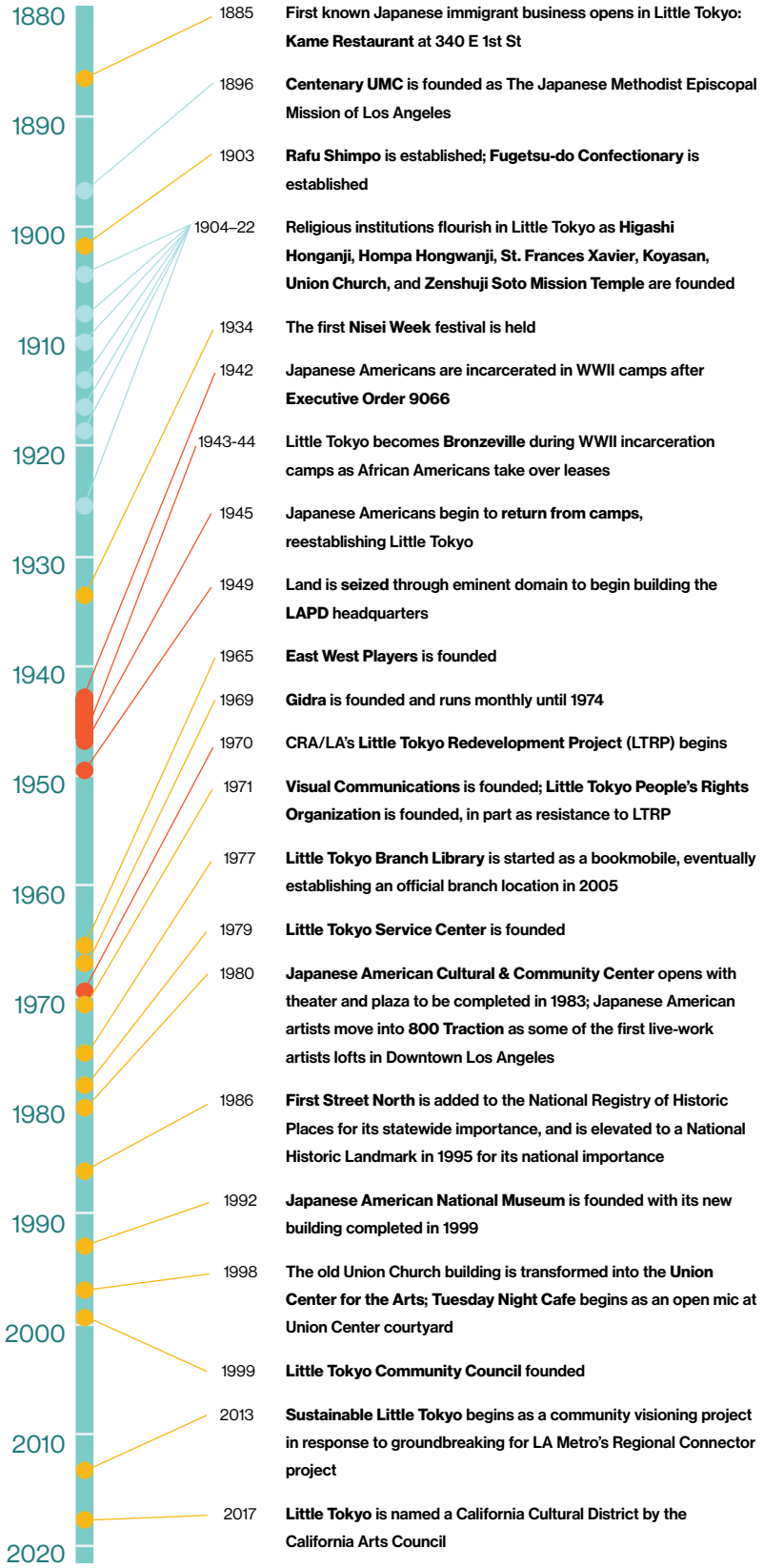

1885 — **First known Japanese immigrant business opens in Little Tokyo: Kame Restaurant** at 340 E 1st St

1896 — **Centenary UMC** is founded as The Japanese Methodist Episcopal Mission of Los Angeles

1903 — **Rafu Shimpo** is established; **Fugetsu-do Confectionary** is established

1904–22 — Religious institutions flourish in Little Tokyo as **Higashi Honganji, Hompa Hongwanji, St. Frances Xavier, Koyasan, Union Church,** and **Zenshuji Soto Mission Temple** are founded

1934 — The first **Nisei Week** festival is held

1942 — Japanese Americans are incarcerated in WWII camps after **Executive Order 9066**

1943-44 — Little Tokyo becomes **Bronzeville** during WWII incarceration camps as African Americans take over leases

1945 — Japanese Americans begin to **return from camps,** reestablishing Little Tokyo

1949 — Land is **seized** through eminent domain to begin building the **LAPD** headquarters

1965 — **East West Players** is founded

1969 — **Gidra** is founded and runs monthly until 1974

1970 — CRA/LA's **Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project** (LTRP) begins

1971 — **Visual Communications** is founded; **Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization** is founded, in part as resistance to LTRP

1977 — **Little Tokyo Branch Library** is started as a bookmobile, eventually establishing an official branch location in 2005

1979 — **Little Tokyo Service Center** is founded

1980 — **Japanese American Cultural & Community Center** opens with theater and plaza to be completed in 1983; Japanese American artists move into **800 Traction** as some of the first live-work artists lofts in Downtown Los Angeles

1986 — **First Street North** is added to the National Registry of Historic Places for its statewide importance, and is elevated to a National Historic Landmark in 1995 for its national importance

1992 — **Japanese American National Museum** is founded with its new building completed in 1999

1998 — The old Union Church building is transformed into the **Union Center for the Arts; Tuesday Night Cafe** begins as an open mic at Union Center courtyard

1999 — **Little Tokyo Community Council** founded

2013 — **Sustainable Little Tokyo** begins as a community visioning project in response to groundbreaking for LA Metro's Regional Connector project

2017 — **Little Tokyo** is named a California Cultural District by the California Arts Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1949 Nisei Week Queen Terri Hokoda appears in the Nisei Week Grand Parade. Courtesy Toyo Miyatake Studio.

This report seeks to answer the following questions: Does arts and culture have impacts in Los Angeles's Little Tokyo community, and what are those impacts? The short answer is a resounding yes: In addition to having major impacts, arts and culture is foundational to the existence of Little Tokyo as a place with a historic Japanese American identity. Impacts include a staggering amount of economic activity, community cohesion and social capital, stakeholders with an unusually high degree of political engagement, and development of new community leadership. Historically, arts and culture has served as a means to bring community together and spark new life into local, family-run businesses in Little Tokyo — such as the Nisei Week Festival's creation in 1934 — and as a way to organize and hold on to place in the face of urban renewal during the 1960s and 70s. Today, Little Tokyo continues to be a commercial and cultural hub, acting as the "spiritual home" for Japanese Americans across Southern California, and as a nationally-recognized site for Asian American and Pacific Islander arts and culture.

This sense of home and belonging is captured in the Japanese word "ibasho," which connotes the psychological comfort and well-being associated with feeling at home, or knowing you have a place to belong to in the world. Little Tokyo's arts and its distinct culture have enabled it to thrive with economic vitality. Importantly, arts-based efforts have also channeled this vitality into community strength and equitable development. Little Tokyo stands as a stark contrast to many communities, especially those experiencing runaway cultural development and deep concern around gentrification and displacement. While Little Tokyo has faced seemingly insurmountable challenges in the past, and continues to face threats to its place in the city, its cultural foundation provides an alternative narrative — that arts and culture do not automatically drive gentrification, and can help slow or even stop it. Arts and culture in Little Tokyo has served to create, sustain, and protect ibasho, and should be celebrated, supported, and safeguarded so that this community can continue to thrive into the future.

LITTLE TOKYO

BIG CULTURAL IMPACT

Even though Little Tokyo has a tiny footprint, its cultural shadow looms huge.

In addition to massive cultural institutions, it is home to over 300 businesses, including many legacy businesses specializing in Japanese American food and goods, over 20 annual festivals, and countless cultural arts groups.

- 1A Japanese American National Museum
- 1B Former site of Nishi Honganji Buddhist Church
- 2 Union Center for the Arts
- 3 Go For Broke Monument
- 4 The Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art
- 5A Japanese American Cultural & Community Center
- 5B Aratani Theatre
- 6 Casa Heiwa
- 7 Terasaki Budokan
- 8 Little Tokyo Public Library
- 9 Little Tokyo Towers
- 10 Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- 11 Zenshuji Soto Mission
- 12 St. Francis Xavier Church Japanese Catholic Center
- 13 Centenary United Methodist Church
- 14 Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple
- 15 Jodoshu Buddhist Mission
- 16 Union Church
- 17 Koyasan Buddhist Temple
- 18 Japanese Village Plaza
- 19 Little Tokyo First Street Historic District
- 20 Weller Court
- 21 Parker Center
- 22 First Street North development site
- 23 Mangrove development site
- 24 LA Metro Regional Connector site
- 25 800 Traction Ave

KEY POINTS

- **Over 15 major Japanese American and Asian American arts, cultural, and religious institutions are located in Little Tokyo**, making it ground zero for Japanese American culture and community in Southern California, and even across the United States as **one of three remaining official Japantowns**.

Arts and culture organizations in Little Tokyo generate $55.5 million dollars & 1,734 jobs per year

- Arts and culture play a powerful role in generating economic activity within Little Tokyo, which also benefits greater Los Angeles and even California. Conservative estimates suggest that arts and culture organizations in Little Tokyo generate some $55.5 million in direct economic activity every year, which goes on to directly and indirectly support some 1,734 jobs.

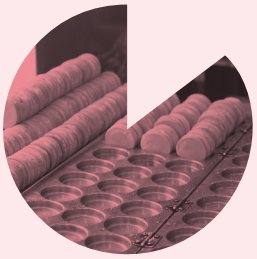
- The economic impact of arts and culture has often been cited in scholarly literature as being a factor in sparking gentrification and displacement. Little Tokyo stands in contrast to this narrative due to its history of **using arts-based activism to hold on to place and generate economic benefit.**

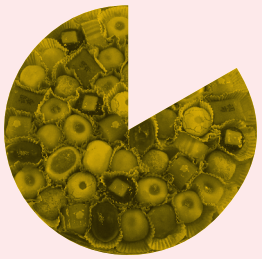
- Little Tokyo has a distinct place-based culture situated in its Japanese American heritage, and arts and culture has played an important role in **developing a culture of organizing and activism tied to community development.**

- **Arts and culture are greatly valued in Little Tokyo,** including all popular, traditional, and everyday forms such as food culture.

88%
of community stakeholders believe festivals are fundamental to Little Tokyo

86%
of community stakeholders believe food is fundamental to Little Tokyo





82%
of community stakeholders spend money on food while visiting

72%

believe Japanese-American identity is crucial to Little Tokyo

One third of these believe this even though they are not themselves Japanese-American

- While Little Tokyo's demographics are changing with more mixed-race, pan-Asian, and even non-Asian American stakeholders, its **Japanese American heritage is still extremely important**. Almost half of stakeholders describe Little Tokyo's Japanese American identity as both important and fundamental to their own personal identity, and another 25% describe it as important even though they are not Japanese American.
- Art and culture's impact in creating a **highly engaged community** is demonstrated in the fact that half of all stakeholders participated in political activity and volunteering in Little Tokyo over the past year, and political engagement is tied to community health both economically and socially.

50%

of all stakeholders participated in political activity and volunteering in Little Tokyo over the past year

- Many stakeholders are concerned about gentrification, which takes a distinctly cultural form in Little Tokyo since it is largely a commercial and cultural center rather than a residential neighborhood. Local, **family-run** businesses are seen as an important part of Japanese American culture in Little Tokyo, and **their disappearance and protection** are the biggest concern of stakeholders.

"Atomic Nancy" spins records at the closing night of awareness-raising and SLT-sponsored ART@341. Photo by author.

- Community leaders are very cognizant of the **role that property rights play in gentrification.** Past efforts to re-centralize Japanese American cultural institutions in Little Tokyo have been key to **holding onto place**. Current initiatives include a "community investment fund" and Sustainable Little Tokyo.
- **Arts and culture in Little Tokyo are key to empowering new leaders and enabling new stakeholders** who respectfully abide by the community motto: "Welcome to Little Tokyo, please take off your shoes."

"Welcome to Little Tokyo, please take off your shoes."

- Sustainable Little Tokyo uses **arts-based organizing and activism** to generate economic activity for local businesses, build up new leaders, create culturally-based spaces for engagement, build social and political capital, and stake claim over three major city-owned parcels of land slated for development. **It integrates sustainability of the environment, culture, and community.**

Introduction

Artistic director Nobuko Miyamoto performing at FandangObon in 2014. Photo by Mike Murase

Ibasho is a Japanese term which connotes the psychologically comfortable feeling of being at home and of belonging. As concerns around gentrification and urban change become more urgent in cities around the globe, it is important to understand that these processes are not just abstract changes in property values, and they are not just limited to the very real problem of people being displaced from their homes. Instead, gentrification includes a wide range of processes, some economic and some cultural, all of which threaten ibasho. Sometimes, people can be safe in their homes, but as the culture of the environment changes around them, they too feel the loss of ibasho. Most conversations around art and gentrification focus on how artists move into neighborhoods, bringing with them cultural cache, and leading to high priced art galleries and other upscale uses moving in and pushing out long-time residents. But art can have different impacts beyond catalyzing gentrification, many of them positive. In Little Tokyo, art and culture have long been an integral part of the community, and a key reason why it has managed to protect ibasho and hold on to its place in the city. Art and culture have driven economic growth, but

also created a sense of community and enabled political organizing and activism. This report was produced in collaboration with one community coalition, Sustainable Little Tokyo, which is facilitating art and culture in the neighborhood to accomplish just that. It aims to explore and demonstrate the impact that art and culture have had on Little Tokyo, both historically and today.

Together, we will first look at some of the insights that scholars have had with regard to how art and culture can impact neighborhoods. Next, we will look at the spatial dimensions of art and culture in Little Tokyo, mapping out where key cultural institutions are located and where important sites of neighborhood development and change pose threats but also opportunities for the community. We will dive into the history of arts and culture in Little Tokyo, providing context to the distinct way art and culture have played a role in transforming the community into one that is well organized and politically engaged. And we will consider some of the specific, measurable impacts of arts and culture in Little Tokyo, including economic, political, and gentrification-related metrics. And, finally, we will explore some of the work that Sustainable Little Tokyo is doing, considering how it intersects with these impacts.

Overall, this report seeks to distinguish itself from the many "economic impacts of the arts" reports that have been commissioned by neighborhoods and cities across the United States. First, we hope that it will be an accessible and enjoyable entry point into the rich arts and culture scene in Little Tokyo for professional artists and arts funders, newcomers to Little Tokyo, and longtime community members alike. We want to demonstrate how important art and culture is to Little Tokyo, and to share that in a way that encourages people to engage with and support the burgeoning arts scene here, becoming part of our community in an ethical and supportive way. And second, we want to show how the arts and culture can have a wide range of impacts in neighborhoods, including but also going beyond sparking economic growth. Little Tokyo is an exciting example of how arts and culture can build community and even be a force for generating social capital and political power within the neighborhood so that it can stand up to forces of gentrification and protect ibasho. We hope that this example will act as a reminder for our community on how to come together, even when the fight looks grim, and will also serve as a model for other communities, and especially immigrant and ethnic communities across the United States, who are facing similar threats to ibasho.

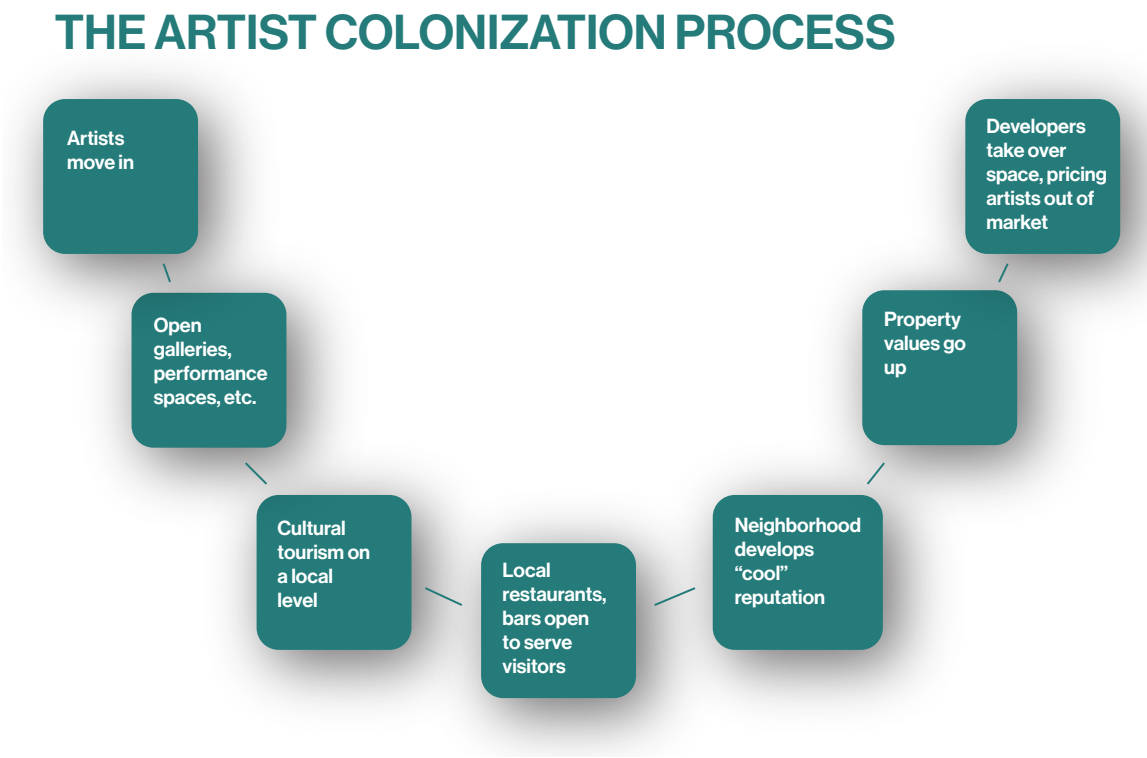
A Primer on Arts and Neighborhood Impacts

What do scholars have to say about the impact of the arts and culture in other neighborhoods around the world? What they have to say offers insight into how art and culture might be operating in Little Tokyo, and guides us toward examining not only the economic impacts of the arts in the community, but also issues such as the impact of the arts on political engagement, property rights, and gentrification.

In her book *Loft Living*, sociologist Sharon Zukin explores the changing meaning of urban housing in the context of 1970s and 80s New York City where artists were moving into industrial loft spaces, creating a lifestyle with cultural and economic cache which she termed the "artistic mode of production."[1] This phenomenon went on to be intentionally used by cities and developers to push out shrinking industrial uses in favor of commercial and residential loft development which had a higher rate of return. Zukin later built on this analysis by reflecting explicitly on this process occurring at the nexus of spatial, cultural, and economic transformation as one of gentrification — establishing the link between culture and urban change long before current, ubiquitous discussions regarding gentrification.[2]

Two decades after Zukin's book, urban economist Richard Florida published his widely read *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which linked the economies of the "creative class" with urban

Figure 1. Ian Moss, http://createquity.com/2012/05/creative-placemaking-has-an-outcomes-problem/



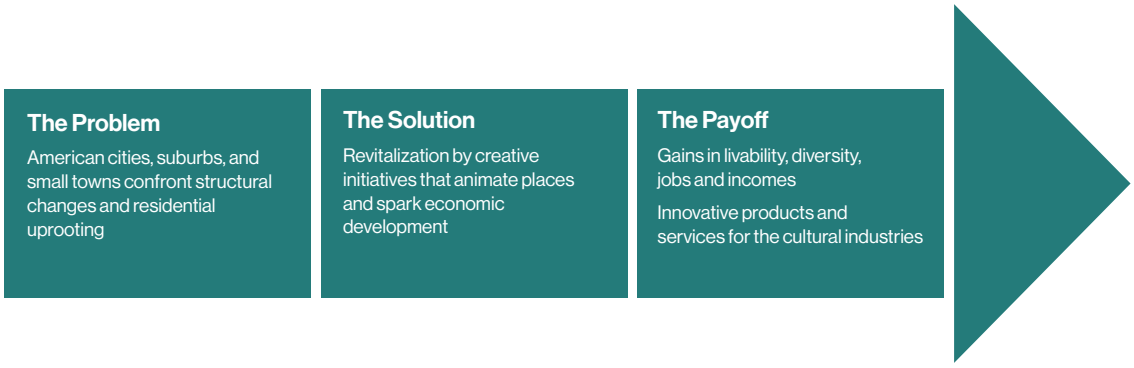
1 Sharon Zukin, L*oft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

2 Sharon Zukin, "Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core," *Annual Review of Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1987): 129-147.

regeneration, calling for cities to remake themselves as bohemian paradises which could lure in authors, artists, software engineers, and other "creatives" — and scores of urban policymakers set out to do just that.[3] A number of urban planning scholars have similarly identified and examined the ways in which arts and culture can produce positive economic effects, noting their potential in driving growth and development.[4] While many "creative cities" policies ended in failure, most notably including efforts to build Guggenheim Bilbao-like flagship cultural institutions in small towns which were later bankrupted, the overall trend of urban growth and change was perhaps too successful: gentrification has now become the watchword for a strange cross-section of urban denizens, including NIMBY homeowners who do not like to see any change, lower-income renters and activists who are concerned about displacement, and longstanding communities which fear a loss of control of their future development — such as Little Tokyo.

A number of grantmaking foundations, led by the NEA in 2010, sought to establish "creative placemaking" as a form of artistic practice which intentionally located within socioeconomically depressed or shrinking communities, sparking economic growth and urban regeneration in the process.[5] This practice has been enthusiastically adopted by cities looking for a slice of the creative cities pie, though it has similarly come under critique for sparking gentrification and its progenitors have dutifully reflected on more equitable means by which creative placemaking can be undertaken. Perhaps most strikingly, poet and arts administrator Roberto Bedoya who himself has launched creative placemaking projects has called for the consideration of the impact of any project on a community's sense of belonging. He calls for the use of the term "placekeeping" rather than placemaking to signal the fact that most, if not all, of these places have already "been made." Such "creative" interventions may often have the effect of destroying an existing place rather than making one anew.[6]

Figure 2. Theoretical model of creative placemaking, Markusen & Gadwa. https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf



3 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). See David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) for the introduction of the idea of a bohemian paradise, or see the more recent Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) for a more rigorous, academic approach to understanding the phenomenon that Brooks lays out.

4 See Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, "Symposium Introduction—Art and Economic Development: New Directions for the Growth of Cities and Regions," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 29, no. 3 (2010): 257-261 for the introduction to a special issue devoted to precisely this topic.

5 For the initial white paper which was published by the NEA to launch the notion of creative placemaking, see Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010).

6 Roberto Bedoya, "Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-Belonging, *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader 24,* no. 1 (2013).

Sustainable Little Tokyo's work, and a related project called "+LAB" managed by one of Sustainable Little Tokyo's coalition members, the Little Tokyo Service Center, are, in fact, funded in part through such grants –notably through a multi-million dollar grant from creative placemaking funder ArtPlace. Analysis of the range of projects funded by the NEA's primary creative placemaking grant program, titled "Our Town," demonstrates that there exists a great deal of variety in their constitution, spanning from large public sculpture and preservation of historic buildings which may contribute to forces of gentrification, to process-oriented projects which emphasize political participation and performance which lend themselves more to the kind of activism seen in Little Tokyo.

The general theory of art and urban change shared by Zukin, Florida, and the range of creative placemaking scholars and funders is this: art and artists increase the value of places in which they exist and work. Florida and creative placemaking boosters see this as a positive and either do not consider who benefits from this increased value, or naively assume that it will remain within the geography of the community. Zukin, Bedoya, and similarly critical voices decry this production of value because the benefits accrue to those who are not from the community, such as absentee landowners, or newcomers who can afford to move in and push out those who are already there.

One missing piece of the puzzle in the general theory of art and urban change lies in the property rights structures and entitlements that govern to whom these benefits flow.[7] The potential of art to prevent rather than cause gentrification must operate on both of these levels: first, at the level of the art itself in matching its context and avoiding cultural gentrification, and second, in its use as a tool to grapple with these property rights regimes which govern to whom the rising value of a place flow when arts and culture enter. This fact is at least tacitly understood in Little Tokyo where increased value is not seen as a bad thing, or as something which will necessarily produce gentrification and displacement — as long as the value accrues to the local community, and as long as the community retains control over the future of the neighborhood.

Another missing piece of the puzzle involves the fact that art and artists can do more than just increase economic value. They can also build social and political capital, and help create a sense of identity in a community. An understanding of the wider array of diverse arts activities, entities, and cultural frames has been acknowledged by public arts scholar Maria Rosario Jackson — and the arts have been identified as providing more than economic impacts, but also "attachment to place, positive health outcomes, and civic engagement."[8] Indeed, a more equity-oriented version of creative placemaking has emerged in response to critiques such as the one posed by Bedoya. The NEA published a guide with dozens of authors and case studies begins with a chapter on "inclusive planning and equitable development" which goes on to reflect on questions of "community identity and belonging," among other more conventional topics of economic and community development.[9] And in another primer published by PolicyLink, arts and culture is seen as a mechanism for providing equity, especially considering its historical role as a means for fostering shared identity and processing trauma within marginalized communities.[10]

What would a new model or diagram be organized if it were to reflect these missing puzzle pieces? We might be able to build one based on how these ideas and theories play out in the context of Little Tokyo.

7 For more on this, especially in East Asian contexts, see Annette Kim, "Real rights to the city: Cases of property rights changes towards equity in eastern Asia," *Urban Studies* 48, no. 3 (2011): 459-469.

8 Maria Rosario Jackson, *Building Community: Making Space for Art* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2011), 4.

9 Jason Schupbach and Don Ball, eds., *How to do Creative Placemaking: An Action Oriented Guide to Arts in Community Development* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2016).

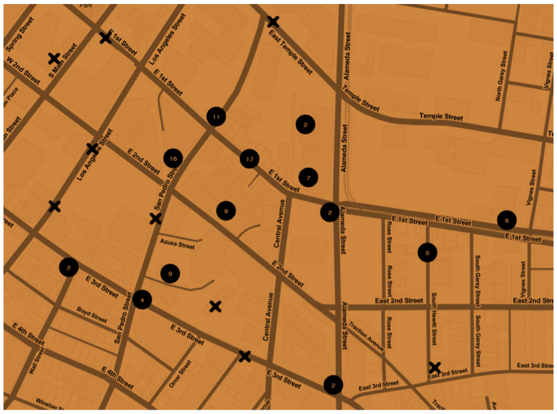
10 Rose Kalima, Milly Hawk Daniel, and Jeremy Liu, *Creating Change through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development: A Policy and Practice Primer* (Oakland: PolicyLink, 2017).

Mapping the Arts in Little Tokyo

Before we begin exploring the impacts of the arts and culture in Little Tokyo, we need to first contextualize this historic Japanese American neighborhood. Arts and culture play an especially big role in this community because of its role as one of the most important Japanese American and Asian American ethnic communities in the United States. As community leaders have said, it is the "mother ship" for Japanese Americans, the "ground zero" where Japanese American history really begins in Southern California. Despite this importance, it actually holds a relatively small geographic area in Downtown Los Angeles, and one that is primarily commercial and cultural rather than residential. This makes it all the more important to protect as an important cultural site and resource, and also provides some unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to promoting arts and culture, and protecting ibasho.

While this section will look at Little Tokyo and its arts and culture from a broad view — looking at its context from economic and demographic measures, from maps that contextualize the neighborhood, and from findings from a community stakeholder survey — we will begin here by considering one community cultural asset mapping project that was recently undertaken under the auspices of Sustainable Little Tokyo and Little Tokyo Service Center's +LAB: Takachizu, spearheaded by artists Rosten Woo and Maya Santos.[11] This project aimed at evolving the now-widespread practice of community asset mapping which is often done to demonstrate the wealth of valuable assets that go overlooked in communities. In this case, Takachizu (which comes from a combination of the words for "treasure" and "map" in Japanese) made the process participatory, easily accessible through the internet and in-person workshops, and collected material paraphernalia which represented a range of important cultural histories and places in Little Tokyo (fig. 3). The project drew from the wealth of historical resources in Little Tokyo, often held by its community members (fig. 4). As Woo describes it, Takachizu operates as a kind of "archive of archives." Woo then highlighted elements from the project in a series of zines that raised questions about things like the First Street North campaign, which seeks to stake a community claim over the future of the large city-owed parcel of land north of First Street, or about "self-determination" (fig. 5). Needless to say, Little Tokyo is a place with an unbelievably rich culture and history, as well as one where its community members turn out to participate. As this report will show, these two things turn out to be very closely connected.

Figure 3. Map from Takachizu website, showing some 153 community treasures within Little Tokyo.



11 Go to http://www.takachizu.org to see the entire project, including maps, the zines, and community-contributed cultural assets.

Figure 4. An example of one community treasure found within Takachizu: Grant Sunoo holding community treasure #149, a screen print on newspaper from a "guerilla art" campaign circa 2007 which occurred when Weller Court and Japanese Village Plaza were sold to private developers.

Figure 5. A spread from one of the Takachizu zines, showing maps and treasures related to the theme of "self-determination."

The Context of Little Tokyo

Little Tokyo proper currently occupies about 7 city blocks, give or take a block depending on how you measure it, between 1st and 3rd Streets to the north and south, and between Los Angeles and Alameda Streets to the west and east. However, it once occupied a much larger area, stretching down to 7th Street (see map 2). It is nestled between Los Angeles's civic center to the west, with City Hall's shadow setting on the neighborhood, and the rapidly gentrifying Arts District to the east — an arts district in name only, where most of the longtime artists have been displaced by hip shops and cafes, and new condo buildings. In other words, Little Tokyo sits on some of the most valuable real estate in the city, with immense gentrification pressures pushing in from both sides. The 101 freeway is to the north, acting like a wall between it and another historic Asian American neighborhood in Los Angeles, Chinatown, and Skid Row is just to the south, creating ongoing concerns in the neighborhood around housing accessibility and homelessness.

Most accounts of Little Tokyo's origins point toward a Japanese sailor named Charles Hama who started Kame Restaurant near the intersection of 1st and Los Angeles. In other words, local businesses have been at the heart of Little Tokyo's culture and economy since its beginning! But there were also a number of Japanese American settlements throughout Los Angeles, including farming, fishing, and gardening communities in Venice, San Pedro, and down Washington Boulevard from Downtown to Crenshaw (see map 1). Most of these neighborhoods have since dissipated, especially after the forced relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Of those that remain, Little Tokyo is home to the densest cluster of Japanese American cultural and community institutions, and is cited as one of only three remaining historic Japantowns in the United States, along with the Japantowns in San Francisco and San Jose.[12] Even still, Little Tokyo was also a much larger neighborhood before incarceration in 1942, with some 30,000 Japanese American residents with churches, temples, and businesses that stretched all the way down to around 7th Street (see map 2). Its current, smaller official boundaries date back to the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Plan established by the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Authority in 1970. Today, while Little Tokyo has achieved some degree of stability through the density of cultural institutions which have grounded the community, several large-scale urban development projects threaten to upend the neighborhood unless they fit within the fabric of the community (see map 3). Community leaders have described these development projects as "make or break."

Little Tokyo is a locus for Japanese American and Asian American culture, including organizations like East West Players, the oldest theater company of color in the United States, Visual Communications, the oldest Asian American media arts organization, the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, the largest ethnic and community center in the nation, and the Japanese American National Museum — not to mention the many historic Japanese American churches and temples, sites for food and everyday culture, and many other non-profit organizations. These cultural institutions are key in sustaining Little Tokyo's identity, and in bringing in people who live, work, and shop within the community, sustaining its economy as well. As of the 2010-14 American Community Survey, 2,781 people work in Little Tokyo, almost all of whom commute into the neighborhood. Community leaders have rightly identified the way in which Little Tokyo acts as the premiere center for Asian American arts and

12 This refers to the official designation by California state law SB307 passed in 2001 which declared these three communities as the only historical Japantowns that remained in a significant way, while some 44 other historical Japantowns have either only small portions remaining or have disappeared entirely. There are many other new Japantowns that have since started to grow elsewhere in California and in the United States.

culture not only in Southern California, but across the United States and around the world. Acknowledging and supporting this role will ensure that Little Tokyo will stand out in an increasingly competitive race for urban resources.

But while Little Tokyo is predominantly a commercial and cultural center, its residential community is diverse, but skews older. Little Tokyo was home to 3,386 residents as of the 2010 census, with a quarter of them over 65, about 65% were between the ages of 18 and 64, and only 10% were under 18. As of the 2010 census, it was 39.6% Asian, 25.9% Black, 19.5% Hispanic and 12.2% white.[13] Of the Asian American population, about half were Japanese American, and half were a mix of other ethnicities, including Korean, Chinese, and Filipino American. Community leaders have acknowledged these shifting demographics, noting that Little Tokyo should be a place where people can express their own culture and have a sense of belonging, that it should be "multicultural by design." But, at the same time, Little Tokyo's unique role as a site of Japanese American heritage is also a precious resource that should be respected and honored into the future.

The population of residents in Little Tokyo is split between new, affluent renters and homeowners who have been moving into the new market-rate condo buildings built over the past several years, and less affluent long-time renters who live in the handful of affordable housing and retirement housing communities in Little Tokyo, such as Casa Heiwa and Little Tokyo Towers.[14] Some 80% of residents are renters, and about 60% of these renters face a rent burden larger than 30% of their income. Almost half of households are non-English speaking, and more than half live below the federal poverty line with a median income of about $15,500, presenting unique challenges in providing services. Only 37% of residents participate in the labor force, and there is a 20% unemployment rate, demonstrating both a large retired population but also a very under-resourced population. These are populations of people that are at times left out of the mental picture of Little Tokyo, and inclusion is important not only for its own sake, but also because many of these residents are living cultural treasures themselves, practicing increasingly rare forms of traditional Japanese American arts and culture.

13 Much of the demographic data in this section is based on a report written for the Little Tokyo Service Center: Gary Painter, Jung Hyun Choi, Vincent Reina, Derek Hung, Jacob Denney and Jovanna Rosen, "Little Tokyo Community Assessment" (USC Price Center for Social Innovation, 2016).

14 The 2010 census is unfortunately the most recent available though it is now almost 10 years old, with the past decade including both the great recession and a resurgence in economic development, gentrification, and new market-rate home construction in Little Tokyo. These figures may have changed significantly.

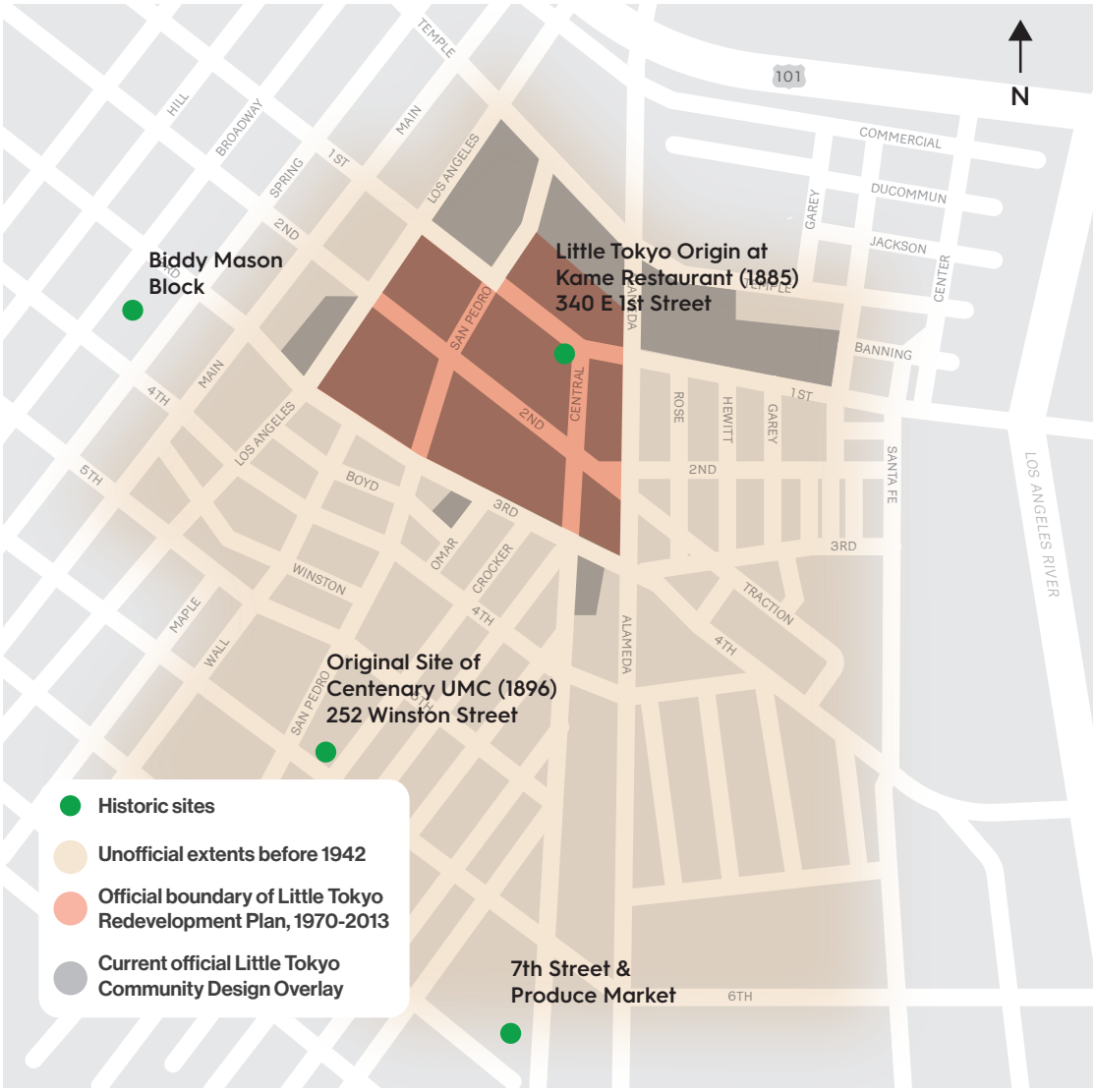
Terms such as "Hispanic" are used to remain consistent with the Census data even though they are not necessarily the most accurate terms to reflect race, ethnicity, and identity in Little Tokyo."

Maps of Little Tokyo's Past and Present

Map 1. Little Tokyo in context of Los Angeles

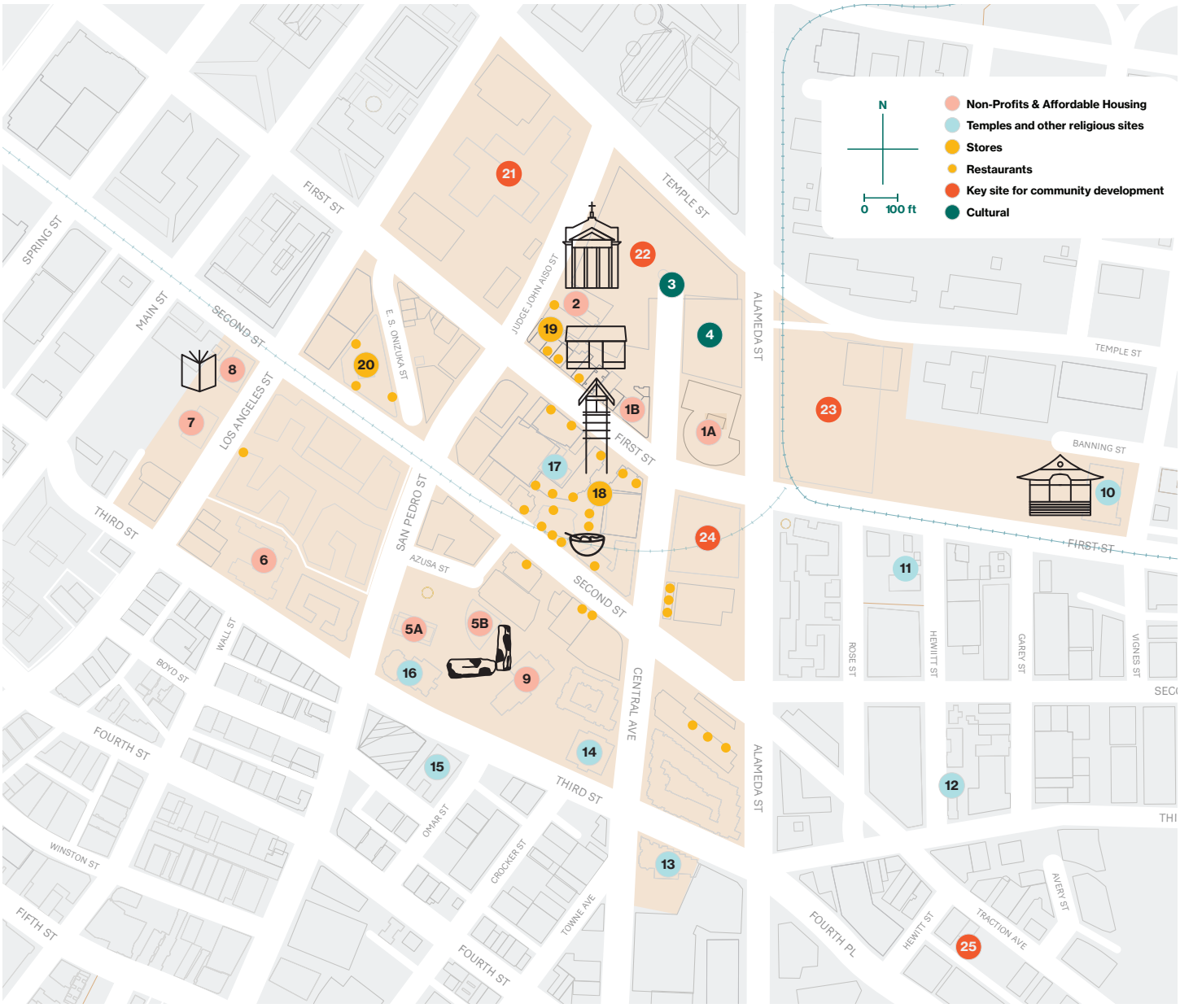
A map of Little Tokyo with other historical and current Japanese American communities noted. While Little Tokyo remains the cultural and spiritual heart for the Japanese American community in Southern California, and while many of these neighborhoods still have Japanese American places of worship or community centers, residential patterns are dispersed throughout the region with Gardena being one of the few significant residential centers.

Map 2. Extents of Little Tokyo over time



Unofficial extents from 1942 are "fuzzy" because the neighborhood did not have an official boundary, and was mixed with residential, commercial, and industrial uses, including a large community of African American Angelenos located to the west and south, down Central Avenue to around 7th Street. Before WWII incarceration in 1942, the Japanese American community was much larger that the official boundaries that were later circumscribed, including up to approximately 30,000 Japanese Americans.

Map 3. Key community institutions and sites



1A **Japanese American National Museum** (JANM, founded in 1992, current building constructed in 1999), 100 N Central Ave (all addresses are Los Angeles, CA 90012)

1B **Former site of Nishi Honganji Buddhist Temple** (built in 1925, now part of JANM with new construction, offices, the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy, and the Go For Broke National Education Center offices), 111 N Central Ave

2 **Union Center for the Arts** (built in 1923, former site of Union Church, now houses East West Players, Visual Communications, and LA Art Core), 120 N San Pedro St

3 **Go For Broke Monument** (built in 1999), 160 Central Ave

4 **The Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art** (MOCA), 152 N Central Ave

5A **Japanese American Cultural & Community Center** (JACCC, built in 1980, houses numerous other community and cultural organizations), 244 San Pedro St

5B **JACCC Aratani Theatre** (built in 1983, fronts Noguchi Plaza and sculpture *To the Issei* by Isamu Noguchi), 244 San Pedro St

6 **Casa Heiwa** (built in 1996, affordable housing developed by Little Tokyo Service Center, also includes LTSC offices and public art by Nancy Uyemura titled *Harmony*), 231 E 3rd St

7 **Terasaki Budokan** construction site, 237-249 S Los Angeles St

8 **Little Tokyo Branch Library** (built in 2005), 203 S Los Angeles St

9 **Little Tokyo Towers** (affordable housing for retirees, built in 1975), 455 E 3rd St

10 **Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist Temple** (originally founded in 1905, current building constructed in 1969), 815 E 1st St

11 **Zenshuji Soto Mission** (founded in 1912, current building constructed in 1969), 123 S Hewitt St

12 **St. Francis Xavier Church Japanese Catholic Center** (originally founded in 1912, chapel built in 1939, formerly known as Maryknoll Church), 222 S Hewitt St

13 **Centenary United Methodist Church** (originally founded in 1896, current building constructed in 1985), 300 S Central Ave

14 **Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple** (originally founded in 1904, current building constructed in 1976), 505 E 3rd St

15 **Jodoshu Buddhist Mission** (originally founded in 1926, current building constructed in 1992), 442 E 3rd St

16 **Union Church** (originally founded in 1918, current building constructed in 1976), 401 E 3rd St

17 **Koyasan Buddhist Temple** (originally founded in 1912, current building constructed in 1940), 401 E 3rd St

18 **Japanese Village Plaza** (built in 1978), 335 E 2nd St

19 **Little Tokyo Historic District / First Street North** (designated locally in 1986, and as a National Historic Landmark in 1995), 301-349 1st St, 110-120 San Pedro St, 119 Central Ave

20 **Weller Court** (built in 1980), 123 Astronaut Ellison S Onizuka St

21 **Parker Center** (former LAPD headquarters built in 1954, now demolished), 150 N Los Angeles St

22 **First Street North development site**

23 **Mangrove development site**

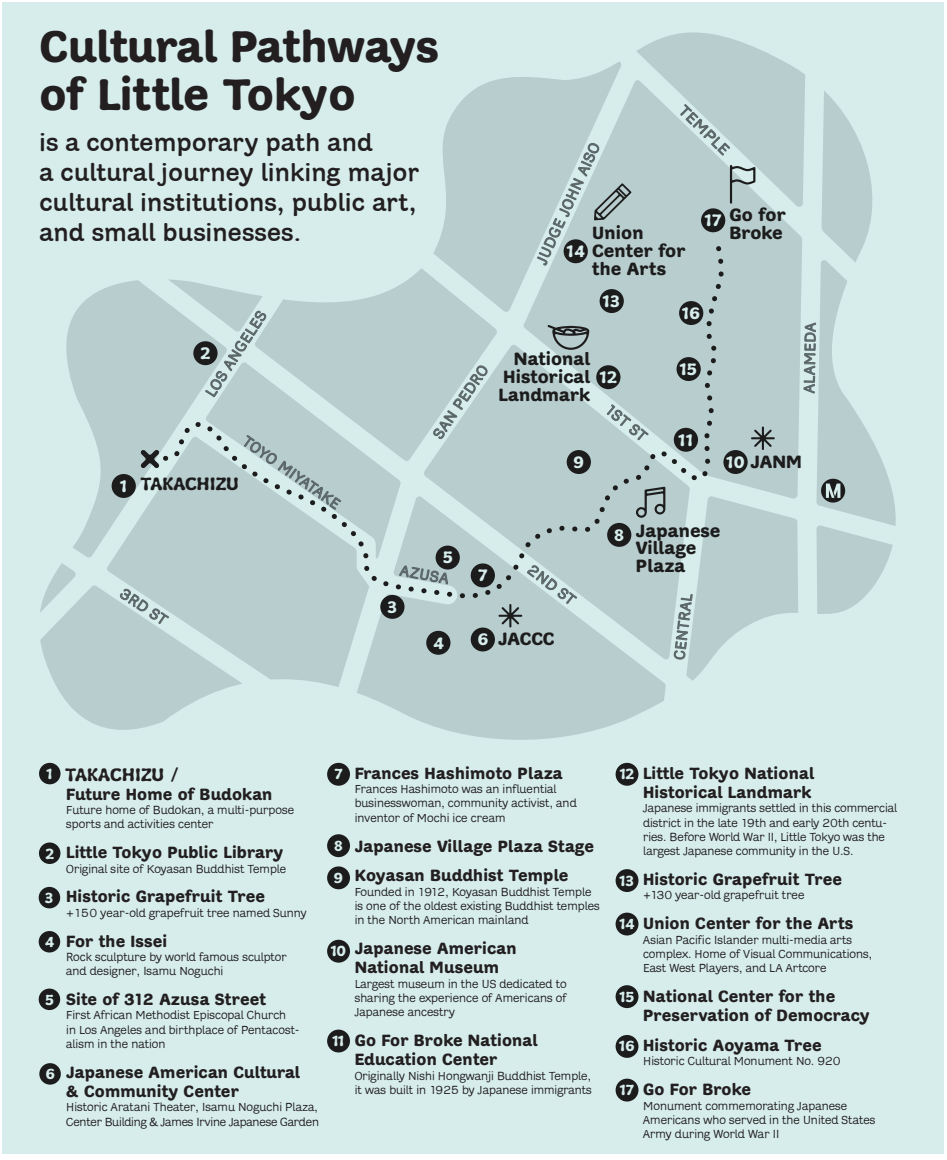
24 **Little Tokyo / Arts District station site** (under construction)

25 **800 Traction Ave** (built in 1917, converted to artist lofts in 1980, artists evicted in 2018)

Map 4. California Cultural District and legacy businesses

Little Tokyo was one of the first places designated as a “California Cultural District” by the State of California via new legislation (AB189) and the California Arts Council. After the legislation passed and the necessary process was established in 2016, the first batch of 14 districts was named in 2017. It did not establish official borders but, instead, named several key cultural sites including the First Street North block and several local, family-run (or “legacy”) businesses. Note that Bunkado, a gifts and home goods store which has existed since 1945, is in the same location as the previous Kame Restaurant which was the first known Japanese business established in Little Tokyo in 1885. This designation highlights the contribution of vibrant cultural districts like Little Tokyo to the state economy. The legacy businesses shown in this map are only a handful out of the many that exist in Little Tokyo.

Map 5. JACCC/SLT Cultural Pathways Map



LTSC +LAB and Sustainable Little Tokyo (SLT) created a cultural pathways map as a virtual tour of Little Tokyo's key historical sites, aiding those exploring or people who want to give tours of Little Tokyo's culture and history. This cultural pathway was developed some 10 years ago through a participatory process.

Surveying Little Tokyo Stakeholders on the Arts

Another way to consider the context of Little Tokyo is to look at the attitudes of stakeholders in Little Tokyo with regard to the arts. We surveyed a representative sample of 333 stakeholders in Little Tokyo with a "field team" of four community members with connections to Little Tokyo's history and institutions. The survey had a diverse mix of responses with about 12% of respondents as renters or homeowners, 4% as business owners, 32% as local employees, 36% as volunteers in the community, 47% as regular patrons or visitors, and 14% as members at a religious institution (respondents could identify as more than one category, so total percentage is more than 100 points). These responses are reflective of the fact that Little Tokyo is predominantly a community with commercial and cultural entities, creating a large number of patrons, volunteers, and employees who are stakeholders with a strong connection to the community, and relatively few renters and homeowners in comparison to other neighborhoods.

A follow up question asked about the relationship between the respondent and the Japanese American heritage of Little Tokyo, asking if they felt a strong connection to it, with a list of five options of increasing intensity. Almost half of respondents felt a strong connection to Little Tokyo's Japanese American heritage, calling it fundamental to their identity (47%) and an additional 25% of respondents felt a strong connection to Little Tokyo's Japanese American history even though they themselves were not Japanese American. Another 15% of respondents felt a strong connection but would not call it important to their identity, and 14% didn't feel a strong connection at all. These responses demonstrate the importance of Little Tokyo's Japanese American heritage with 87% of respondents having some form of yes answer, and virtually no respondents (only 2 out of 329) viewing it as "unimportant." Furthermore, these results hold up even when the respondent is not necessarily Japanese American with almost twice as many non-Japanese American respondents marking that they felt a strong connection as not (25% to 13%). These results suggest that as Little Tokyo changes over time, and even as its stakeholders become less Japanese American, its identity as a Japanese American place remains important, and future development ought to respect and protect this heritage.

The first set of questions dealt with which art forms were seen as integral to the community. The highest three categories included festivals (88%), food related (86%), and art exhibits (81%; see table 1). It is rare to have this degree of a uniform and consistent positive response, demonstrating the importance of these categories. It is remarkable, however, that even the art form that garnered the fewest responses — religious ceremonies at 56% — still had a majority of respondents mark it as important. In other words, a wide variety of art and culture, including forms that are not necessarily considered part of the "art world," are considered integral to the community. Art and culture are widely appreciated by the community and should be understood as an integral part of the neighborhood and its economy as it develops, changes, and moves into the future.

Specific arts and culture organizations that were consistently highly identified by respondents include Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (40%), Japanese American National Museum (31%), and Nisei Week (31%). These are also some of the largest organizations in Little Tokyo which also are circulated widely because

of their long histories and grassroots funding — and they are also all explicitly cultural organizations. This response was open ended without any prompting, so these responses can also be seen as a measure of the degree to which these organizations have name recognition and are at the top of stakeholders' minds. East West Players, Obon festivals, Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), Visual Communications, and Tuesday Night Cafe were also regularly mentioned, each mentioned by at least 10% of respondents. Though, of course, this doesn't touch upon the many smaller cultural institutions present in Little Tokyo, such as its many historic, family-run small businesses.

The next set of questions dealt with issues of neighborhood change. The following question was asked to determine the respondent's intensity of concern around neighborhood change, as well as to prime the respondent to provide insight into issues of concern or excitement about development in the community: "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'never or rarely' and 10 being 'often or daily' how often do you think about the changes that Little Tokyo is undergoing as a neighborhood?" The mean response was 6.4 with a standard deviation of 2.5, and the median response was 7. In other words, while there was a wide range of responses from one to ten, neighborhood change was more often than not on people's minds as an issue.

When asked about specific issues that were exciting for respondents in an open-ended response format, most people (about 70%) named a range of new developments in the community. Most frequently named were new entrepreneurial businesses popping up, especially local, family-run businesses and Japanese American and Asian American businesses that were drawing in a younger crowd (16%), and also LTSC's Terasaki Budokan recreation center development project which had broken ground and is slated to open in 2020 (14%). Yet the biggest category of all were the 30% of respondents who left this question blank, suggesting a degree of apathy or exhaustion with neighborhood change, or even explicitly said that there was nothing they were excited about, suggesting an even stronger degree of antipathy toward all of the changes that Little Tokyo has been undergoing.

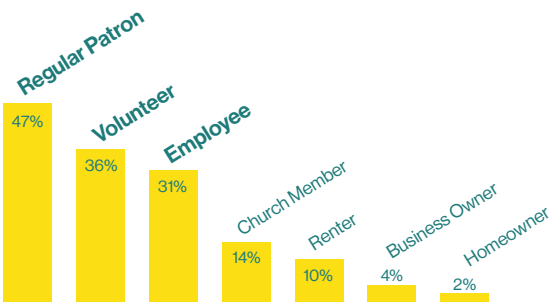
When asked about changes which concerned them, respondents most consistently named some version of local, family-run shops closing (37%) suggesting the cultural importance that these businesses have in Little Tokyo, and connecting to a gentrification process very different from the typical understanding of residential upscaling and displacement. Local small businesses are key both as cultural institutions and also as important sites of economy activity within Little Tokyo. Another 25% named the diminishing Japanese American presence as a concern, countering those who were excited about new forms of diversity in the neighborhood, and reinforcing the fact that Little Tokyo is singular in its role as a physical place for Japanese American culture and heritage — a role that ought to be protected. Again, this is a kind of cultural gentrification, a threat to ibasho, that does not fit within the typical understanding of economic or housing-based gentrification.

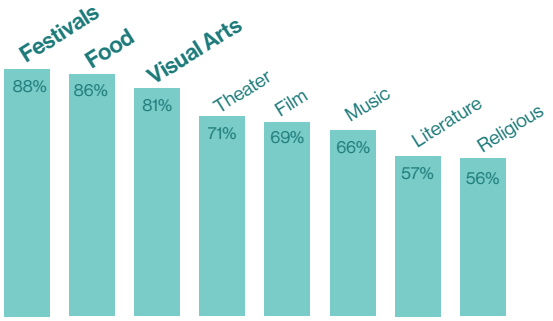
As a final comment in this section, it should be noted that there was also an optional open response question at the end of the survey which allowed respondents to insert whatever they liked, including any comments on issues facing the community which were not included in the survey. The tone of the responses was generally positive and optimistic — striking, especially

given that this open response comes immediately after a question about disconcerting neighborhood changes. There was often a gratitude toward the surveyor because the survey was seen as helping preserve the community, and there was a general sense of hopefulness about the future of the community. This speaks, again, to the unique culture of Little Tokyo, developed through generation of challenge, political action and response, and building community power and agency. There seems to be a sense that there are urgent issues facing the community, but also a faith in the integrity of the community to hold together and stake a claim over its future, despite these and any future challenges.

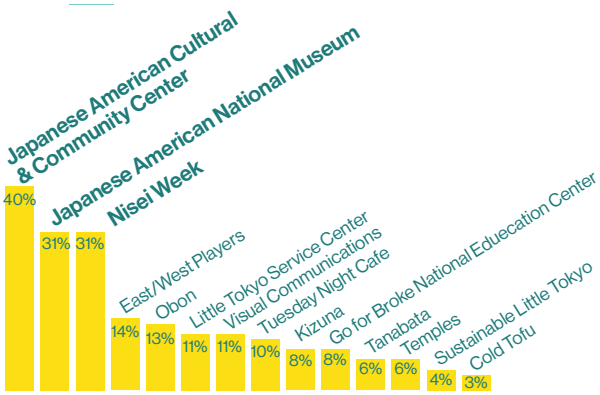
Table 1.

Frequency table of responses, n = 333. Respondents could only mark one answer for "Is Japanese American identity important," "SLT Familiarity," and "Change Concern" questions (% column totals 100, Frequency column total does not include no response so may be slightly less that 333), while respondents could mark multiple answers for all remaining questions (each individual % should be read as out of 100). Starred questions had options listed while all others were open response, and only responses that had at least a frequency of 10 (~3% of 333 responses) were listed.

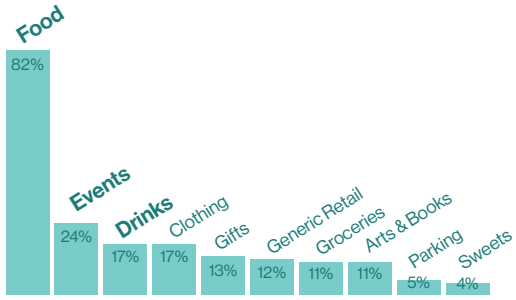




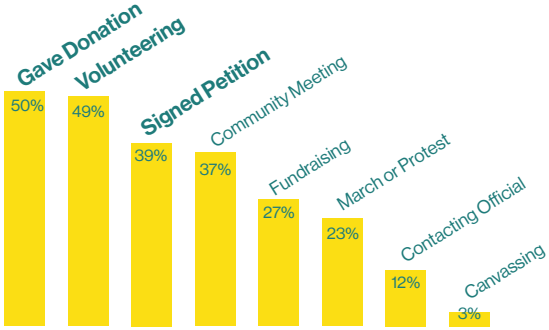
Organizations



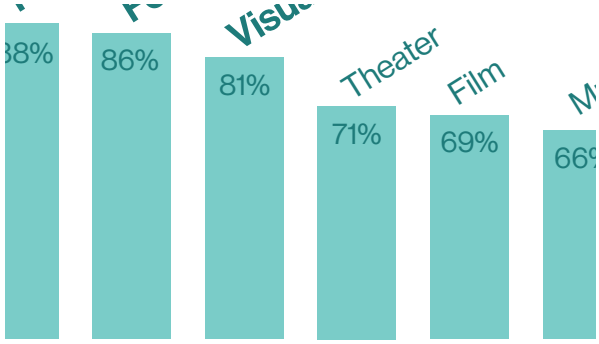
Money Spent On



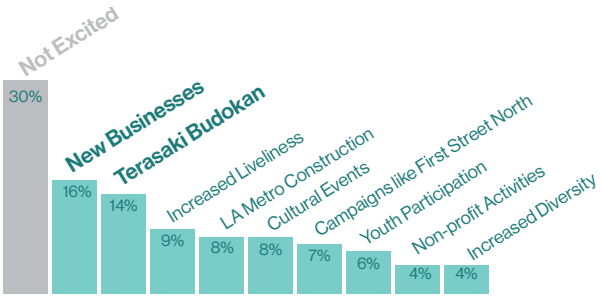
Types of Participation



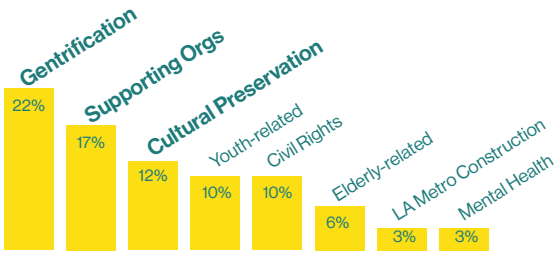
Concerning Changes



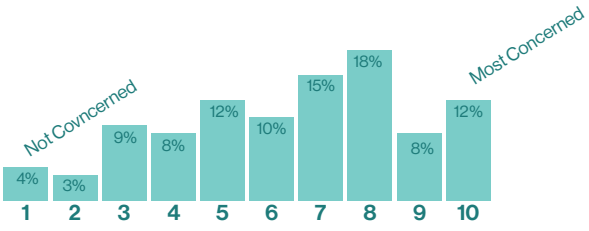

Exciting Changes

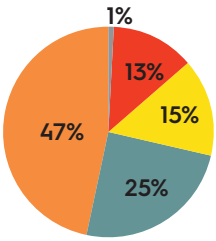

Not Excited
30%
New Businesses
16%
Terasaki Budokan
14%
Increased Liveliness
9%
LA Metro Construction
8%
Cultural Events
8%
Campaigns like First Street North
7%
Youth Participation
6%
Non-profit Activities
4%
Increased Diversity
4%


STOP THE FORCED DISPERSAL
Political Issues

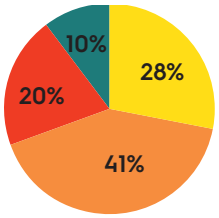

Gentrification
22%
Supporting Orgs
17%
Cultural Preservation
12%
Youth-related
10%
Civil Rights
10%
Elderly-related
6%
LA Metro Construction
3%
Mental Health
3%


How Concerned About Change


Not Covncerned
4%
3%
9%
8%
12%
10%
15%
18%
8%
12%
Most Concerned
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10



No, and I don't see it as important
It's great, but I'm not connected
Yes, but it doesn't play a huge role
Yes, even though I am not Japanese Am
Yes, it is fundamental to my identity



Have not heard of them
Participated in a few activities
Heard about them but not too involved
Very involved and supportive

The Economic Impact of the Arts

The most commonly studied impacts of arts and culture in communities is their economic impacts. A number of scholars have identified the important ways that arts and culture support and grows the economic life of communities, ranging from the businesses and employees that they support, to the way that they bring in visitors who spend money and support jobs. Some of these scholars, such as Elizabeth Currid-Halkett and Richard Florida, are cited in the "primer" section of this report. Other critics have concerns about these economic benefits getting out of hand and sparking gentrification, and others still have concern about these economic benefits flowing to particular groups in an inequitable way. Nevertheless, arts and culture play an important role as an everyday part of a larger economic system within communities. This role ought to be identified and acknowledged, especially in a community like Little Tokyo where it is predominantly a commercial and cultural center. It has a rich history of arts and culture, one that is unique to this specific place, and one which generates enormous benefits within Little Tokyo and for greater Los Angeles. Little Tokyo's statewide economic contributions to California have also been recognized through its designation as a California Cultural District in 2017. Accordingly, while it is important to ensure that this economic activity does not spark gentrification, and that it plays a role in creating an equitable economic in the neighborhood, it should also be recognized, celebrated, and supported as a critical, life-giving part of the community.

Direct and Indirect Impacts of Arts and Culture Organizations

Conventional reporting on the economic impact of the arts uses a standard methodology of surveying arts organizations, employees, and attendees to events, and using multipliers to estimate what the total direct and indirect economic impacts are based on the spending of these arts and culture organizations, their employees, and attendees. For this report, we took a simplified survey of 18 of the main non-profit arts and culture organizations in Little Tokyo, including major institutions like JACCC and JANM, smaller performing arts organizations like Cold Tofu and Grateful Crane, and religious institutions such as Centenary UMC and Koyasan Betsuin. We then used standard multipliers for urban areas of over one million residents, provided by Americans for the Arts, one of the major arts research organizations doing this kind of analysis. One caveat is that these figures are estimates based on similarly populated communities, and that the figures represent the total economic activity of these organizations, but that much of this economic impact ends up flowing into the Los Angeles region and even statewide across California because of where employees might live, or where vendors that organizations use are located. While we do not have specific quantitative data to demonstrate the overall statewide impact of Little Tokyo's art and culture, its economic impact has been officially recognized through its designation as a California Cultural District in 2017.

Additionally, there are many, many more arts and culture organizations located in Little Tokyo, or that regularly hold events in Little Tokyo. A number of other entities such as local, family-run businesses are also seen as cultural institutions within the community, and they are known for drawing people from across the region for their unique offerings. Accordingly, these numbers really only capture the economic activity of major, non-profit arts and culture organizations, so these numbers should be considered on the very conservative end.[15] Despite this, we see that this sample of arts and culture organizations in

Little Tokyo generate some $55.5 million in direct economic activity, an additional cycle of indirect economic activity based on $42.9 million in household income generated, and some $5.3 million in tax revenue generated for local and state government which also goes back into communities and generates additional indirect economic activity. People make some 365,448 visits to Little Tokyo just for these organizations, spending an estimated average of $34.57 per visit, sustaining the businesses and organizations in Little Tokyo. While these numbers are somewhat abstract, it is safe to say that arts and culture in Little Tokyo generate a significant amount of economic activity which both sustains the neighborhood internally, but also provide immense benefits to the greater Los Angeles urban area.

The following definitions are taken from "Arts and Economic Prosperity 5" published by Americans for the Arts: **Total expenditures** are the total dollars spent by your nonprofit arts and cultural organization and its audiences; event-related spending by cultural audiences is estimated using the average dollars spent per person, per event by cultural attendees in similarly populated communities. **FTE Jobs** are the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs in your community that are supported by the expenditures made by your arts and cultural organization and/or its audiences. An FTE job can be one full-time employee, two half-time employees, etc. Economists measure FTE jobs, not the total number of employees, because it is a more accurate measure that accounts for part-time employment. **Household income** is the total dollars paid to community residents as a result of the expenditures made by your arts and cultural organization and/or its audiences. Household income includes salaries, wages, and entrepreneurial income paid to residents. It is the money residents earn and use to pay for food, shelter, utilities, and other living expenses. **Government revenue** is the total dollars received by your local and state governments as a result of the expenditures made by your arts and cultural organization and/or its audiences.

15 It should also be noted that these numbers include the Geffen Contemporary MOCA which sits in the heart of Little Tokyo's First Street North block, and which holds an outsize economic impact because of its flagship size and budget model, driving over 40% of identified institutional spending. While this institution does indeed play a key role in generating economic activity in the community, it plays a much smaller role in the critical impacts that are discussed elsewhere in this report because it largely operates outside of community institutions, such as participating in community visioning and decision making, and does not interface with the neighborhood's heritage.

Table 2. Direct and indirect impacts of arts and culture organizations.

Total Industry's Expenditures	**Direct Economic Activity**	**Arts and Culture Organizations**	**Arts and Culture Audiences**	**Total Industry Expenditures**
	Total Industry's Expenditures	$42,863,466	$12,632,982	$55,495,448
Spending by Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences Supports Jobs and Generates Government Revenue	**Total Economic Impact of Expenditures**	**Economic Impact of Organizations**	**Economic Impact of Audiences**	**Total Economic Impact**
	Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Jobs Supported	1,414	320	1,734
	Household Income Paid to Residents	$35,888,294	6,965,700	$42,853,994
	Revenue Generated to Local Government	$1,743,686	641,250	$2,384,936
	Revenue Generated to State Government	$2,123,027	771,496	$2,894,523
Event-Related Spending by Arts and Culture Audiences Totaled $12.6 million (excluding the cost of admission)	Total Attendance to Arts and Culture Events	365,448		
	Average Event-Related Spending Per Person	$34.57		
	Total Event-Related Expenditures	$12,632,982		

Government revenue includes revenue from local and state taxes (e.g., income, sales, lodging, real estate, personal property, and other local option taxes) as well as funds from license fees, utility fees, filing fees, and other similar sources. Local government revenue includes funds to governmental units such as city, county, township, and school districts, and other special districts.[16]

How Money is Spent in Little Tokyo

The average amount that a visitor will spend on a trip to Little Tokyo, based on data from Americans for the Arts for cities like Los Angeles, is about $34.57. Where does this money go? To gain more insight into how stakeholders in Little Tokyo spend money in the neighborhood, we included it as a question on the 333-respondent survey that we described at the beginning of the report. It was included as an open-ended question, where respondents could write in whatever came to mind.

Food was far and away the most common response to this open-ended question. Some 82% of respondents mentioned food which is all the more striking given that this did not include drinks (which another 17% of respondents named this, including both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks), sweets (4% of respondents named this or, more often, specifically naming mochi, manju, or the iconic Fugetsu-do Confectionary), or groceries (11%) which were all separate response categories. Little Tokyo is seen by its stakeholders as a destination and locus for food, and especially Japanese and Asian food. Food is a critical part of Little Tokyo's cultural landscape, and should be celebrated and supported as part of the everyday arts and foodways culture that makes this neighborhood unique. This corresponds with interview subjects who described how Little Tokyo's visibility in Los Angeles is in part due to its identity as an important food destination, with many public officials walking over from the neighboring Civic Center area daily for lunch, giving it a presence in the minds of elected officials and civil servants.

Events and tickets to events were the second most mentioned item, with 24% of respondents mentioning this category. While still a large number, this is less than a third as many who mentioned food. Ticket prices, however, are not included in Americans for the Arts multipliers, so the amount spent is likely even higher, perhaps double. A number of other retail categories were named including clothing (17%), gifts (13%), generic forms of retail (12%, e.g. "shopping" or "merchandise"), and art and books (11%). Clothing, in particular, included a diverse array of responses where specific brands like Japangeles were named, and specific goods like shoes or jewelry, suggesting Little Tokyo's strength in this retail category as a locus for a particular fashion sensibility along the lines of Japanese American and Asian American inspired streetwear.

All of the named categories some degree of culture embedded into them, reinforcing Little Tokyo's identity as a Japanese American and Asian American cultural destination. Local, family-run businesses are especially beloved in the community, and legacy businesses need to be supported and protected as a key part of Little Tokyo's culture. Businesses would also do well to provide goods and services that tie into the neighborhood's Japanese American and Asian American heritage, highlighting this connection as a way to distinguish themselves and compete amidst the larger Los Angeles market.

16 Americans for the Arts, "Arts and Economic Prosperity 5," report published in 2017

A History of Arts, Culture, and Activism

Another way of examining the wide range of impacts of the arts and culture in Little Tokyo is to look more broadly at its history. This not only provides context, but also gives a qualitative look at many of the important impacts that arts and culture have had over the years. This short history is by no means comprehensive or conclusive, but it does confirm that arts and culture have played a big role in generating economic vitality in Little Tokyo, and that they have had a number of additional important, positive impacts in the community. Little Tokyo has long been a site for Japanese American and Asian American arts and culture, and this history is intertwined with the community's urban development and political engagement. One perspective on how to periodize Little Tokyo's history can be seen through external structures and challenges — an approach not unusual for how historians understand marginalized places. However, another way of periodizing Little Tokyo's history is based on the resistance, agency, and activism found in its key political fights — which are also explicitly or implicitly tied to protecting ibasho using its rich arts and cultural resources.

Little Tokyo has seen four periods of political engagement through culture, the nature of this relationship shifting over time based on changes in culture, generational shifts, and differences in the types of challenge that the community has had to face. First, as the community was built up through traditional arts and building a shared cultural identity from its founding, and rebuilt as such after incarceration during WWII; second, as a new generation of arts activists came of age from 1963-1979 during fights over urban renewal and Civic Center expansion; third, as institution-building with a maturing community responding to foreign direct investment from 1980-1999; and fourth, during our current period of increased urban land values, LA Metro construction, and arts organizing from 2000 to the present. Each of these periods is also intertwined with the way in which art and culture played a role in generating economic life in the community, and in channeling resources into economically productive cultural institutions which helped sustain the life and culture of the neighborhood.

How did art and culture manifest during these historical periods of challenge and threat to ibasho in Little Tokyo? What was the nature of this art and culture, and how did it change over time? Indeed, how do we even begin to define "art and culture," especially within the context of a place like Little Tokyo? As a starting point, I would posit that we begin with a very different understanding of art and culture than the professionalized network of artists and artistic production found in MFA programs, commercial galleries, global museums, and auction houses — what Howard Becker might call "the art world."[17] Art and culture take many forms in Little Tokyo, though few of them exist as the sole professional occupation of artists and culture bearers in the community, and fewer still circulate within the global networks of the art world. Instead, art takes the form of a diverse array of performing arts, of writing by poets and journalists who hold second and third jobs, of traditional forms of Japanese art and culture such as ikebana flower arranging, shodō calligraphy, or shigin, a type of sung poetry, performed and taught by elders who practice out of a commitment to the craft rather than an expectation of fame or money. And culture takes the form of distinct Japanese American foodways, of daily practices of caring for family, community, or environment, and of shared beliefs, values, and language. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, we will take an expansive and big tent approach to defining art and culture, an approach that includes professional artists, part time performers, hobbyists and outsider

17 See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

artists, and forms of culture beyond the fine arts such as food, communally shared practices, and celebratory rituals and public festivals. This approach is not merely one used for convenience or for the purposes of loosening the terms of art and culture, but in fact is one which informs and expands how we understand more professionalized art worlds as well. This is especially true in examining the ways in which this expanded sphere of art and culture manifests in increasingly popular art funding and urban planning regimes under the auspices of public art, creative placemaking, and historic preservation.

Traditional Arts and Community Building

Little Tokyo has been around at least as long as the formation of its religious institutions which are often some of the first markers of a cohesive community. An article from 1888 claimed that Los Angeles was home to around 40 Japanese immigrants, mostly men, who were forming their own YMCA chapter.[18] Centenary United Methodist Church, as conveyed through its self-described history, began in 1896 as the Japanese Methodist Episcopal Mission of Los Angeles. Issei met in a house at 252 Winston Street in what was then considered part of Little Tokyo, as the neighborhood extended farther south, to around what is now 7th Street (see map 2 in the previous section).[19] The Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple and the Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple (also known as Nishi Hongwanji) were formed in 1904 and 1905, respectively, with several additional Japanese American Christian, Catholic, and Buddhist congregations forming during the 1910s and 20s. These religious institutions — which live on to today — formed the foundation for the practice of traditional forms of art and culture in Little Tokyo.

Throughout the development of Little Tokyo as a place, both before and after incarceration, there existed a wide array of practicing Japanese and Japanese American artists who exemplified this process. As the late art curator Karin Higa noted, "the artistic activity centered in Little Tokyo presents tantalizing evidence of a dynamic nexus of artists, art, audiences, and intellectual exchange."[20] She describes how the renowned photographer and documentarian of life in Little Tokyo, Toyo Miyatake, got started by taking photography lessons from fellow Japanese American photographer Harry Shigeta who was living and working in Little Tokyo in the late 1910s. Miyatake opened his own studio in 1923 which then became a mixing ground for artists such as actor Sessue Hayakawa, opera singer Yoshie Fujiwara, cinematographer James Wong Howe, poet T. B. Okamura, and painters Takehisa Yumeji, Tokio Ueyama, Hojin Miyoshi, and Sekishun Masuzo Uyeno. Prefiguring Union Center for the Arts, an exhibition showing much of these artists' work was installed at the newly constructed Union Church in 1923.

These artists, many of whom associated with the Shaku-do-sha, a modern art collective, established a self-reflexive criticality, not content to laud each other's work merely for being Japanese American or from Little Tokyo, but providing frank and insightful critique to push the work and community further. Photographer Taizo Kato and Ueyama both reviewed the exhibition, and the Shaku-do-sha went on to produce several more notable exhibitions over the years, intersecting with global art figures such as Edward Weston and Diego Rivera. Another important figure was the renowned choreographer Michio Ito who settled in Little Tokyo in 1929 and intersected with Ezra Pound, Y. B. Yeats, and brought in Isamu Noguchi to work on designing set elements. Around this time, a number of young Japanese

18 See LA Times, "Good People," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1888.

19 See https://www.centenary-dtla.org/history/.

20 Karen Higa, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Little Tokyo Between the Wars," in *Asian American Art: A History, 1850–1970*, Gordon H. Chang, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 31. See Higa's article for more detail on all of the material contained in this and the next paragraph.

Figure 6. Ground breaking ceremony for the Nishi Hongwanji Betsuin.

The reverend can be seen seated just behind the grandstand, while the majority of the crowd in the back is Japanese American. It is unclear why those doing the groundbreaking are white, along with a "VIP" section of white spectators in the front, but it is likely that they are local Los Angeles leaders and boosters who offered a sheen of pro-American sentiment (also demonstrated by the numerous flags). These guests were honored likely because they made some financial contribution to construction within a Los Angeles of the 1920s where there was widespread interest in alternative spiritualities by white Angelenos, often from other cultural contexts, yet simultaneously there was also a great deal of suspicion and racist attitudes towards people of color in everyday contexts. Additionally, it was difficult if not impossible for non-white and especially immigrant people to own land, likely necessitating some kind of trust organization to set up the temple.

https://tessa.lapl.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/photos/id/78315/rec/16

Americans enrolled in Los Angeles art schools Otis, Chouinard (later to become California Institute of the Arts), and Art Center, producing an explosion of Japanese American work such as that by Hideo Date and Benji Okubo who went on to exhibit together in Little Tokyo in 1933. And in the late 1930s and just into the 1940s, a number of Japanese Americans associated with Little Tokyo life began to work for the major motion picture studios, extending intersections between Little Tokyo's art scene and the global production of culture even further.

Many of these congregations and art collectives formed within Little Tokyo because it was the locus of Japanese American life in Los Angeles, with the population swelling to around 7,000 residents by 1915, and around 30,000 residents before Executive Order 9066 in 1942.[21] Despite this growth, Little Tokyo was still located in an area where realtors sought to implement racial covenants on much of the land which prohibited ownership by people of color, an insidious process that grew coincident with the rise of white supremacy during the 1920s. Accordingly, many of the important religious institutions in the community had to move when they had trouble securing space or continuing leases, including Centenary and Higashi Honganji who moved to Boyle Heights where racial covenants were less prevalent.

This history of racial covenants, redlining, and other forms of racially motivated spatial discrimination is one that is common and ubiquitous in American cities, and Little Tokyo was no exception. It was a fact of life in Little Tokyo since its origins (consider the California Alien Land Law of 1913), and is one that continued in varied ways even beyond the point at which many of these strategies became illegal, with the 1948 Supreme Court ruling Shelley v. Kraemer which outlawed racial covenants, or the Fair Housing Act of 1968 which banned housing discrimination. For Little Tokyo, ibasho was threatened before it even had the time to fully take root, both through these legal and financial mechanisms, and through the psychological impact that these mechanisms created through, for example, inhibiting even cultural resources like a Japanese American Buddhist temple from being built without white access to money and land. But even these forces paled in comparison to the wholesale uprooting of Little Tokyo in 1942.

So-called "Japanese internment" euphemistically refers to the forced relocation and resettlement of Japanese Americans into incarceration camps during World War II upon Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 issued on February 19, 1942.[22] Japanese Americans were forced to give up their homes and belongings, allowed only to take a couple of suitcases, and often having to abandon successful businesses and properties. During the period of incarceration from 1942 to 1945, arts and culture continued to play a role in Little Tokyo, however it was of a different community: the mostly white landowners needed tenants to quickly fill vacancies and African Americans, who also suffered from redlining and racial discrimination were centered just to the south down Central Avenue, moved en masse into Little Tokyo. The community became known as Bronzeville and it was home to a vibrant landscape of Black culture for a short period of time, including jazz and night clubs which remained important even after Japanese Americans returned to Little Tokyo. While the exact cost of incarceration to the Japanese American community is impossible to quantify, it would be difficult to underestimate it. It is certainly more than the $20,000 in reparations given to incarcerated Japanese Americans in 1988 after a well-organized Redress Movement sought an official apology from the US government.

21 LA City Planning, "Little Tokyo CDO District," report published in 2013, available at http://planning.lacity.org/complan/othrplan/pdf/Little%20Tokyo/LittleTokyo_CDO/ DraftProposedLittleTokyoCDO_DesignGuidelines.pdf.

22 The degree to which incarceration disrupted Little Tokyo is difficult to convey in this short section. For more on this topic, see: Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015); Lawson Fusao Inada, *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000). Also, a variety of terms are used to describe the camps, though "concentration camps" was used in the landmark 1998 exhibition at JANM title *America's Concentration Camps: Remembering the Japanese American Experience*. Along with the exhibition, there was a joint statement released by JANM and American Jewish Committee approving of the accuracy of the term while also noting how Nazi concentration camps in Germany were extermination camps of a different order from American camps for Japanese Americans.

It is, in fact, implausible that Little Tokyo would continue to exist at all after its complete destruction and dislocation during incarceration, the ultimate challenge to ibasho. But churches and temples acted as resettlement centers where belongings were stored and reclaimed, and where people could temporarily find shelter, and eventually returned to their role as a locus for community life and the building of a shared culture. Accordingly, art, culture, and community first emerged in Little Tokyo from traditional Japanese forms of culture and often through religious

Figure 7. Japanese Americans being relocated from Little Tokyo during incarceration, boarding busses at Maryknoll Church in 1942.

People were only able to bring an amount of belongings that they could carry, shown in bags and suitcases to the right, and the coats and hats worn in the photo suggest this was an early and cold morning. Women and younger children were gathered in the back of the courtyard, largely separated by gender and age for the move. https://tessa.lapl.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/photos/id/14662/rec/2

institutions. These forms of culture were also critical for accessing resources like real estate such as how religious institutions were able to sidestep land ownership rules, and how they were later used in rebuilding — a critical precursor to any kind of subsequent economic development. But this culture also evolved with younger generations who incorporated American culture and sensibilities to produce a distinct Japanese American "third culture" and it continues to evolve with each subsequent generation.

In figure 8, we can see a promotional photograph from the 1949 Nisei Week festival in Little Tokyo taken by the Toyo Miyatake Studio, the professional photography studio and practice helmed by the Japanese American photographer Toyo Miyatake who had his studio on 1st Street in Little Tokyo. Nisei Week was first celebrated from August 12-18, 1934, as a festival organized to spark new life into Little Tokyo businesses, and is an example of this "third culture." The businesses were largely owned and run by Issei immigrants and the younger generation of Nisei children

Figure 8. 1949 Nisei Week Queen Terri Hokoda appears in the Nisei Week Grand Parade. Courtesy Toyo Miyatake Studio.

wanted to reinvigorate Little Tokyo with an event that would cater to new tastes and bring in new business to the community. This particular festival in 1949 was the ninth edition yet the first one to be held since incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII, and stands out as a striking example of Japanese American willingness to celebrate their identity in the public spaces of Little Tokyo despite widespread persecution only a few years prior.

The photograph demonstrates the intentional way that a distinct Japanese American identity was forged through hybridizing Japanese and American cultures, represented in the use of traditional forms of Japanese culture found in street dance and clothing of the ondo and contemporary American culture found in the beauty pageant competition, automobile procession, and perhaps most of all, the celebration of consumer culture promoted by local businesses. It represented a herculean effort of community organizing and savvy appropriation of a range of cultures which walked a fine line of Japanese American identity with political and cultural palatability not only for a broader white audience, but even for Japanese Americans who wanted to assimilate and seem like "good Americans." Nisei Week, like many of the cultural events and institutions in Little Tokyo, also served as a way to build social capital and connections between the scores of volunteers who helped put it on. It continues to do so through today, where it is still held annually in August, bringing together Little Tokyo, and pulling Japanese Americans back into the community, even if just for a week.

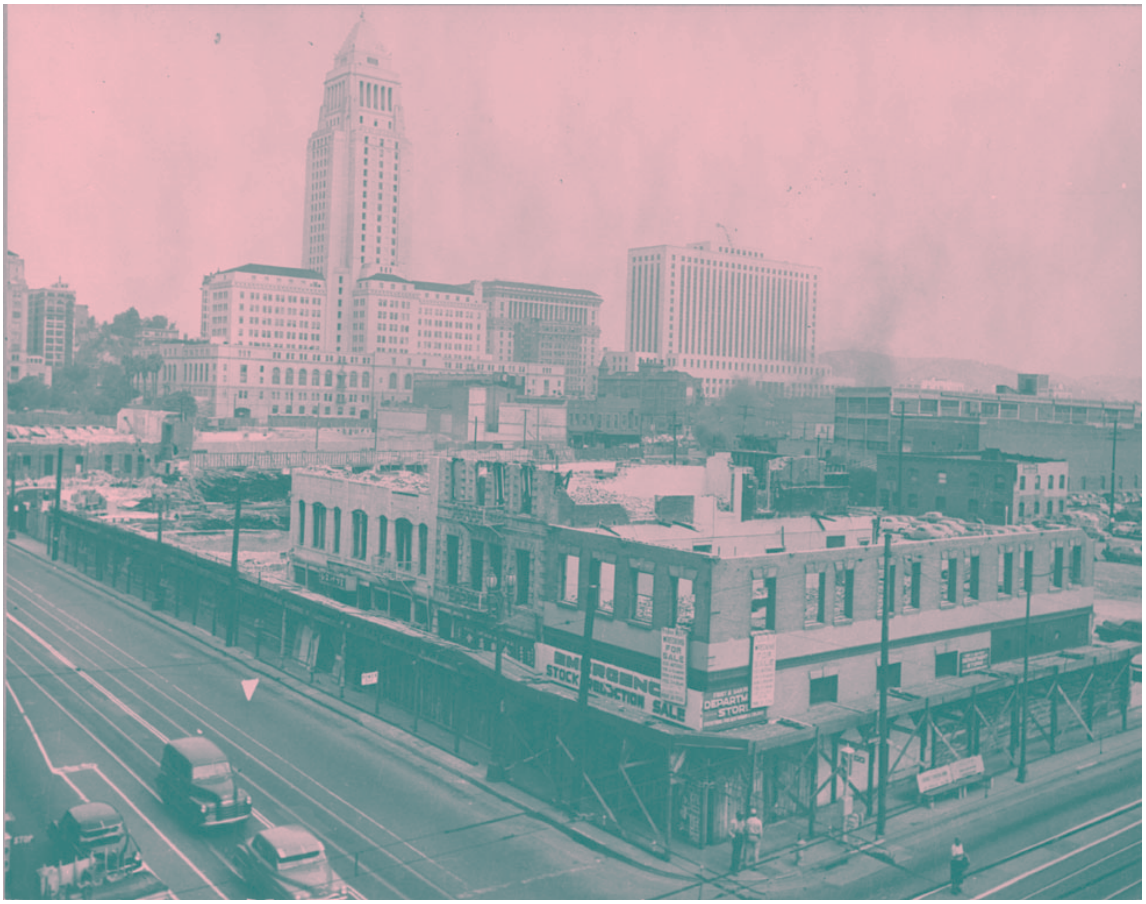
Another image that shows this distinct "third culture" in Little Tokyo is figure 9, of Cub Scout Pack 379, associated with Boy Scout Troop 379 at the Koyasan Buddhist Temple. The earliest forms of what could be called arts activism in Little Tokyo came out of the arts and culture produced by religious institutions in the neighborhood like Koyasan. These institutions provide continuity to the neighborhood as rituals, festivals, and traditions sustain it from generation to generation, and they were also sites for constructing a new Japanese American culture.

Centenary United Methodist Church was first formed in 1896, and has long supported local arts and culture. It was notably the site of a community library started in 1977 which, after organizing and activism led by a group called Friends of the Little Tokyo Library, eventually grew into the official Little Tokyo Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library in 2005, supported by public funding and housing important community documents. Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple was first established in 1905, and has long supported a range of cultural practices, such as an annual Obon festival and Bon Odori, and the commissioning and display of murals and sculptures related to Buddhism. Both these and many other religious institutions have also supported public architecture, commissioning buildings for worship, community spaces, and schools, with Centenary's current building opened in 1995, and Hompa Hongwanji's current building dedicated in 1969. These building projects were critical moments where the community would come together, pool financial resources, and spend these resources on construction activity which also had implications for economic growth. These forms of activism focused on community building and maintaining cultural traditions, rather than more antagonistic and politically oriented forms of activism which we might commonly recognize today, which we will delve into in the next section.

Figure 9. Group photo of Pack 379 of the Cub Scouts at the Koyasan Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, 1962. Photo LAPL Shades of LA Collection.

A New Generation of Arts Activists

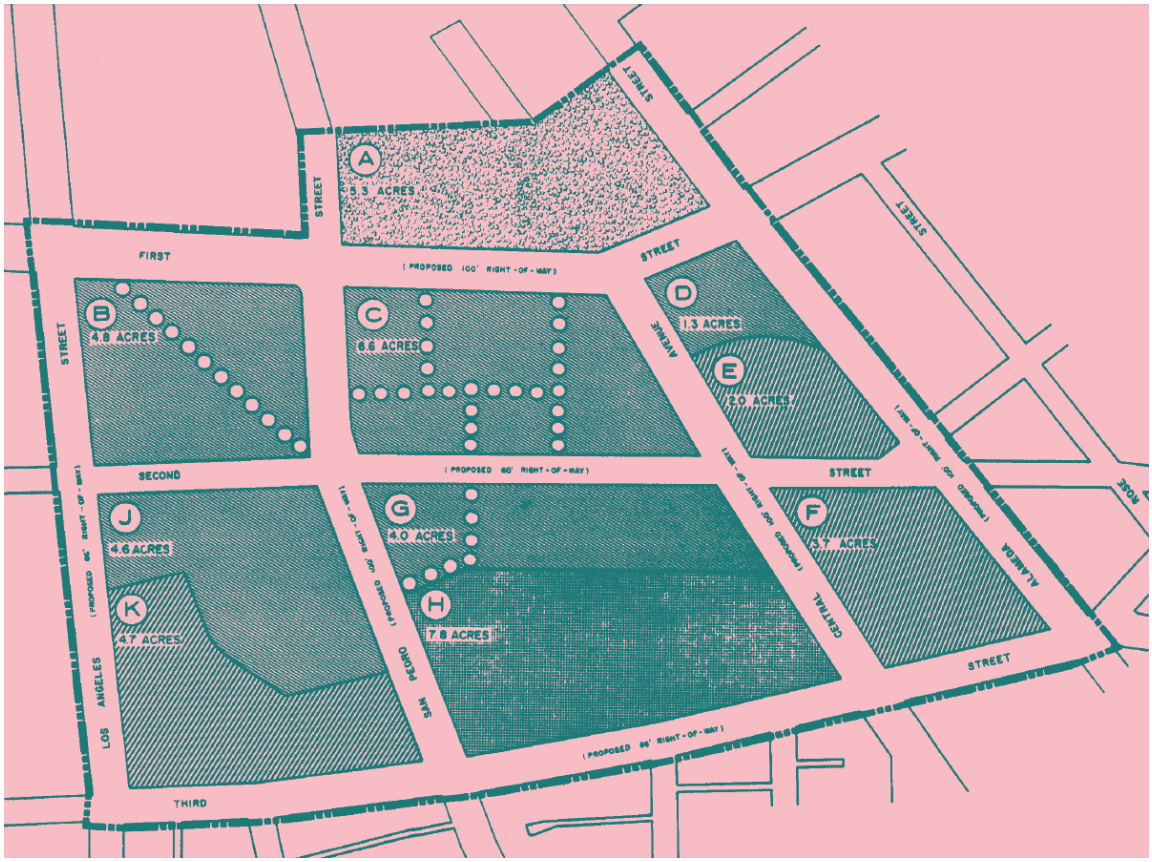
Figure 10. Demolition of Little Tokyo on the north side of First St, between Los Angeles St to San Pedro St, to make way for the LAPD's Parker Center.



The last remaining buildings still have signs posted of sales, indicated the rapid process by which business owners had to unload their wares and relocate, especially from prime corner real estate adjacent to the streetcar, with street car electric lines visibly hanging in the air. The Hellenistic style architecture of Los Angeles City Hall hovers over the block being demolished, an ominous reminder to Japanese Americans where power is located in the city, especially given that it was intentionally developed as the tallest building in Los Angeles and remained as such until 1962, well after this image was taken. Courtesy of the Seaver Center (P-011-3ov).

The first wave of arts activism that explicitly engaged systems of power more directly than past organizing efforts which focused on building community arose with the coming of age of a younger generation of Japanese Americans, and the broader climate of the countercultural 1960s, from about 1963 to 1979. Almost immediately upon Japanese Americans' return to Little Tokyo from the camps, a large swath of its western land, most notably the vibrant block of buildings and residences bounded by Temple, Los Angeles, First, and San Pedro, was seized by the City of Los Angeles through eminent domain so that it could build additional municipal buildings (fig. 10). The largest and most notorious of these buildings was the now demolished LAPD Parker Center which has long been a symbol of violence and racism for people of color in Los Angeles.

Figure 11. Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project area map, CRA/LA, 1971.



The map shows the "official boundary" of Little Tokyo as defined in conjunction with the redevelopment project, a boundary that has largely remained the same to this day, despite the fact that the historical extents of Little Tokyo, especially prior to incarceration, stretched out farther in all directions.

Between the shadows of City Hall and the Parker Center, ibasho was threatened through the physical seizure of land, but also through the psychological impact of this reminder of state and police power.

The next major wave of challenges was more of a mixed bag, in the form of urban renewal and redevelopment. The Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) received authorization by the City Council to undertake the "Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project" (LTRP) on February 24, 1970, and subsequently received reauthorizations, modifications, and extensions for the project in 1986, 1994, 1999, 2003, and 2006. The final projected end date for the project was in 2013, a date that may have itself also been extended, but the CRAs were dismantled before that date would ever arrive.[23] In this case, ibasho was threatened in a complex way: on the one hand, the CRA provided power and resources to Japanese and Japanese American business leaders to modernize and reshape the community. Yet, on the other hand, in doing so they also displaced both physical shops and homes, as well as rapidly transformed the sense of place and belonging in Little Tokyo from what it had long been for its residents, leading to tensions within the community that lingered for years to come.

The LTRP map (fig. 11) both clearly delineated the territory for the community of Little Tokyo, but also reified its diminished size based on these circumscribed boundaries. Two of the earlier major projects included Little Tokyo Towers, a 300-unit senior housing building completed in 1975, and the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC) completed in 1980. While each of these projects had their own voices of discontent, including a lack of sufficient transparency, communication, and community participation in Little Tokyo Towers, and concerns about the dominance of Japanese government and business influence in JACCC, both projects were generally accepted and welcomed as important and necessary pieces of Little Tokyo and its future. JACCC, in particular, was hotly debated from its initial inception as a proposed "Japanese Cultural Center," and had both "American" and "Community" added to its name in response to activist organizing and demands. There was a strong desire for JACCC to be reflective of Japanese American culture, rather than only Japanese culture, and also to be a grassroots organization with footing in the community and space and resources provided to non-profit organizations and other small entities, rather than a singular dominating cultural institution.

Other CRA projects, however, were either hotly contested or widely derided by community members and activists in Little Tokyo. The advisory committee for the LTRP largely consisted of business owners and individuals with a connection to the development process, with 1-2 voices that had to speak loudly to convey positions held by those outside of the advisory committee. The most significant redevelopment project that drew the ire of the community included the construction of the New Otani Hotel and Weller Court. This required the demolition of the Sun Building, an important site for traditional arts and cultural practices as well as many community organizations and non-profits, and the Sun Hotel, an SRO building that housed many low-income and elderly residents, many of whom were Latinx. Furthermore, much of this development was driven by the Kajima Corporation, a Japanese company which had already built an office tower in the neighborhood, had received the construction contract for JACCC, and also had a reputation as being complicit in war crimes during WWII.

23 http://www.crala.org/internet-site/Projects/little_tokyo/index.cfm. Miya Shichinohe Suga, "Little Tokyo Reconsidered: Transformation of Japanese American Community through the Early Redevelopment Projects," *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 15 (2004): 237.

During this period, several important Asian American arts and media organizations were established either within Little Tokyo, or in relationship to the neighborhood which served as the de facto spiritual home for Japanese Americans and, increasingly, a broader pan-Asian American identity. The term Asian American emerged during this time as various ethnic groups banded together as a political strategy, forming radical groups under the auspices of Yellow Power movements inspired by Black Power movements, and Third World solidarity movements.[24] Events, protests, meetings, offices, political actions, and the like often occurred in the heart of Little Tokyo. Two organizations in particular are demonstrative of the potential of art and culture in intervening in and changing society during this period: Visual Communications and *Gidra*.

Visual Communications was founded by Duane Kubo, Robert Nakamura, Alan Ohashi, and Eddie Wong in 1970 as an organization which would use visual media and the arts to redefine the perception of Asian Americans in society, photographing everyday life and community events in Little Tokyo and elsewhere, producing films and film festivals, and engaging in political campaigns. Their members used art and media as a direct form of activism, but their extensive visual archive also documents a variety of cultural practices used in activist work of the time, recording the transition of community-engaged cultural work from an older generation of Japanese Americans to the younger generation who used more direct-action approaches to activism. The Visual Communications photographs show a culture of arts activism which was intentionally multigenerational, drawing on culturally-specific practices such as the street performance of protests influenced by odori (fig. 12) and the "calligraphy" of sign making. Their activities represented the lateral interaction, community building, and

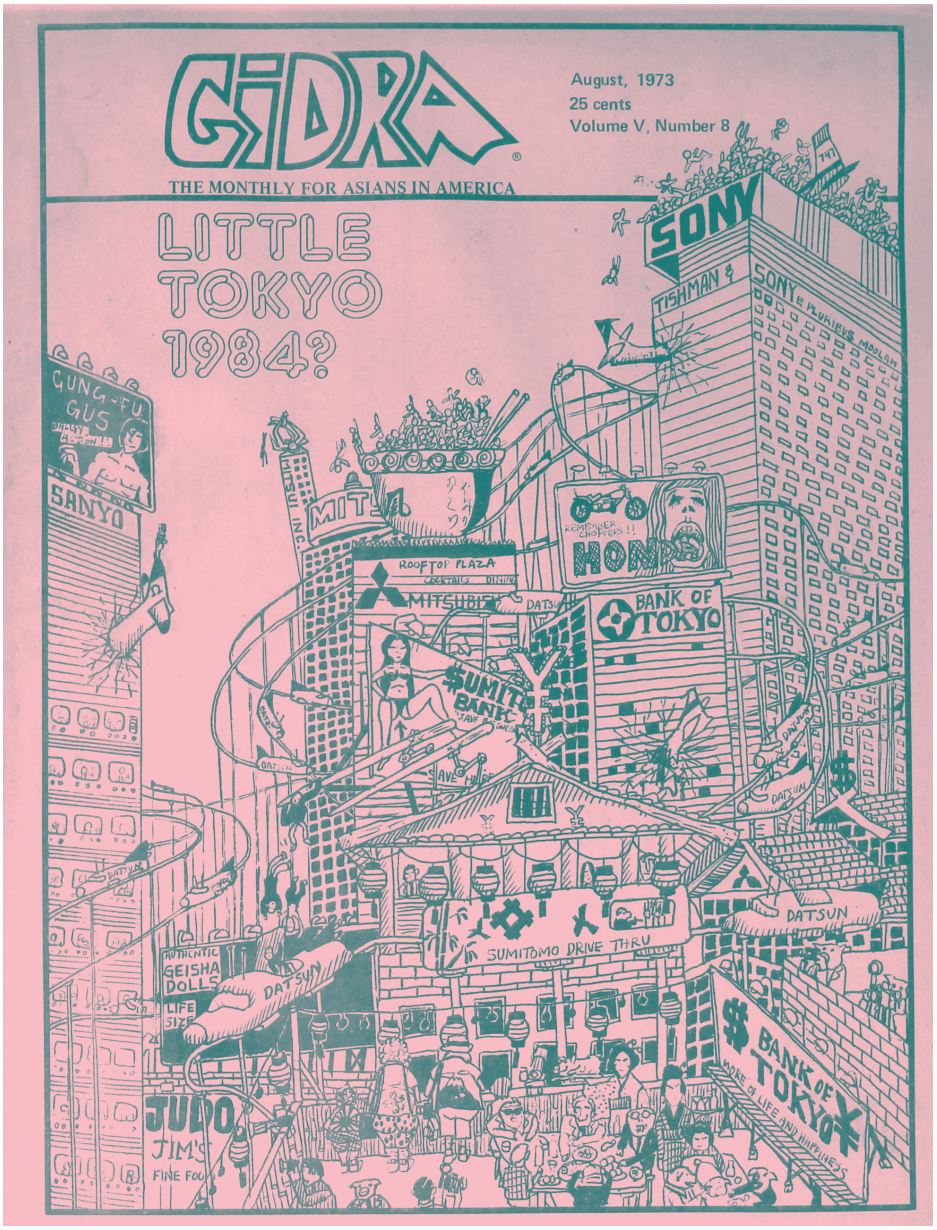
Figure 12. Dance at the newly instituted Manzanar Pilgrimage in 1969 to remember history of Japanese American incarceration (top) and the Van Troi Anti-imperialist Brigade in demonstration against Vietnam War during the 1972 Nisei Week with effigy of Nixon (bottom). Courtesy of the Visual Communications Photographic Archive.

24 For an extensive history of this, see Karen Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London: Verso, 2016).

Figure 13. Artist Bob Miyamoto tutors a local youth during a screen-printing workshop at the Third World Storefront in 1971 (top) and a multi-ethnic coalition advocates its support for affirmative action programs in education at the foot of the Downtown Federal Building with protest signs in 1973 (bottom). Courtesy of the Visual Communications Photographic Archive.

Figure 14. An intergenerational rally of the Little Tokyo Peoples Rights Organization (LTPRO) in front of the then-Sumitomo Bank Building in Little Tokyo (top) and a LTPRO sign drop against development in Little Tokyo at the former Sun Building which housed arts and activist organizations (bottom), both in 1977. Courtesy of the Visual Communications Photographic Archive.

Figure 15. Artist David Monkawa, a key *Gidra* staff member, critiques the influx of corporate capital into the Los Angeles neighborhood of Little Tokyo through his cover art for the August 1973 issue. Courtesy of *Gidra* and Densho Digital Repository.



solidarity across ethnic groups which often even spanned beyond the new Asian American movement, to include Black political movements, engagement with youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and in educational spaces (fig. 13). Additionally, while major campaigns included anti-war and anti-apartheid sentiments, or labor and antiracist educational spaces, concerns regarding urban development were also common (fig. 14).

Gidra was a monthly newspaper started by a group of Japanese American and Asian American students from UCLA that ran from 1969 to 1974 with a politically activist bent, advocating for anti-war and anti-capitalist positions, and for an Asian American political consciousness. While it was first based at UCLA, then in the Crenshaw neighborhood (which was then a heavily Japanese American area), *Gidra* sustained a focus on Little Tokyo's politics, development, and history (fig. 15). The rhetoric used regarding political stances, race relations, and other social concerns remains contemporary nearly 50 years later, from its condemnations of white supremacy, to its concerns about the representation (or lack thereof) of Asian Americans in popular media, to its strongly anti-capitalist positions. Its "People's Page" was included in every issue as a space for submissions of poetry and art, reflecting the intertwined nature of art and politics which was often taken for granted as a given in this era.

More than just a newspaper, *Gidra* was a community of artist-activists and staff who went on to found and work in community and activist organizations, such as the Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization (LTPRO) and the Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), which have made Little Tokyo into what it is today. LTSC has continued to support the arts through projects such as Sustainable Little Tokyo and +LAB. They have also supported public art installations including *Harmony* by local artist Nancy Uyemura at their Casa Heiwa housing development in 1996, or the community-driven *Home is Little Tokyo* mural by Tony Osumi with Jorge Diaz and Sergio Diaz in 2005 (fig. 16). The 16x40' *Home in Little Tokyo* mural, situated on an exterior wall of the Japanese Village Plaza, fits within this muralist tradition not necessarily through its visual aesthetic, which uses Japanese icons such as cherry blossoms, kanji, and hiragana, but through the process of its production, which brought together some 500 participants to collaborate on envisioning and producing the mural.

Other organizations in Little Tokyo have emphasized live performance-based arts and culture. Just a few years prior to *Gidra* and Visual Communications, East West Players was founded in 1965 by nine Los Angeles-based Asian American artists who realized that they would have to create their own space if they wanted to explore roles apart from the stereotypical typecasting by studios and theaters. It has long championed a diversity of genres, from experimental and politically charged theater to American musicals, recasting Asian American representation in the process. It has also been instrumental in changing perceptions of LGBTQ people in the Asian American community, has provided support and a home to young artists, and initiated community-building educational opportunities (fig. 17). The organization has been a locus for community building and the construction of an Asian American identity in which art, theater, and performance play an important and public role. While these projects have impacts that go far beyond economic vitality, including fundamental processes of community building, political engagement, and even impacting human rights, they also brought people into the community who spend money at local businesses and contribute to Little Tokyo's economic sustainability.

Figure 16. Unveiling of Home is Little Tokyo mural in 2005, commissioned by LTSC. Image Courtesy LTSC.

Figure 17. Filipino/Black actor Jiavani Linayao in As We Babble On, a play performed at East West Players in Little Tokyo in 2018. Image courtesy Image courtesy East West Players. The play was written by Nathan Ramos Park who won East West Players' 2042: See Change Playwriting Competition for young playwrights of color and was directed by Alison De La Cruz.

Capital Investment in Cultural Institutions

The next challenge to face Little Tokyo was intertwined with CRA/LA and LTRP, and this was the influx of foreign capital during the 1970s and 80s. Money was largely coming from the Japanese government and from Japanese corporations, coincident with the so-called Japanese economic miracle in which the nation's economy grew substantially from the postwar period through around 1970, and continued to grow at a slightly reduced rate until around 1990. As mentioned, either significant funding came from this influx of capital or construction outlays flowed to sources of this capital through construction contracts, including in CRA projects like Little Tokyo Towers, JACCC, the New Otani Hotel, and Weller Court. But additional foreign direct investment came in the form of land acquisitions, opening branch locations of chain and other businesses, and redevelopment projects not tied to CRA funding. These corporate interventions into the Little Tokyo landscape were a stark change to the local, family-run businesses and religious institutions that had long formed the backbone of ibasho in the neighborhood.

While no particular project or new business was on its own as disruptive or transformative as, for example, the development of Weller Court and the New Otani Hotel, the cumulative effect was disconcerting for community members who could feel their neighborhood undergoing a transformation. These newcomers sometimes failed to communicate or integrate into the community in expected ways, leading to tensions between Japanese Americans who at times could not speak Japanese, and Japanese business owners or managers who did not appreciate how Japanese American culture was distinct from their own. The complexity of this situation was compounded by the fact that non-Japanese individuals, including those at planning and redevelopment agencies, often conflated the two distinct populations, assuming that they were all of a singular, homogenous community. Here too, the complexity of ibasho presented itself in tensions between longtime Japanese American residents and newcomers who also had Japanese heritage but lacked much of the distinct culture that arose out of the Japanese American experience over the past several decades, not least of which included the experience of incarceration.

Japan was the leading source of foreign direct investment in Los Angeles through the 1980s, notably acquiring nearly 50% of the premium Downtown LA office real estate and several high-profile properties such as the ARCO Plaza, the Bonaventure Hotel, the Biltmore Hotel, and the Columbia studios. After the Japanese economy's bubble burst at the beginning of the 1990s, much of this investment was liquidated as corporations sold off their holdings and have largely avoided large purchases and investments at that scale ever since — though even this rapid shift was problematic for Little Tokyo on the ground as property ownership became scattered among other global corporate interests very quickly, and property held within the community lost much of its value as large parcels were traded at a loss. This was compounded by the widespread economic downturn of Los Angeles in the early 1990s as aerospace left Southern California. The effects of this head-spinning transformation of property ownership in Little Tokyo is difficult to measure, but it certainly points toward the problematics of corporate investment in community property which is not held to any kind of ethical consideration of effects of corporate actions on the ground and, as dictated by law, is only answerable to shareholders and maximizing economic returns.

Activists and community organizers in Little Tokyo tried to channel this influx of capital into public cultural institutions which would provide some stability and continuity for the community, such as the creation of the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center in 1980 and the construction of the Japanese American National Museum building in 1999. These institutions would be more resistant to the rapid pace of change brought on by commercial development which could change hands at an instant, and would also be a material manifestation of the neighborhood's Japanese American and Asian American identity. Also, without these flagship cultural institutions, much of this capital might have flowed to projects that ultimately benefited investors outside of the community, or perhaps may have even been constructed entirely elsewhere. So arts and culture have played an important role in capturing economic investment, and turning that into sustainable economic vitality within Little Tokyo.

The Japanese government in collaboration with several large Japanese corporations had an interest in establishing a center for Japanese culture in Little Tokyo, and after a long political battle involving fundraising, activist actions, and negotiations between the community, the CRA, and Japanese funders, the center was planned as not just a Japanese cultural center but as a Japanese American cultural center, and as a community center for Little Tokyo, in what ultimately became the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC) completed in 1980 — though, to this day, the Japanese transliteration of the Center's name remains the "Japan-US Culture Center," perhaps as a means to placate Japanese funders. Beyond a cultural center for housing classes and performances for traditional forms of Japanese culture such as ikebana and shodō calligraphy, there would also be public space, a state-of-the-art theater for live stage performances, and perhaps most importantly, offices for a range of cultural organizations and community non-profits. JACCC would be the primary destination for the relocation of the numerous organizations that were being evicted from the Sun Building redevelopment (see location of Weller Court on map 3 at the beginning of this volume), and the CRA agreement dictated that they would receive rent subsidies for the first five years of their new lease at the JACCC building. The plaza in front of JACCC would go on to be designed by the noted Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi as an abstract, modernist shrine to honor the Issei.

Another major development was the creation of the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in 1992 which was first housed in the historic Hompa Hongwanji Temple where Japanese Americans were processed to be sent away to incarceration camp during WWII. The temple had moved to its current location down the street in 1969 because of concerns about redevelopment and the City's use of eminent domain. The idea for JANM emerged during the 1980s just as Japanese Americans won their right to redress and reparations from incarceration in 1988, and Japanese American businesses along with public funding and Japanese American veterans' organizations saw fit to invest in Little Tokyo. With a landmark exhibition in 1994 that described incarceration camps as "concentration camps," the museum has played an important role in opening up space for Japanese Americans to discuss this painful history and also to create a space of acknowledgement and remembrance within broader American society. JANM later moved into a new building just across the temple in 1999 designed by Gyo Obata, a Japanese American architect who narrowly avoided being sent to camp with his family by attending architecture

school in St. Louis and who went on to found the global design firm HOK. The old temple building was at first used for offices and then later was established as the permanent site for the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy, a project of the museum, and the offices for the Go For Broke National Education Center. JANM has been an important player on the national scene, partnering with the Smithsonian and seen as a site of symbolic importance for Japanese American politicians, as it houses a unique archive of materials including Issei oral histories, documents on incarceration, and other artifacts of Japanese American heritage that might otherwise be lost to history.

Another final development to note was the conversion of the old Union Church building, which had housed a historic Japanese American Christian church and was built in 1923, into the Union Center for the Arts. Union Church moved into a new location in 1978 over worries that their building would be seized through eminent domain and redeveloped. The City of Los Angeles bought the property which ended up lying dormant through the 1994 Northridge earthquake, which severely damaged the decaying building. After demands from community organizers, the City agreed to lease the building to the Little Tokyo Service Center, an important community development corporation in Little Tokyo founded by many of the artists and activist who came of age during the 1960s in the neighborhood, for one dollar a year if they would spend the $5 million necessary to repair and renovate the building. The newly christened Union Center for the Arts became the home to East West Players, Visual Communications, and LA Art Core, a visual arts gallery and non-profit organization. This transformed the long-vacated space into a hotbed of Asian American arts and culture in Little Tokyo, but it also saved the building from demolition — a historic structure which was the locus for a great deal of Japanese American life in Little Tokyo, including processing for incarceration, an employment center when Little Tokyo was Bronzeville, and rebuilding efforts after WWII, like other religious institutions in the neighborhood.

Tuesday Night Cafe, an Asian American bimonthly performance and open mic night held since 1998 showing music, stand-up comedy, spoken word, and other forms of performance art, is in many ways the product of Little Tokyo's artistic culture, and it also takes place at the Union Center for the Arts. It acts as a site of community organizing and consciousness building for Asian Americans artists and Little Tokyo-based organizations through arts and culture, creative expression, and social engagement. It has been an especially important site for Asian American youth and young adults who have historically had few public platforms for creative expression through performance, and has acted as a means to sustain commitment to and interest in the Little Tokyo community by a younger generation of artists and activists. While there are numerous other arts and culture organizations and institutions in Little Tokyo, JACCC, JANM, and the Union Center for the Arts stand out as icons in the community's effort to channel investment into organizations that have shared responsibility and ownership, creating a bulwark against rapid urban change (see map 3 at beginning of this volume). Beyond the issue of control and, especially, control of land in Little Tokyo, these institutions have the multiplying effect of culture, each standing out as a paradigmatic space for Japanese American and Asian American culture in the national scene. They establish Little Tokyo as the preeminent cultural space for Japanese Americans and Asian Americans not only within Southern California but around the world, and this "soft power" enables political power as these institutions secure a

space in national histories, in spaces of artistic and cultural circulation, and within a shared, collective identity within the community. Over the long term, this "soft power" also has a multiplier effect in building cultural cache and economic vitality within the community.

Current Fights Against Gentrification

The final period of arts activism arose in tandem with what Alan Ehrenhalt has termed "the great inversion" as longtime processes of suburbanization are reversed and urban land close to city centers becomes increasingly valuable, from about the year 2000 onward.[25] Little Tokyo, at the heart of Los Angeles and nestled between the Civic Center and the trendy Arts District, has seen some of the greatest of these pressures. This process began around the turn of the millennium, and increased rapidly when the first bubble popped in the financial crisis of 2008, but contrary to expectations, came roaring back only a few years later with current land values higher than they have ever been.

One key narrative of arts activism within this period is the example of 800 Traction, a building adjacent to Little Tokyo which has strong

25 See Alan Ehrenhalt, The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City (New York: Vintage, 2013).

Figure 18. Activists at a landmark hearing for 800 Traction Avenue. Jennifer Swann.

connections with the community because of its former use as live-work artist lofts with a strong Japanese American presence (see map 3 at the beginning of this volume). The building was first converted into live-work artist lofts in 1980 with several important Japanese American artists moving in including Matsumi "Mike" Kanemitsu, Bruce and Norman Yonemoto, and Nancy Uyemura. Uyemura lived in 800 Traction for some 38 years, up until 2018 when it was purchased by a development company who promptly filed redevelopment plans for the building and sent out eviction notices to tenants. The tenants organized rallies, attended hearings, and produced activist art events such as an "eviction gallery show" in which many works of arts and belongings were sold off.

The artists were ultimately not successful in their attempt to thwart the development. Their efforts involved using every tool available, from media campaigns, to direct action, to using planning tools such as historic designation to slow development. But few things can slow development which is guaranteed through entitlements claimed through property ownership in the American property rights regime — and property developers have become savvy to many of these techniques, deploying high-powered lawyers, and weaponizing processes such as historic designation as well. The tenants had to relocate, with many moving to other areas in Los Angeles with lower rents and more available space, and some leaving Los Angeles altogether. Uyemura, for her part, remained in Little Tokyo because of her connections to the community — it was not only her literal, but also her spiritual home. Her work since this effort has taken on issues of gentrification, with engagement in other activist campaigns, and one can even consider the artistry of the tenant's organizing and sign making as Uyemura implored the City's Planning and Land Use Management committee to "PLUM your own ass!!" (fig. 18). Their efforts are the direct product of a culture of activism and political engagement borne out of Little Tokyo, and though their efforts may have appeared in vain, with Uyemura now having to commute to Gardena for studio space, they were a public and visible reminder of the power found in collective organizing and action amidst the seemingly unstopping forces of gentrification and urban change in the capitalist city. As the artists proclaimed in one of their public statements, "We are looking at a possibility of a Little Tokyo without Japanese, and an Arts District without artists."

This history of arts and activism in Little Tokyo is an active one which continues to this day, informing the culture and practice of politics in the community. A culturally specific Asian American aesthetics of activism suffuses the various forms of visual and performance-based art, creating a signaling mechanism for art practices which are of the community. It is one that is based in time-based and process-oriented work driven through the interests of an Asian American identity and the long-term sustainability of Little Tokyo as a spiritual home for that identity, rather than commercial or monetary interests often found in the contemporary art market. All of these elements add up to produce ibasho in Little Tokyo, as well as construct a set of practices which can sustain and protect it. An exciting development in the current use of art and culture to protect ibasho in Little Tokyo are the activities of Sustainable Little Tokyo. It fits within this current period of arts activism, using arts-based community organizing to help the community stake a claim over its future development, and will be discussed further in the final section of this report.

Political Engagement & Community Development Impacts

To identify some of the impacts from arts and culture in Little Tokyo beyond conventional measures of economic revenue and spending, in addition to the stakeholder survey and historical work, we conducted 18 in-depth interviews with community leaders and artists from the neighborhood. Responses were triangulated with each other to identify common themes, which are reported here. Key findings include, first, that the arts have been important in helping produce the history and identity of Little Tokyo, creating a shared culture and sense of belonging for members of its community. This culture, however, has slowly evolved over the years, especially as younger generations take the reins on community organizations, or start new endeavors themselves. These changes have also recently accelerated as the demographics of the neighborhood have shifted and as many younger-generation Japanese Americans have moved elsewhere in Los Angeles and are not as involved. Second, art and culture have played a key role in building social capital and producing a community that can respond to challenges with coordinated political engagement and activism. This culture has allowed Little Tokyo to improbably hold on to its place in the city, and has served as a model for other immigrant and ethnic communities who are looking to do the same in the face of similar challenges. Both of these impacts of the arts and culture are difficult to measure apart from qualitative means, but their existential impacts cannot be underestimated: without the arts and culture, Little Tokyo would either not be itself, or it might not exist at all. And while it goes without saying, the positive effects of arts and culture on political engagement and community development serve as necessary precursors to a sustainable economic vitality in the neighborhood, as well.

Holding On to Culture

One theme that came up during interviews was how art and culture played a role in shaping a shared identity in Little Tokyo, but that it has changed over time as generations shift, as people change, and as Little Tokyo, itself, changes. One interviewee generalized the generational shifts by describing how the first generation Issei "had no choice" but to look, sound, act, and be Japanese because of who they were and the culture they brought with them; second generation Nisei often were "caught in the middle" of a shifting relationship to the US, where there was a desire to assimilate but not a full capacity to do so; and third generation Sansei "didn't want to be Japanese" and reinvented their culture as Japanese American. As one respondent put it, "efforts to acculturate, fit in, be American, yet also preserve and maintain daily life: that is what Japanese-American is! That tension."

One factor that has played a role in this are the changing cultural organizations in the community. Many interviewees mentioned the kenjinkai, or mutual aid associations formed by Issei immigrants based on which prefecture in Japan they were from. Later groups were formed between people who were sent to the same camp during WWII. After this, groups formed based on religious institutions, schools, volunteer and nonprofit organizations, and sports teams.

Interviewees also described the change over time as one where traditional forms of culture from Japan like ikebana and shodō calligraphy were transformed by younger generations of Japanese American artists and culture bearers. As one person described, "For Sanseis, we went to Japanese school, but traditional arts didn't reflect who we were. During the 1970s, we began to explore mixing of traditional motifs with

new experiences to make something new and uniquely Japanese American, not Japanese, not American." Hiroshima, a popular Japanese American band with ties to Little Tokyo, was lauded as an example where taiko drumming, koto, and other traditional Japanese instruments were combined with jazz, rock, and American forms of music.

That many of the traditional forms of culture were practiced as hobbies by older generations meant that there has been little support infrastructure developed for younger generations who may have an interest in them but do not have the time to invest because of the increasing speed and intensity of work and life demands in contemporary society. One interviewee noted that "in the past, you just did these things with your family organically, but now you have to be more intentional to raise money and ensure that they still happen." Interviewees also bemoaned that because of past attitudes toward assimilation, many people in Little Tokyo no longer speak Japanese. This makes communication difficult with monolingual Japanese senior residents, some practitioners of traditional arts, and also new,

Figure 19. The Kawasakis at the Nisei Week Parade. Takachizu treasure submitted by Kimberly Kawasaki.

younger immigrants who may not be comfortable speaking in English. There is a widespread desire to incorporate these Japanese-language speakers into Little Tokyo's community, and art and culture is seen as a wonderful way to accomplish this.

Interviewees also appreciate the transformation of local culture into new forms that excited younger audiences and see it as a necessary means for keeping some forms of culture alive, even if in a "diluted" form. One interviewee quoted their temple minister in describing how traditional holiday meals have changed but that the "most important part is not the food but the sentiment: it's spending time together, and coming up with new traditions." Indeed, not only the culture is changing through generations, but the very ethnicity of Japanese Americans is shifting as there are increasing numbers of mixed ethnicity families with children who may interpret what it means to be Japanese American in a very different way.

Interviewees described how they were increasingly seeing a diverse audience at Little Tokyo's cultural festivals, such as Nisei Week, or in membership at the various religious institutions. And while this was seen as something that sparked a bit of nostalgia and remorse for seeing one's culture change and become unfamiliar, it was also seen as something necessary and even hopeful for the future, as at least these institutions and practices would continue to exist in some, albeit changed, form, rather that disappear entirely. There have even been efforts to intentionally construct multi-ethnic festivals which honor and respect the unique forms, histories, and differences between cultures while reconnecting communities that have always intersected in Little Tokyo. One such festival is the "FandangObon" festival, founded by Little Tokyo artist Nobuko Miyamoto and Quetzal Flores, which combines "Fandango of Vera Cruz, Mexico rooted in African, Mexican and indigenous music; Japanese Buddhist Obon circle dances in remembrance of ancestors; and West African dance and drums of Nigeria and New Guinea."[26]

There is a widespread sense that there is no space for being "pollyannaish" about the future of Little Tokyo and its culture. Perhaps due to the many challenges Little Tokyo has faced over the years, its leaders are realists when it comes to what needs to happen to maintain Little Tokyo, and the limitations of what is possible. Because Little Tokyo used to be a unique destination as the only place where Japanese Americans could buy specific goods and services, it had a stable population and clientele. As increasing numbers of Japanese American settled elsewhere, the need for Little Tokyo became secondary, with families visiting less and less — perhaps only for a funeral or a wedding, or annually during Nisei Week. Little Tokyo has had to be inventive about how it would set itself apart — and the centralization of major Japanese American and Asian American institutions in Little Tokyo was a key part of this process. Today, Little Tokyo is imagined by its leaders as the premiere destination for Japanese American and Asian American arts and culture because this is where many of the churches, temples, and cultural institutions are located. This centrality has been key for keeping visitors coming into Little Tokyo, and especially for keeping its economic vitality as local, family-run businesses try to compete in a regional marketplace.

Many interviewees described how, more recently, Japanese American club basketball has become ubiquitous, and have cited this as a possible cultural formation that can bring in new generations of Japanese Americans to Little Tokyo. One

26 See http://greatleap.org/fandangobon/.

of the main community development projects in Little Tokyo right now is the Terasaki Budokan, a community recreation center which aspires to host league games and tournaments. As one savvy interviewee noted, one of the only things that would get any tired, stressed parent into their car to drive into Little Tokyo — a place with "bad traffic and difficult parking" — would be their kid's basketball game. Furthermore, by creating mechanisms by which Japanese Americans and even the broader community will continue to frequent Little Tokyo, it also ensures that local small businesses will continue to thrive and that the neighborhood will remain economically vital.

Another major change, and one which is intertwined with concerns around gentrification, was the introduction of new market-rate housing in the 2000s which revitalized many of the businesses in the community by increasing the residential population. This was seen as positive, but also disconcerting given how most of the new residents were not Japanese American, often not even Asian American, and had little sense of the history or culture of Little Tokyo. A major challenge for community leaders is maintaining a visible culture in Little Tokyo tied to its unique Japanese American history, while also creating an inviting space where these newcomers can engage and participate. Art and culture, again, is key to this, creating spaces for these stakeholders to ethically engage and really become part of the community. Interviewees felt that it was important to create "a neighborhood where people count" and that is "multicultural by design." This process is unfolding with new programming from cultural institutions, and the creation of new institutions like Tuesday Night Cafe and FandangObon. As one interviewee explained, "young people are coming back to Little Tokyo, and I don't always get it, but I'm glad that it exists."

Welcome to Little Tokyo (Please Take Off Your Shoes)

Nearly every interviewee felt that one phrase in particular really captured the essence of the spirit of the community in the neighborhood today: "Welcome to Little Tokyo, please take off your shoes." The phrase was attributed to Evelyn Yoshimura, a community activist who help start Asian American studies at Cal State Long Beach, co-founded Amerasian Bookstore, was part of *Gidra* and the Redress Movement, and is cofounder and current staff at Little Tokyo Service Center. The phrase captures the tension felt in the community between two desires. First, being an open, welcoming, inviting place that can move into the future while newcomers move in and a younger generation of people connect with Little Tokyo. Yet, second, also wanting to protect and preserve the community's heritage and ensure that it doesn't get overrun with land speculators and corporate businesses who do not respect where the community has come from and what it has been through to get where it is today. It also cleverly references Japanese American and Asian American culture by mapping the respectful practice of removing one's shoes before entering a house — your own, but especially a home where you are a guest — onto the urban scale of the Little Tokyo neighborhood. The phrase captures the essence of what the community organizers and activists are ultimately trying to achieve: to be welcoming to newcomers, but also to ask them to respect the community's long history, heritage, and culture. This section will focus on some of the issues related to this concern as it intersects with art and culture, especially in terms of the way that art and culture can help educate and empower a new group of community stakeholders.

Invariably, when asked about what things happening in Little Tokyo give them hope or excite them, interviewees would bring up how excited and proud they are of the handful of young leaders that have stepped up to the plate. Primary leaders for Sustainable Little Tokyo, Little Tokyo Community Council, and Kizuna, a newer organization which intentionally reaches out to youth to build community leaders, are all helmed by staff younger than 35 years old. These younger leaders are often a spark of energy in the room at community meetings, events, and direct actions, yet there is also a great deal of concern about burnout because while there are a number of younger leaders — and a number of staff in LTSC, East West Players, JACCC, and other organizations who are also younger — there are fewer people involved in activities in Little Tokyo than in the past.

Even non-Japanese Americans are supported and encouraged, especially if they are Asian American, or if they respect the community's Japanese American history, and as long as they support the community's efforts to make Little Tokyo an equitable, livable place where stakeholders are treated with dignity and respect. Many interviewees pointed toward several new businesses, such as the hip coffee shop and bakery Cafe Dulce, started by young, often Asian American entrepreneurs who were not necessarily Japanese American, but who fit into the community's culture, participate in community meetings and events, and have contributed positively to its health and cultural landscape.

There is a sense of awareness that to bring in a younger generation of leaders, the community must create space for them, and encourage a "sense of belonging" for them, even if that means the culture of Little Tokyo must evolve. There is also a sense that arts and culture is a great way to explore how to do this and ultimately bring in younger people, with new festivals, events that blend community with hip bars, venues like Tuesday Night Cafe, and other similar undertakings that respect Little Tokyo's heritage while making it more contemporary. As one interviewee explained, "the vision is that in 20 years, Little Tokyo will still be a historic Japanese American community, but not just defined by your last name or looking JA." There is a sense that the culture must evolve, and the community must be open to newcomers — that if the community is "closed off" then it might dissolve and die, that it cannot turn into a "museum" but must remain a "living community."[27] Indeed, even many of the more traditional activities such as Obon festivals are now seen as family friendly events for a diverse array of visitors, including a majority who are not Japanese American or Buddhist, but people can nevertheless appreciate and participate in public dance and celebration together — a fact that repeatedly bemused and surprised interviewees. By ensuring that the community has continuity into younger generations, as well as to a broader audience, it also provides a pathway for small businesses and Little Tokyo's economic life at large to remain healthy and sustainable into the future.

Despite this attention toward the future, there is also a concern for maintaining Little Tokyo's singular role as ground zero for Japanese Americans in Southern California, and for respecting the elders who are aging in place and may feel left behind as the neighborhood changes. LTSC, for example, has undertaken many efforts to create space for these residents, creating a community center where mahjong nights, arts and culture classes, and other events are held so that these elderly neighbors, many of whom primarily speak Japanese, have a place where they can interact with others and be sociable. JACCC also

27 See, for example, Jonathan Crisman and Annette Kim, "Property outlaws in the Southland: The potential and limits of guerrilla urbanism in the cases of arts gentrification in Boyle Heights and street vending decriminalization in Los Angeles," Urban Design International (2019).

has programs with this aim, such as its Ukulele's for Little Tokyo which teaches ukulele lessons and creates opportunities for "jam sessions." One interviewee noted the scientific research that demonstrated how mental and physical health decline faster when one is aging alone, trapped in a single-occupancy unit watching TV, as is too often the case. By creating spaces where these residents can interact with one another, and even where they can teach each other by taking on roles as class and workshop facilitators, these residents can find new life and energy in their interactions with others. Furthermore, arts and culture are what are most often used as the reason for stepping out into the world, be it through classes, events, or participatory performances. As one respondent described these residents, some of whom had long practiced some form of traditional art, while others were picking up things for the first time, "artist is a loaded term — who is to say who is an artist, or what is art?" Interviewees share a big tent interpretation of arts and culture, and appreciate the instrumental value in declaring oneself an artist, especially in cases where it can literally be a life-saving tactic for these individuals, and collectively for the community at large, both in terms of its economy but also its daily rhythms of life.

Art, Culture, and Political Engagement

Another major theme, and perhaps the most important finding from this report, is the role that art and culture has played in empowering Little Tokyo to hold on to its place in the city, through challenging histories from incarceration to urban renewal to gentrification today. Before delving into this theme based on responses from interviews with community leaders, we will first look at the extent to which there is a culture of political engagement in Little Tokyo based on responses to our 333-person survey.

At least half of all respondents have engaged in some kind of political activity over the past year, with 50% making a donation, 49% volunteering, 39% signing a petition, and 37% attending a community meeting. Additionally, 27% raised money for a cause, 23% attended a march or protest, 23% contacted an elected official, and 3% did door-to-door canvassing. These rates are extraordinarily high and are likely reflective of the high degree of organization within the community, especially in regards to the way stakeholders are connected to major organizations like JACCC, giving their time and money to these institutions.[28] These high participation rates are reflective of the fact that Little Tokyo operates as a de facto "spiritual home" for Japanese Americans, a tangible place that has become symbolic in its importance for Japanese American history, and that the neighborhood is densely populated by community and cultural organizations. This unique neighborhood structure engenders a higher degree and greater scope of engagement than a typical residential community which, more often than not, primarily sees engagement with home-life issues such as protecting the value of one's home or school reform.

For example, the numbers demonstrate that there are a series of about three "tiers" of participation and political engagement. The greatest degree of participation might fall into a third-tier category of "community service" or "volunteerism" where respondents are donating money and volunteering for institutions like JACCC, JANM, or LTSC's Terasaki Budokan project, with participation rates around 50%. These volunteers play an important role in making these organizations work, and this work often acts as a stepping stone into more intensive forms of community engagement.

28 Compare these rates with William M. Rohe and Michael A. Stegman, "The Impact of Home Ownership on the Social and Political Involvement of Low-Income People," Urban Affairs Quarterly 30, no. 1 (September 1994): 152–72 who finds that neighborhood participation rates in political organizations ranges from 2.3-6.3%. Other studies, such as Kevin R. Cox, "Housing Tenure and Neighborhood Activism," Urban Affairs Quarterly 18, no. 1 (September 1982): 107–29, have consistently shown that homeowners have a high degree of participation in neighborhood activism, but even this was only a rate of 38%. Furthermore, these studies have generally examined the relationship between residents and their neighborhood, and Little Tokyo provides an alternative example where the connection to place is based on shared culture and identity rather than residence.

The next category might be a second-tier called "community activism." Here, activities are focused on the development of and changes in Little Tokyo as a place, with petitions and community meetings focused on planning issues germane to the neighborhood. Participation rates for this tier are around 38% — and it is likely that most of these participants also engage in community service and volunteerism. As many community leaders described, newcomers to Little Tokyo are welcome, but to really be a part of the community, they ought to give back and engage in these kinds of volunteer service and community activism.

A final first-tier category might be identified as "political activism" with participants engaging in political organizing almost from an expert or professional practice. Participants in this category are highly informed about specific political issues facing Little Tokyo not only from a local level but also from a structural, regional, and national perspective, with issues such as civil rights or federal spending on the military budget seen as intertwined with Little Tokyo's development as a place. This includes people who actively raised money for a cause or campaign, marched and protested on a political issue, contacted public officials, and canvassed door to door — activities which ranged from 3-27% but likely centered on closer to the lower end of 3-10% of people who engaged regularly at this intensity of activity. These participants also likely engaged in community activism and community service, and many are past and present leaders and staff members at a range of community organizations. For example, many of the past leaders of the Redress movement have formed a contemporary organization to engage politically called Nikkei Progressives.

A follow-up question asked which specific issues the respondent was engaging with. The most frequently mentioned issue was "gentrification" with 22% of respondents mentioning it, demonstrating the degree to which this once-technical and academic term has permeated the public consciousness, especially in a place like Little Tokyo that is heavily impacted by urban development pressures. This category also includes less technical or historically used variants of this term, such as community redevelopment or community preservation, or specific anti-gentrification campaigns such as First Street North (FSN). This issue fits within the second tier of community activism and, to a lesser extent, the third tier of volunteerism. Additional issues that fall within these tiers include cultural preservation (12%), youth-related (10%) and elderly-related (6%) issues, and the LA Metro construction (3%).

The second most common category involved respondents just explicitly naming one or another organization in the community such as JANM, JACCC, LTSC, Kizuna, or others, with some 17% of respondents doing so. This might fall into the third tier of engagement, where respondents might be volunteering for an organization without a commitment to a specific underlying political issue. This demonstrates the ongoing importance of arts and culture organizations in Little Tokyo in drawing in new participants in community organizing and activism.

Remaining issues include civil rights (10%) which likely includes many political activists from tier one engagement, and an outlier was the relatively specific issue of mental health within the Little Tokyo community (3%). This issue's presence was likely the product of a laudable campaign initiated by LTSC called "Changing Tides" which focused on the often-taboo issue of mental health, and is demonstrative of the power that a coordinated campaign can have on a specific issue, especially within a small and close-knit

community like Little Tokyo. It also demonstrates the sway that community leaders hold, most of whom would likely fall into the first tier of professional activism, or at least the second tier of community activism, and who can generate a substantial community discussion over issues that might be off the radar simply by organizing a coordinated awareness campaign — a powerful demonstration of the intense networked connectivity of people in Little Tokyo and of the social capital held by its leaders. A politically engaged community who participates and who builds social capital is also one that can continue to support the economic life of the community, such as through highlighting and supporting the local businesses that make up the neighborhood.

Holding On to Place

The survey data shows that stakeholders in Little Tokyo, owing to their shared Japanese American identity forged in the immigrant ethos of Isseis and in the injustice of incarceration, have a strong sense of community and the importance of organizing. This culture is enabled and reinforced by the presence of many arts and culture organizations. Interviews with community leaders affirmed this data. One interviewee told me a joke: "What happens when three Isseis walk into a room? They start a newspaper!" Other interviewees described the community as "uber organized," "super organized" or even "over-organized." Some respondents griped about how many meetings everyone is always having, but their importance was acknowledged: "Who meets more than we do? But it's the only way you can have exchanges." And this culture of organizing was embedded into the community's DNA from its inception when Issei immigrants formed their kenjinkai associations.

This particular culture of organizing was associated by many respondents with Japanese American identity. Cultural tropes that supported an organizing and activist mindset were baked into Japanese American upbringing through a number of sayings. "Kodomo no tame ni" translates to something like "for the sake of the children," and refers to self-sacrifice that ensures a healthy future for a community. "Ganbaru" is a command that means "give it your all" and suggests that community members shouldn't half-commit to things, but should fight for what they believe in. "Issho-kenmei" is another phrase that suggests if something is worth doing, then it is only worth doing with all your strength — and etymologically has its roots in keeping one's land at the risk of one's own life, an apt term for thinking about gentrification.

But this culture cannot only be chalked up to a shared family origin, as many of the interviewees suggested, especially given the fact that many of these respondents are third and even fourth generation Americans. A culture of organizing comes out of a shared identity forged in opposition to threats to that identity, created through arts, culture, and a practice of political engagement, honed over several decades. Interviewees described the ways in which the community in Little Tokyo had to change certain behaviors and speak out about uncomfortable topics, such as the history of incarceration, in order to organize and achieve political aims. This process was aided through actual artistic practice and production, such as in the 2019 performance *Tales of Clamor,* sponsored by JACCC and Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress (NCRR), to engage the specific questions of cultural propensities for staying silent or speaking out.

Many of these cultural factors have also been useful in the community's ability to access city

political and planning processes, as several interviewees described. Historically, Japanese Americans and Asian Americans have managed to take on jobs within the City of Los Angeles or the CRA, and have moved up the ranks to where they can nudge the needle on projects to ensure that the community is being served. Community members have actively joined advisory committees that ensured their voices would be heard throughout planning processes. Leaders of nonprofit organizations and institutions also became savvy to funding mechanisms and exploited programs like the CRA's Percent for Art program to ensure that funding continued to benefit the community. As one interviewee described, "We've gotten smarter, we've gotten better at demanding stuff — you learn as you go along, you get more savvy and aggressive."

Another important factor that has allowed Little Tokyo to hold on to place has been its awareness of the role of property rights. One interviewee joked that the activist art he wants to do is a 50-foot-tall Godzilla statue that will scare away land speculators, and another noted the importance of this "layer underneath" what was visible on the surface. An important strategy has been deploying cultural organizations to recentralize in Little Tokyo and act as land anchors to stabilize the community, a process that largely played out in the 1980s and 90s when land was affordable. A common trend for with immigrant enclaves is that as second, third, and forth generations assimilate, they also move into more spatially diffuse patterns, often draining life out of what was once an important ethnic hub.[29] By intentionally bringing these cultural institutions back into a centralized location, they draw people in across a much larger geography. This ensures the longevity and vitality of Little Tokyo as compared to a community dependent on localized residential and commercial activity alone.

Two recent initiatives also point toward the general awareness of property rights and their importance. The Sustainable Little Tokyo (SLT) coalition, which will be described in much greater detail in a later chapter as a notable and unique case study, began as an effort to exert control over three large publicly owned parcels in the neighborhood. The First Street North parcel, currently a large city-owned parking lot, the LA Metro Regional Connector site which is under construction, and the Mangrove parcel which is currently being used as a construction staging site for LA Metro were all identified as publicly owned and, as such, susceptible to community organizing and public demands. The community sees these three large parcels as ones which are not subject to the same kind of independence as privately held land and, as such, are sites where the community can stake a claim over its future. This land is described as "make or break" for the long-term viability of Little Tokyo. SLT has intentionally deployed arts and culture as a means of organizing the community around these goals, demonstrating yet another development in Little Tokyo's long lineage of arts-based activism.

Another initiative related to land and property rights is an innovative "community investment fund" spearheaded by Bill Watanabe, the community leader who was a founder of LTSC some 40 years ago. The intention behind the fund is to tap into the financial reserves of Japanese Americans who can pool their resources and purchase land in Little Tokyo. The fund would provide a modest return commensurate with investment funds, but moreover it would also provide community benefits guaranteed in its charter. This dual-purpose mission is a novel approach to ensuring community ownership over land and property in a neighborhood, and is one that is likely especially viable given the symbolic and spiritual importance of Little Tokyo

29 See, for example, Mark Ellis and Richard Wright, "Assimilation and Differences between the Settlement Patterns of Individual Immigrants and Immigrant Households," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 102, no. 43 (2005): 15325-5330 or many of the chapters contained within Wei Li, ed., From Urban Enclave to Ethnic Suburb: New Asian Communities in Pacific Rim Countries (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

to the Japanese American community not only in Southern California but the nation at large. The fund is only just beginning, so time will tell if this innovative approach to combating gentrification will be successful.

A final factor in Little Tokyo's ability to hold onto place has been its history and contemporary use of arts-based activism. Art has long been seen as a fundamental part of Little Tokyo that was formative in its identity, and in the community's sense of place and livability. Interviewees listed a litany of arts-related projects that have unfolded in the past, and major funding is being allocated today to anti-gentrification placemaking efforts with LTSC's +LAB program and Sustainable Little Tokyo. This culture of art and its appreciation for community building comes out of a practice which privileges the collective over the individual author. It can be found in the structures of artistic practice for traditional Japanese arts, along with more activist-oriented arts organizations that arose in the 1970s — such as *Gidra* or the Little Tokyo Arts Workshop which worked with LTPRO and the Asian American Voluntary Action Committee, creating protest banners and giving workshops to youth. The traditional arts, for their part, are not explicitly activist, but many respondents described how they became vehicles for voluntary association, for creating classes which passed on knowledge, and ultimately as structures which organized the community in a subtle way — which could then be counted upon when a political need arose.

Later arts organizations, cultural institutions, and even individual artists have played an important role in creating the built environment of Little Tokyo. The community seized upon Percent for Art funding, producing a dizzying array of public art and sculpture at a far greater density than other Los Angeles neighborhoods. Public funding was also secured for JACCC, the Nisei Week Festival, and other cultural institutions in the community, a unique win for such funding which so often flows exclusively to marquee public museums, symphonies, and operas. Michele Bogart, for example, has written on the history of the development of the arts and culture in New York City, identifying its reliance on "civic collaboration" between public agencies and largely upper class socialites who organized to ensure their beloved artists and art institutions received sustained funding.[30] For ethnic and immigrant cultural organizations, even ones as well connected and established as JACCC and Nisei Week, to receive such funds speaks to the degree of organizing and insider savvy that Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo had to successfully navigate.

30 Michele Helene Bogart, Sculpture in Gotham: Art and Urban Renewal in New York City (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

Mottainai and a Sustainable Little Tokyo

To conclude this report, we will reflect on Sustainable Little Tokyo which is, in many ways, the culmination of this community's particular history of arts activism. It is a coalition of community organizations which advocates to ensure a "healthy, equitable, and culturally rich Little Tokyo for generations to come," and it has done so primarily through participatory planning, community organizing, supporting local businesses, and especially arts and culture. SLT began with a community visioning process in 2013 which responded to the imminent development occurring at the three last, large, city-owned parcels of land in the neighborhood: LA Metro's Regional Connector rail station site, the Mangrove block to the east of the station site, and the First Street North block to the north of the station site. The Regional Connector site, acquired through eminent domain, was formerly a historic block of 19th century brick buildings home to local institutions such as the Japanese American diner Atomic Cafe and Troy Cafe, key sites for punk rock talent in past decades. Given this new development, and with memories of past evictions and seizures through eminent domain still relatively fresh, community organizations in Little Tokyo knew they had to mobilize to get ahead of this impending development and stake a claim to the future of the neighborhood.

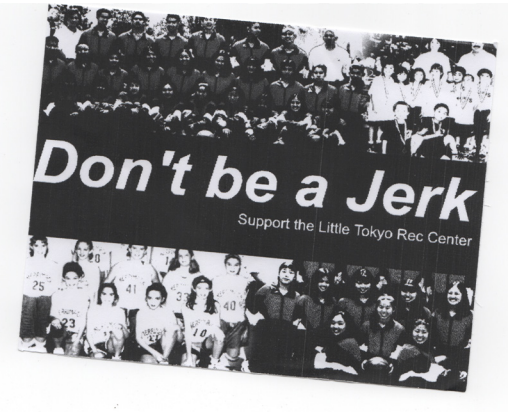
The first project of this coalition predates the official formation of SLT as an organization. Representatives from community organizations including the Little Tokyo Community Council, Little Tokyo Business Association, and Little Tokyo Service Center began meeting in early 2013 shortly after LA Metro's plan for the Regional Connector was announced. In the short term, community representatives gained concessions from LA Metro to compensate businesses impacted by construction, and also ensured that LA Metro would support arts and culture programming during construction as well as install permanent art in the stations upon completion of construction. But moreover, over the course of the year, a task force of some 33 community leaders convened dozens of meetings and workshops, and prepared a range of design and economic analyses with consultants, culminating in a 3-day public charrette which included facilitators, design experts, local businesses and institutions, public officials, and over 200 participants from the community. The grassroots community visioning process released a final report in January of 2014 which laid out a clear set of aspirations and expectations for the future of the three sites. Affordable housing, green construction, human-scaled development, the fostering of local, family-run businesses, a coordinated parking and transit plan, and the protection of the neighborhood's unique Japanese American identity were all key components of the plan. Of particular note was the theme of mottainai, a Japanese exclamation of concern which roughly translates to "what a waste!" This motif recurred in discussions regarding environmental sustainability, with calls for renewable energy and water recycling in the plan, but also the sustainability of the culture and community of Little Tokyo for future generations, including its economic life. Art and culture were used here both as a part of the process of community planning, but also seen as an integral goal for planning outcomes as well.

The importance of the organizing work which was required to see this vision through was identified, and a coalition composed of Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC), Little Tokyo Community Council (LTCC), and Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), established Sustainable Little Tokyo as an official initiative. They hired a full-time staff member who would focus on arts organizing to continue a constellation of projects: spearheading arts-based com-

munity organizing and political campaigns related to the First Street North development, continuing to spread the word about the overall vision and getting community buy-in, and generally building the necessary political capital to see the community vision through.

The first major project undertaken by SLT (with LTSC's +LAB) was Takachizu, a combination of the Japanese words for "treasure" and "map," led by artists Rosten Woo and Maya Santos. The project's goal was to produce a community asset map of local cultural treasures, a common participatory planning project which too often ends up being process without outcomes. Here, however, the project served multiple purposes: to demonstrate the wealth of cultural assets which are densely located in Little Tokyo, to advocate for their protection from outside development or other such threats, and to serve as a means of

Figure 20. Takachizu community asset mapping installation in 2016 developed through SLT and LTSC's +LAB with artists Rosten Woo and Maya Santos (left) and "Don't be a Jerk" guerrilla art campaign from 2002 to support the Budokan development project collected during Takachizu. Courtesy Sustainable Little Tokyo.



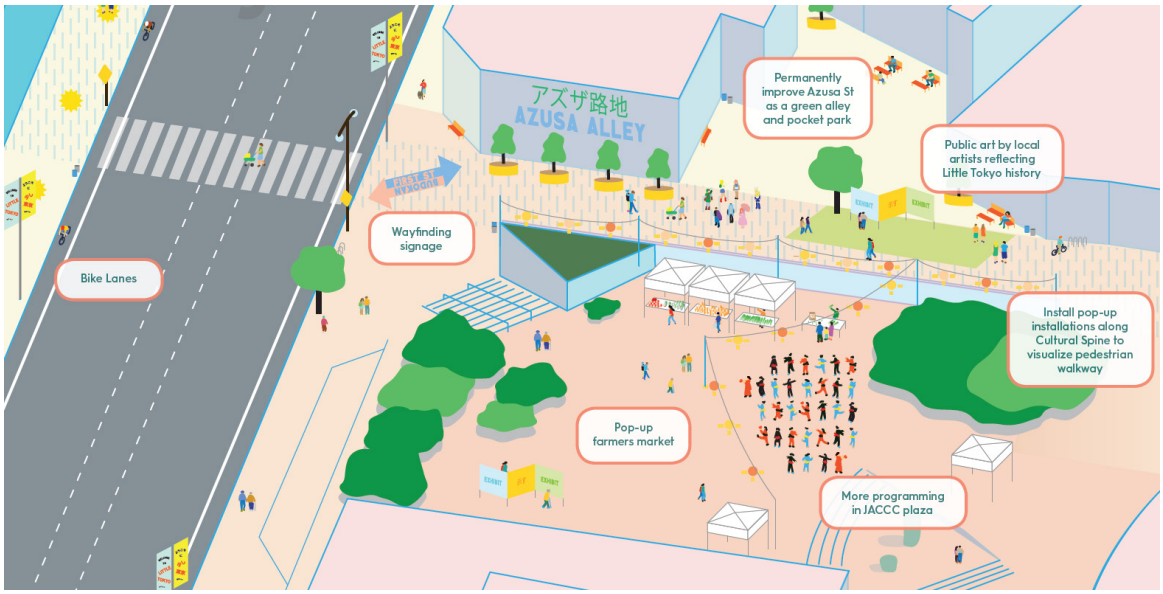
building and activating the community in discussions and reflections on the values of Little Tokyo. It now lives as an online archive to which new materials can be contributed by anyone, and as such has fulfilled yet another purpose: as a repository or archive of objects, images, and narratives about the neighborhood. Some of the items uncovered during the project include past examples of arts activism in Little Tokyo that might have otherwise been lost to time, including a "Don't Be a Jerk" flyer distributed at MOCA Geffen to promote support for the local Budokan community recreation facility development project (fig.20), and a guerrilla art campaign poster after Weller Court was sold to a private developer (fig. 4). Once again, participatory planning process and political activism are intertwined through the use of art and culture.

In addition to Takachizu, SLT has also sponsored a number of other culturally and contextually specific arts activations in Little Tokyo which have raised awareness about issues of gentrification and community sustainability. A ceremony using traditional performance to celebrate three historically important trees in the community was paired with a fundraiser and celebration which used grapefruit juice made from one of the trees in a local business beginning in 2015. Azusa Street, an alley that was Biddy Mason land and the historically important origin point for Pentecostal Christianity, was improved and activated with temporary seating and murals in 2016. The FandangObon festival which was first launched in 2013 by local Japanese American artist Nobuko Miyamoto, blending the dancing and music of the Japanese Buddhist Obon festivals with that of Mexican fandango and West African dance festivals, gained wider support and promotion through SLT and introduced new components regarding the culture of sustainability. A range of food and sustainability related initiative were launched, including a club for bokashi (a particular kind of Okinawan composting practice), an Obon food recovery program, and a produce stand which sells goods from Asian American farmers. And the "Little Tokyo Mini Open" and "Windows of Little Tokyo" exhibitions were held during 2018, which hired artists to develop and install a range of interventions throughout the community which reflected on its history and future, raising awareness about the impending development.

Over a six-month period in 2017, SLT revisited its 2013 community vision with the help of another arts, design, and participatory planning expert Theresa Hwang. According to interview subjects, Hwang had to navigate "pie in the sky" proposals, and instead imagine more near and mid-term scale projects that could be realized in the meantime to keep visible, forward momentum. Thus, this plan was dubbed "SLT 2020" because of the plausibility of realizing many of its goals within a 3-year time span, along with a play on 20/20 vision. Some of the goals included creating a community market, developing a pocket park at an important historical site, improve pedestrian connectivity between key sites, and work towards supporting business incubator sites and locations for new and affordable housing (fig. 21). Many of the envisioned projects include or use arts to achieve "guiding principles" such as building a "strong community fabric" or responding to mottainai. Art and culture here provide a window through which participants can reflect on the community's past and imagine its future in a very politically savvy way.

Another project, initiated in 2017 and realized in 2018, is the "Windows of Little Tokyo" project, where an open call was put out to local artists who were asked to develop large-scale two-dimensional graphics which would be installed in storefront windows throughout Little Tokyo

Figure 21. SLT 2020 rendering showing tactical urban interventions. Image courtesy Sustainable Little Tokyo.



(fig. 22). The initial call asked for artworks which responded to the theme of the "Past, Present, and Future of Little Tokyo," including responses such as historical material on Japanese Americans, poetry and art linking Little Tokyo and its Japanese American history with the experiences of other ethnicities and cultures, and personal experiences of gentrification and displacement. Each of the windows was located either in a key cultural institution or a local family-run business, and the installation, up for six months, included a map which could guide longtime stakeholders and newcomers alike to these institutions and businesses worth supporting — ostensibly to enjoy a work of free public art, but also to engage with the themes and to support these local legacy businesses and organizations.

Most recently, at the end of 2018, SLT sponsored "ART@341FSN," a 2-month long pop-up space in a former gift shop located in the heart of Little Tokyo's historically designated 1st Street. The gift shop storefront is owned by LTSC and loaned out free of charge in 2-month increments to a variety of community organizations, including SLT, who could gain more exposure on the heavily trafficked 1st Street location. Led by an "Arts Action Committee" of artists and community members, the grassroots SLT initiative installed an exhibition of the history of arts activism in Little Tokyo, and over 24 arts-related events such as readings and music nights were held featuring over 50 different artists. According to SLT's records, over 2,100 people attended the events, and over 3,000 signatures were collected to use in a rally to raise awareness about the desire to maintain community control over future Little Tokyo development. These activities and petitions were delivered to the city councilmember who, ultimately, retains

Figure 22. Nancy Uyemura, Butterflies (2018) installed at JACCC as part of SLT's Windows of Little Tokyo exhibition. Image courtesy Sustainable Little Tokyo.

Figure 23. Dan Kwong, LT (2018) installed as part of SLT's Little Tokyo Mini Open exhibition. Image courtesy Sustainable Little Tokyo.

make or break power to determine how the parcels would be developed. On the opening and closing nights of the space, the former proprietor of the now-demolished Atomic Cafe and DJ "Atomic Nancy" Matoba held a revival of the space, drawing in crowds to view the actions and activities of SLT (fig. 24).

While SLT continues to pursue its goals and final plans regarding the development of the three parcels remains up in the air, its arts and culture-based activities have left a political mark in Little Tokyo and Los Angeles at large. Many shops throughout the community have SLT materials posted in their windows, signaling a cohesive political identity shared by the largely locally-owned and operated business community, and the dizzying array of local non-profit organizations ranging from the various religious communities to arts and culture entities have also signed on to support SLT in its goals. Little Tokyo faces a daunting challenge to compete against global developers who may be eyeing the large city-owned parcels on the basis of money alone, yet if it can maintain a unified political front with high community participation — the primary logic behind grassroots political organizing, based on the threat of electoral politics — then the City of Los Angeles and the councilmember responsible for Little Tokyo will be hard pressed to make any development decisions that do not have the approval of and alignment with the community's will.

Of particular note in all of SLT's activities throughout its organic development over time is how wide-reaching its intersectional approach to "sustainability" is. Intersectional approaches are now seen as fundamental in contemporary social movements which are reliant on pulling together disparate identities under a shared cause — critically, by demonstrating the ways in which

Figure 24. The exterior (left) and interior (right) where "Atomic Nancy" spins records at the closing night of awareness-raising and SLT-sponsored ART@341. Photos by author.

the issues themselves intersectionally affect disparate groups in often unseen ways — to build enough political power to achieve shared aims.[31] There are specific activities that emphasize environmental sustainability, such as its Bokashi Club, bike tours, and slogans and cultural practices that promote environmental sustainability. But these are then interwoven with culture, such as the sites that are visited on the bike tours, or the art, culture, and dance of FandangObon which also includes workshops and symposia on sustainability concerns. And, to take it a step further, SLT frames all of its activities and especially its activism and organizing around the future of Little Tokyo as sustainability concerns, but it is attempting to ensure the sustainability of the community, economy, culture, and environment of Little Tokyo for future generations.

Building Social Capital

Based on participant observations at Sustainable Little Tokyo meetings and events, we can see how art and culture are transforming conventional community organizing practices into more enjoyable, sustainable, and convivial spaces where social and political capital can build over time. In some meetings, participants were given a platform to share their artistic work, creating a gracious space where we could work together more effectively as we not only worked on a shared project but also learned about each other's passions and interests. In other meetings, participants were forced to get up and share quickly improvised collaborative performances, a great tactic for helping digest a lot of material very quickly and sharing it with each other, as well as for breaking down barriers of discomfort. Art and culture lower barriers to entry, enticing people that might otherwise feel uncomfortable attending something they do not know too much about.

SLT's meetings and events demonstrate a space created and produced through community arts making and appreciation, yet one that could also quickly pivot to a focus on collective concerns around neighborhood change and gentrification when needed — echoing the concept of the three tiers of participation. SLT creates a space where non-participants might be pulled up into the third tier of participation, volunteering with the organization, or where third and second tier participants in the community might be pushed up to the next level of intensity of engagement.

The types of meetings and events varied along with the types of stakeholders that would be present at these sessions. While these participants were often artists, they nevertheless represented a very diverse group. In addition to diversity on the basis of their chosen field within the arts, participants, while most commonly being Japanese American, were also representative of a wide range of other POC ethnicities, age groups, gender identities, sexual orientations, and so on. There were also a range of connections to Little Tokyo, from longtime residents, to those who had family connections based on their Japanese American heritage, to local employees or staff members at one of Little Tokyo's many cultural institutions, to newcomers who have found a home in Little Tokyo or have started a new business.

This curious mix of, on the one hand, a relatively uniform collection of people who all consider themselves artists yet, on the other hand, a diverse group of people with different identities and attachments to Little Tokyo, created a potent mix of community organizing potential based in Little Tokyo's arts scene. This mix tended to be more diverse with regard to how people were connected to Little Tokyo, as well as age and gender, than many more conventional community meetings in the neighborhood where, often,

31 The term originated with legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw who used critical race theory and feminist critique to demonstrate how different identities intersect in people, and cannot be uncoupled nor ignored. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum 140 (1989): 139–67.

many of the same community leaders show up time and again. Art plays a role in softening the seriousness of a community meeting where younger stakeholders might not feel as though they belong, or stakeholders who are on the fence about attending might be lured in by the added bonus of engaging with some fun and interesting cultural activities. This space of mixing and encounter creates opportunities for the community to build social capital. Participatory planning processes often struggle to get people into the room, let alone get them interacting with each other beyond discussing some urgent planning concern, but here art and culture create a different kind of space of convivial interaction.

Sustainable Little Tokyo has oscillated on its role over its short lifetime: is its purpose to promote arts and culture in Little Tokyo? Or is it to do political organizing? Or something else? Because its purpose was not an explicit one that began and ended with some kind of anti-gentrification campaign, but rather an interest in arts, culture, and Little Tokyo that transcended means and

Figure 25. SLT Arts Action Committee meeting at 341FSN. Artist Jen Hofer presenting how her mobile book bike titled AntenaMóvil can be used for an SLT program, with fellow Arts Action committee member and poet Kenji Liu and SLT manager Scott Oshima. Photo by author.

end, and was more closely aligned with identity and passion, its "public" was more sustainable and robust than even many typical political campaigns. In other words, precisely because SLT was *not* so instrumental, and because it was *not* explicitly framing its purpose around political action but, rather, to pull in a new community together around arts and culture, that it *was* so successful in getting participants to stay connected and engage in politics.

Furthermore, because SLT is not a standalone organization, or even an offshoot from a particular community institution, but instead is a coalition made up of some of the biggest players in Little Tokyo's community development and cultural heritage, JACCC, LTSC, and LTCC, it already has cross-cutting connections built into its DNA. This coalition approach is especially productive in a place like Little Tokyo where there is a saturation in the number of community organizations and non-profit organizations, but better coordination across these numerous groups is hard to come by. Social mixing occurs within the context of shared projects, but also in the informal spaces of learning and exchange that happen before and after meetings, and outside of projects, as community members bump into each other at local restaurants and bars. SLT generates social and political capital by creating these intersection links based on a shared culture of arts-based organizing and activism, and it also supports economic life in Little Tokyo through building up socially engaged community members who interact at local businesses and make new networked connections.

Equipping New Leaders and Expanding Intersectionality

One specific population of stakeholders that has repeatedly surfaced as one of great concern for Little Tokyo and its futures, especially in the eyes of its leaders, is the younger generation of Japanese Americans, Asian Americans, and others who have a connection to Little Tokyo. As Little Tokyo ages, and especially given its status as a place with fewer residents, it becomes increasingly important to build out the next generation of leaders who will carry on the community's identity and development. As one leader stated matter-of-factly, "To survive, we need a younger generation," and to get that younger generation, "they need their own stake, a sense of belonging." Many of these leaders expressed hope and optimism because of initiatives like Sustainable Little Tokyo, and have named SLT specifically as one which can bring in new stakeholders, and especially stakeholders who need more representation, including younger adults and those who are outside of many of the traditional centers of cultural importance in Little Tokyo, such as the religious institutions, JACCC, or JANM. Sustainable Little Tokyo has been a site where newcomers, new residents, and artists can come together and engage with Little Tokyo's rich history of action and organizing. Arts-based organizing, such as the activities of SLT, acts as a cultural pipeline, drawing in new stakeholders and, especially, younger stakeholders who might be left out of conventional recruitment processes for participatory planning. This fact is especially important in Little Tokyo where, as its leaders have described, there is concern about how many of the organizations rely on leadership that is "aging out."

This process has not been entirely painless. As one community leader and activist asked, "Are people aware of SLT and what it's doing or the campaigns?" They went on to note that it "took a while for SLT to be understood, we had to see material results, but it has raised awareness that sustainability means more than just environmental or economic sustainability." Because of SLT's diverse array of activities and engagements, it is hard to pin down — both a source of strength in its ability to draw an intersectional public together, and to have the freedom and flexibility to engage in activities that might not fit into others' typical mission or portfolio of activities, yet also a source of confusion and slow growth because of the lack of a clear identity. Yet the same leader went on to say, "what gives me hope is that we have younger people like those in SLT which has helped, trying things out, bringing people together." Sustainable Little Tokyo's lack of a fixed definition has allowed it to experiment and while it may still take some time to build a recognizable brand or identity, it has nevertheless been successful in two key measures important for community organizing in Little Tokyo: bringing in younger people, and bringing disparate stakeholders together in community.

Other leaders also have reservations. One longtime activist and artist who is actually quite engaged with SLT's activities has described their view of it as "ambivalent." As they said, it's hard not to have "melancholy because I've been there and done that." Little Tokyo has been the site of so many challenges, and while it has managed to hold on to place, that place is a fraction of its former size because many of the battles that it has fought were ultimately lost: large parcels of land were sold off to outsiders, redeveloped and seized through eminent domain, or changed beyond recognition. Though this same leader did not attribute their lack of excitement to SLT and its particular approach necessarily, but more so because of an overall weariness from a battle that never seems to end. As they went on to say, "I hope something works, and it's good to know that young people are getting involved." While one aspect of leadership's focus on bringing in a new generation of leaders is practical and common sense, another aspect may be driven from an acknowledgement that it is hard to do this work, and even harder to keep doing it over a long period of time. Like a war of attrition, Little Tokyo needs new troops to keep up the fight and hold on to its place in the city.

And another community leader noted that while SLT has done great work in bringing in a new set of stakeholders and a different audience than others have been able to do, there still remains more work to be done. As deep and rich the scope is for Little Tokyo's many cultural and community organizations, there continue to be struggles in bringing in certain populations, including the "working class" of employees in restaurants and other service sectors, the large population of elderly residents who live in places like Little Tokyo Towers and who might not speak English well (and, incidentally, who might also be some of the most engaged with traditional Japanese art forms), and new immigrants from Japan and other parts of the world (and who also might have trouble communicating in English), who don't have ties to Little Tokyo's deep history despite exterior appearances.

As we learned from our stakeholder survey, about 30% of respondents have participated in SLT activities, 41% have at least heard of SLT, and 28% have not heard of SLT. This, in conjunction with the fact that it was only named by 4% of respondents as being an important contributor to arts and culture in Little Tokyo, suggests that perhaps it is seen as something apart from an

arts and culture organization because of its fuzzy identity, or perhaps that it has yet to make an "important contribution" because of how new it is. Yet another possibility is simply that it is mostly reaching a particular audience, and these other audiences, such as those listed above, may not be captured in SLT's activities. On the one hand, SLT has very quickly drawn in a large number of participants, but on the other hand, it still has work to do in creating a recognizable identity for itself, and in reaching out to even wider audiences.

Another way of looking at this issue is informed by a regression analysis of the survey data, where there appears to be a positive association between being a regular patron, a volunteer, an employee, or a homeowner and being familiar with or participating in SLT activities. Renters are conspicuously absent, and this is the group which is most commonly associated with the low income or elderly renters in Little Tokyo's precious few residential buildings, including Little Tokyo Towers and LTSC's Casa Heiwa development. Additionally, while it does not meet the threshold for statistical significance, the only negative association is with being a church or temple member, suggesting that this may be a population in Little Tokyo that SLT could do a better job of reaching out to and engaging with — and these are also a site for many of those elderly Japanese American stakeholders who are most deeply engaged in traditional forms of culture. SLT has done a great job of bringing in a class of artists and people plugged into cultural sectors, and especially in bringing in a younger generation of Little Tokyo stakeholders, but its intersectional approach may need to be expanded to capture these additional populations in Little Tokyo who remain absent in many of the community planning processes and local events and activities.

Sustaining Environment, Culture, Economy, and Community

In this section, we have explored the history of Sustainable Little Tokyo's history and its current activities, considered the way in which SLT participants have engaged in Little Tokyo and how they are effectively building social capital, revisited survey and interview responses which explain how SLT is reaching out to a new audience in Little Tokyo, giving hope to leaders who are seeking a new generation of leadership, and considered some of SLT's limitations as it transitions into a new phase of existence. Woven throughout this narrative has been the way in which SLT has deployed art and culture, and developing art and culture, as a means of community organizing and activism, especially against gentrification. This is an important element, especially as it relates to literatures from urban planning on art and gentrification which typically describe a process in which public and commercial arts move into a community, economically revitalizing it — but too much success becomes a curse as cultural and economic gentrification sets into a community that has changed beyond what its residents recognize, even physically displacing them through rising rents and new developments. Yet here we have an alternative narrative wherein arts and culture, long embedded into the community with a particular aesthetics of Japanese American and Asian American activism, is deployed through a grassroots organization to organize and build community power in the interests of slowing and stopping gentrification — thus far with incomplete yet positive results. This narrative upends typical arts and urban planning theories about art and urban change.

What is the mechanism behind this process? How is it that the art and culture in Little Tokyo results in such drastically different processes unfolding? This process appears to be two-fold: The first step is to use arts and culture within a locally appropriate aesthetic regime. Each of the initiatives that SLT has taken on reflect a distinctly Japanese American culture specific to Little Tokyo: to achieve environmental goals, a bokashi composting club was started, using an Okinawan method of composting; to build intersectional alliances, FandangObon pairs Japanese Obon festivals with other cultural forms of public dance; and a bike club is referred to by the Japanese term for bicycle, jitensha. Perhaps most importantly, these cultural endeavors fit within Little Tokyo's history of arts activism, engaging politics and participation rather than the commercial art market so often associated with visual arts.

The second step is to consider the secondary impacts of engaging people in a series of accessible and participatory art and culture events, activities, and making: as explored earlier in this chapter, SLT has managed to build a large mailing list and a considerable amount of social capital for itself and its participants even though this was an almost unintended consequence of its activities. Beyond the local legitimacy of the arts and culture deployed through Sustainable Little Tokyo — that is to say, they are using art forms and are operating in aesthetic regimes that fit within the community's history — there is also the active building of local power to a degree that an intervention in urban development is expected through these large, city-owned parcels of land. Political goals were laid out in the earlier community vision of 2013, but its recent activities focused on arts and culture yet, curiously, achieved some of its political aims almost better than it might had if it were to simply proceed with a conventional political organizing campaign. Art and culture had the effect of building a public.

We will end this report by noting one last story shared by an interviewee who pointed to the quintessential architectural icon of Little Tokyo: the yagura, a traditional tower architectural form in Japan. In this case, the yagura is situated at the entrance to Japanese Village Plaza, a themed outdoor shopping arcade built in the 1970s, and a central commercial space of Little Tokyo. This yagura was modeled after a fire tower, historically a slender, tall, open wooden frame structure where townspeople would take turns at the top looking out for fire, an especially damaging threat for the largely wooden architecture of the time. If the watchperson saw signs of fire, they would ring a bell and the townspeople would form a bucket brigade to collectively put out the fire, a practice that went on 24 hours a day. As this interviewee shared this story with me, they described how the yagura is an especially important symbol for Little Tokyo both historically and in the present moment of gentrification because "we all have to take turns being the sentry." And the community needs to come together when the bell is rung, when a threat arrives that can only be addressed through collective action. As this interviewee and many others noted with urgency, Little Tokyo would only survive if they stuck together, and if newcomers understood this history — exemplified through the symbolism of the yagura — and participated in community. And art and culture practices, such as those being undertaken by Sustainable Little Tokyo, are the primary mechanism for building community and, in times of need, taking action.

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About

Sustainable Little Tokyo (SLT) is a community-driven initiative working to ensure a healthy, equitable, and culturally rich Little Tokyo for generations to come. Led by Little Tokyo Community Council (LTCC), Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), and Japanese Cultural & Community Center (JACCC), Sustainable Little Tokyo began in 2013 as a multi-day community vision effort and has evolved into a holistic, neighborhood-wide campaign to promote the environmental, economic, and cultural sustainability of Little Tokyo.

sustainablelittletokyo.org

Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC) is one of the largest ethnic arts and cultural centers of its kind in the United States. A hub for Japanese and Japanese American arts and culture and a community gathering place for the diverse voices it inspires—JACCC connects traditional and contemporary; community participants and creative professionals; Southern California and the world beyond.

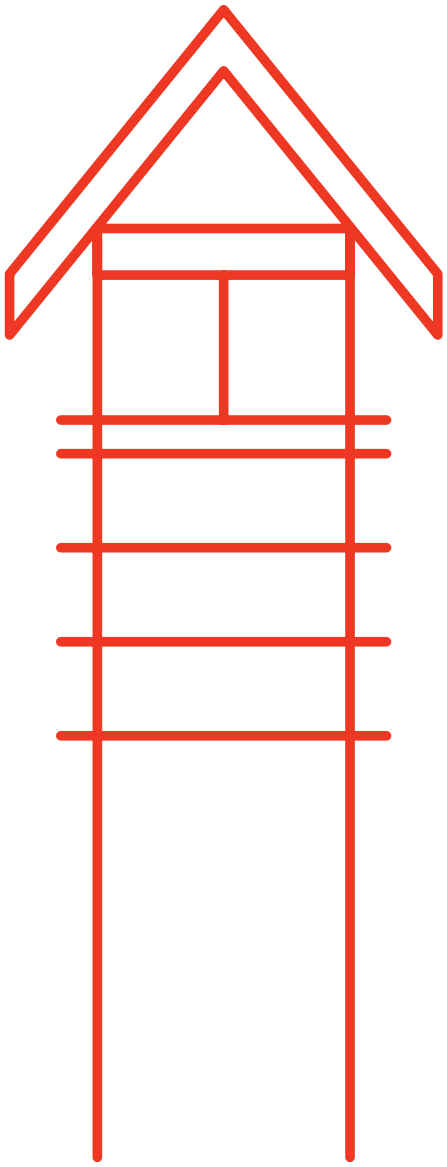
jaccc.org

Little Tokyo Community Council (LTCC) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) with membership representing the business, residential, organizational, and religious stakeholders in Little Tokyo as well as other vested interests. By bringing together a broad range of Little Tokyo stakeholders to speak with one voice, LTCC protects, preserves, and promotes the character and values of our historic community.

littletokyola.org

Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC) is a social service and community development organization committed to improving the lives of individuals and families through culturally sensitive social service care, strengthening neighborhoods through housing and community development, and promoting the rich heritage of our ethnic communities.

ltsc.org



Little Tokyo, a new paradigm of how a unique history of arts-based activism is used to hold onto place and generate economic benefit

日米文化会館 JACCC

Little Tokyo Service Center

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