

## Quantifying a Neighborhood in Transition : — A Spatial Analysis of Japantown, San Francisco —

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**Abstract** Most of the dozens of Japantowns that dotted America's West Coast before World War II disappeared following the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans. Only three Japantowns remain in the continental United States today, including San Francisco's Japantown. A series of sales of major Japanese properties to non-Japanese investors at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century led to a significant reduction in size of those ethnic communities. The neighborhood's transformation, particularly the development of what some people in the community call market-led "gentrification," has resulted in a community narrative that has advocated the need to preserve, revitalize, and increase public participation in the planning of San Francisco's Japantown. Such community's concerns about "gentrification" brought about the *Save Japantown* campaigns, eventually leading to formal zoning and public planning schemes. This article aims to quantify local knowledge of and anecdotes about the neighborhood, and to describe transitions the neighborhood has gone through, by using statistical data and housing and population statistics obtained using Geographic Information System (GIS). Additionally, the Japan-related businesses in the area are discussed, along with a historic overview given of preservation policies. A detailed understanding of the *status quo* of the neighborhood, and its surroundings, will help contribute to a wider discussion on socioeconomic, political, and urban renewal within the greater community. Some useful comparisons to San Francisco's Chinatown will also be made. This article also serves to clarify community concerns of those involved in the preservation and revitalization of Japantown, thereby providing further knowledge for future assessments in policymaking and public planning programs.

**Key words** : neighborhood transition, gentrification, public planning,  
U.S. Census, GIS, Japantown

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Science Reports of Tohoku University, 7th Series (Geography) Vol. 58, Nos. 1/2, 2012, 1-26

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to analyze socioeconomic dynamisms behind an urban neighborhood's change in San Francisco, California, U.S.A., using population, housing, and economic statistics. The focus of the study is derived from the transitions and recent state of ethnic neighborhoods in America's urban areas. Ethnic neighborhoods in the United States are frequently located in inner areas of old cities, and are often formed as a result of socioeconomic segregation of immigrants and refugees (Knox, 1982, pp. 170-173). After the postindustrial urban society of the late 1960s, reconfigurations of urban industries led to low-skilled laborers losing employment opportunities. This resulted in inner city problems throughout many of America's urban centers. Urban blight, a series of riots, and the emergence of the Civil Rights movement generated national debates on issues pertaining to race, ethnicity, and class. Studies on inner city ethnic minorities and concentrations of poverty have been documented in the social sciences and public policy (e.g., Wilson, 1987 ; Dreier *et al.*, 2004). A significant amount of research in geography has detailed the mechanisms that contribute to the rise of inner city problems, the formation of ethnic enclaves, and the impact on their respective residents. However, there has been little focus on former ethnic enclaves that are decaying and facing the need of preservation and revitalization to maintain their ethnic character and economic viability, as observed in such historical ethnic neighborhoods as the more than century old Japantowns throughout California.

San Francisco's Japantown is an ethnic enclave formed by Japanese immigrant pioneers in the early 1900s. As with other ethnic neighborhoods in the U.S., Japantown went through different transitional phases over the years while reflecting the socio-economic and political dynamics at local, regional, and international levels. The traditional Japantowns in the U.S. that remain — such as those in San Francisco and San Jose, as well as *Little Tokyo* in Los Angeles — have gone through a period of initial ethnic clusters playing a defensive role (Knox, 1982, p. 172) to protect them from charter group discriminations. The Japantown community then went through a phase of exclusion and eviction during World War II, when Japanese-Americans were forcibly removed to internment camps (Kawaguchi and Seigel, 2000 ; Graves, D. and Page & Turnbull, Inc., 2009).

The Japantown community went through a period of rebuilding and redevelopment after the war, followed by an influx of postwar Japanese residents (*Shin-Issei*) and Japanese business investors. The redevelopment changed the built environment in these ethnic enclaves, and the postwar redevelopment process led *Sansei*, third-generation Japanese Americans, to mobilize to protect their immigrant community from external capital investors, as described in Lai (2001) and Sugiura (2007).

Since the turn of the century, Japantowns have faced increasing pressures. As waves of “gentrification” occurred, members of the community sensed the need to internally reorganize and transform their neighborhoods. Previous academic studies conducted by geographers in

Japan have examined the sociopolitical dynamisms and actors involved in the transactions of Japantown properties. Sugiura and Oda (2009) examined and interpreted the struggles over place in Japantown, taking the sales of major Japanese-owned property to non-Japanese investors as an example. Based on local newspaper coverage and a field study, it shed light on the conflicting values between economic revitalization and cultural preservation while examining the conflicts between different actors in the urban process.

Oda (2010) discussed a more recent *Save Japantown* campaign that surged in early 2006 in San Francisco when the then largest owner of Japantown properties announced its intention to sell its properties. The campaign resulted in a formal zoning regulatory scheme being introduced (*Japantown Special Use District* legislation, 2006) as well as the implementation of a participatory public planning process (*Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan*, 2007-). In this study, Oda pointed out that this public planning process could be regarded as the formation of institutional grounds of neighborhood *governance*, where more citizens are involved in the decision-making process of a particular neighborhood through a bottom-up approach to politics, policy-making and public-private partnerships.

The 2009 and 2010 studies examining different aspects of the changes in Japantown referred to local fears of continuing neighborhood change and “gentrification” that were expressed in the narratives and anecdotes of the political campaigns that arose in an effort to achieve some institutional frameworks including legal regulations on land use in Japantown. Some of such transitions are visible and are reflected in building structures and in the opening and closing of businesses. Other factors are not perceptible, such as population and the social characteristics of residents, their ethnicity, and income. While the term “gentrification” was not necessarily used in the same way as it is in academic definitions, it is worth assessing and confirming anecdotes about and knowledge of neighborhood changes and transitions from the local community through presenting measurable data using a wide variety of statistics.

With regards to neighborhood planning, an increasing number of programs have been provided to assist public planning through participatory use of GIS (Murayama and Shibasaki, 2009), and interaction between specialists and ordinary people concerned about the community. It is essential for citizens to be provided with more knowledge about their neighborhood so that they can more effectively participate in decision-making about it ; in this way, communities are empowered (Coburn, 2005 ; Hagiwara, 2009). Furthermore, as pointed out by Fujime (2007) in his discussion on an approach to governance, geographers can play an increasing role in helping people in a community grasp the state of that community in a scientific and thus objective manner.

The study in this volume of *Science Reports*, therefore, constitutes an attempt to demonstrate the results of the spatial analysis of neighborhood change and “gentrification,” anchoring its arguments on statistical analysis. This research focuses on the visible, spatial indicators that drive neighborhood change in a transforming ethnic neighborhood. Specifically, this study

aims to discover statistically what led to social movements of preservation and revitalization such as the one in Japantown in 2006.

This study will not only contribute to further dialogue about neighborhood-scale urban transitions in the context of wider socioeconomic and political shifts in urban geography, but will also provide further insights into policymaking, as well as clarifying community concerns through measurable data.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. First, a brief overview of San Francisco and the Bay Area is given in the following section. In Section 3, an examination of a variety of indicators of neighborhood transition is made that includes : 3.1) the spatial socioeconomic characteristics of residents examined ; 3.2) change of Japanese-related business environment ; and 3.3) state of buildings within the neighborhoods and preservation schemes applied. These are all based on statistics with some spatial comparisons to a Chinatown neighborhood in the city. In section 4, a detailed discussion of the academic definitions of “gentrification” is given, and an analysis of the housing and demographic characteristics is provided in Table 2.

This study is based on the decennial census (U.S. Census, 2000) from the Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, statistical and spatial data provided by the San Francisco Planning Department, survey data published by the San Francisco Office of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), and other publicly available data. Data with spatial information were processed with *ArcGIS Desktop Ver. 9.3.1.* at the Institute of Geography, Tohoku University<sup>1</sup>, Sendai, Japan.

## 2. San Francisco and the Bay Area

Located in the northern part of the State of California, San Francisco is a consolidated city-county that was incorporated in 1850. In 1852, it had only 36,154 residents but by 1870 there were 149,473 residents recorded (Biller, 1993 ; Census Bureau, 1870). San Francisco went through at least three distinct periods of development and redevelopment. The first started in the late 1840s, when the “*instant city*” emerged as a result of the influx of migrants triggered by the *1849 California Gold Rush*, and ended with the *1906 Great Earthquake*<sup>1</sup>, which caused tremendous damage that the city then had to recover from. The second period of development occurred with a phase of rebuilding and transformation before and after World War II. During the third stage of development in the 1960s, many high-rise buildings were constructed downtown, making San Francisco a *World City* and window to the Asia Pacific with the establishment of corporate headquarters of organizations such as Chevron and Bank of America (Godfrey, 1997, pp. 315-319). Postwar redevelopment led to the obliteration of neighborhoods designated by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) during the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, the anti-high rise movement came into effect and strict growth-control regulations were implemented in San Francisco. The city adopted a *Downtown Plan* in 1984, and placed further restrictions on downtown development in the following years, includ-

ing *Proposition M* in 1986 (Godfrey, 1997 ; Hartman, 2002). Environmental activists in the San Francisco Bay Area organized these political campaigns.

Labeled the “*Left Coast City*” (DeLeon, 1992), San Francisco is known as a center of American liberal activism that later spread elsewhere. The anti-war, civil rights, free speech, redress for Japanese-American internment, environmentalism, and same-sex marriage movements have strong associations with this city.

The City and County of San Francisco is part of the wider San Francisco Bay Area, consisting of Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Sonoma, Solano, Napa, and Marin Counties (Figure 1). The metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area population totals approximately seven million. The so-called “Silicon Valley” areas in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties have boomed with the growth of information technology industry headquarters such as Apple, Google, Hewlett Packard, and Yahoo !.

To accommodate the highly paid young professionals working in the Silicon Valley, the construction of luxury condominiums increased from the 1990s onward (discussed in 3.3). San



Figure 1 Major counties of the San Francisco Bay Area



Figure 2 Japantown, Chinatown, and redevelopment areas in San Francisco



Photo 1 On-going Mission Bay redevelopment  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in October 2008



Francisco's South of Market (SOMA) and Mission Bay are currently areas where there are many redevelopment projects (Figure 2). The Mission Bay project was accelerated by the initiatives of local authorities that accommodated new development of the University of California San Francisco (UCSF)<sup>2</sup> campus (Hartman, 2002, pp. 189-190). The nation's top medical institutes are located in the Mission Bay now, and this has attracted retail and housing projects as well as a concentration of related medical and biotechnology industries (Photo 1).

### 3. Characteristics of and transitions in Japantown's Neighborhoods

#### 3.1. Residential composition of Japantown and Chinatown

This section presents the results of analyses of San Francisco's East Asian residential populations, with particular emphasis on the city's Japanese, Chinese, and Korean populations. We will discuss Japantown in terms of its residential population, and compare it with the Chinatown community in San Francisco in order to obtain a current picture of ethnic neighborhoods in transition and to present differences in the size and ethnic compositions of neighborhoods.

According to the U.S. Census (2000), San Francisco has a diverse population of 776,773 persons, more than half of whom are non-white. The 2006 American Community Survey estimated that Asians comprise 31% of San Francisco's population. San Francisco has long served as a major host city and port of entry for East Asian immigrants to the U.S. Beginning at around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese and Japanese immigrants mainly resettled in ethnic



Figure 3 Percentage of Japanese residents in San Francisco by census tract 2000

Source : U.S. Census, 2000

enclaves in the city.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of Japanese residents by census tracts in the U.S. Census of 2000. It suggests a relatively higher concentration of Japanese residents in and around the Japantown area. The highest occupancy rate is approximately 11% compared to the rest of San Francisco. However, western residential areas such as the Richmond district (north of Golden Gate Park) and Sunset district (south of the Park) contain 5% or more Japanese (*see* Figure 2 for locations).

San Francisco's Japantown began to grow in 1906, after the great earthquake hit the city. Many Japanese immigrants moved to the Western Addition district and built a vibrant ethnic community throughout the 1920s and 1930s. However, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued *Executive Order 9066* on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1942 which led to the forcible removal of all "enemy aliens" from coastal areas, including Japanese nationals and the Japanese-American populations from Japantown, who were relocated to internment camps across the country. This led to the decline of the Japanese population in San Francisco's Japantown. After the War, some of the residents came back and rebuilt the community, and Japantown flourished during the late 1940s. The federal redevelopment program, however, targeted the Western Addition district for its "slum clearance" project. The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency designated A-1 and A-2 redevelopment project areas in and around Japantown, as shown in Figure 2. This major postwar redevelopment ultimately resulted in the eviction of numerous residents and businesses from Japantown, and led to the construction of a new shopping mall called the Japan Trade Center, which was opened in 1968 by the Kintetsu Enterprise Company of America, a U.S. subsidiary of a major private railway company



Photo 2 Japan Center Mall and Peace Pagoda from Geary Blvd.  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in June 2009





Photo 3 Cherry Blossoms Festival Ground Parade in Japantown  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in April 2009



Photo 4 Chinatown commercial area  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in July 2007



Photo 5 Firecrackers at Chinese New Year Celebration in Chinatown  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in February 2006

headquartered in Osaka, Japan, as a showcase of Japanese high economic growth (Sugiura and Oda, 2009 ; Oda, 2010). The Japan Trade Center, later renamed as Japan Center Mall (Photo 2), and surrounding businesses, including two hotels and a bowling alley, initially flourished, attracting many tourists. The neighborhood economy, however, has declined over the past two decades with the relocation of Japan-related businesses. Nevertheless, the Japan-town Merchants Association and other business and community leaders still work together to hold street festivals (Photo 3) and other events to attract tourists, maintain economic vitality, and preserve the cultural heritage of the Japanese and Japanese-American community.

San Francisco's Chinatown and the Chinese community have gone through a different trajectory of growth and development than Japantown, despite a similar history of immigration. Figure 4 indicates the high concentration of residents of Chinese ethnicity in the Chinatown area located in the northeast part of the city ; some tracts have a more than 90% ethnic Chinese population while, as seen with the Japanese, the Chinese population is widely distributed in the eastern residential districts, with much higher occupancy rates in these tracts than the Japanese. These new Chinatowns have been formed to serve newly arrived, highly educated, and relatively wealthy immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This phenomenon of the creation of a new Chinatown, in addition to the traditional ones, is also found in other cities in the U.S., Canada, and Australia (Yamashita, 2005, p. 158).

The influx of those newcomer ethnic residents who migrate to these existing ethnic neigh-



Figure 4 Percentage of Chinese residents in San Francisco by census tract 2000  
Source : U.S. Census, 2000

borhoods not only affects the neighborhood's social characteristics, but also impacts the neighborhood's economy. In public forums, many Japanese-Americans have pointed out the decrease in Japanese residing in and around Japantown, while issues pertaining to the resettlement of low-income immigrants are often reported from the Chinatown community.

Figure 5 shows the change in the number of foreign-born persons from China, Japan and Korea who obtained legal permanent resident status in the U.S. from 1850-1999<sup>3</sup>. Figure 5 also shows how the changing numbers reflect historical state, national, and international socio-political events such as immigration acts, war-related immigrations, and the relocations of particular ethnic groups.

Figure 6 is a map of the percentage of foreign-born populations in the census tracts of 2000. It shows the high concentration of foreign-born residents in the Chinatown area, with the maximum concentration ranging from 49% to 84%. Japantown has a relatively low concentration of foreign-born residents, but it is still higher than the affluent waterfront areas. Not only does traditional Chinatown serve a wider international community as a tourist destination (Photo 4), but it still plays an active role as an enclave for first generation Chinese immigrant households. Their everyday dwellings can be glimpsed on side streets a few blocks from the tourist and business areas (Photo 5).

Table 1 summarizes the above residential figures of the ethnic groups<sup>4</sup> in comparison to other areas. It also provides figures of ethnic Korean populations that also have a high percentage of residents in the Japantown area due to the growth of Korean businesses. For the

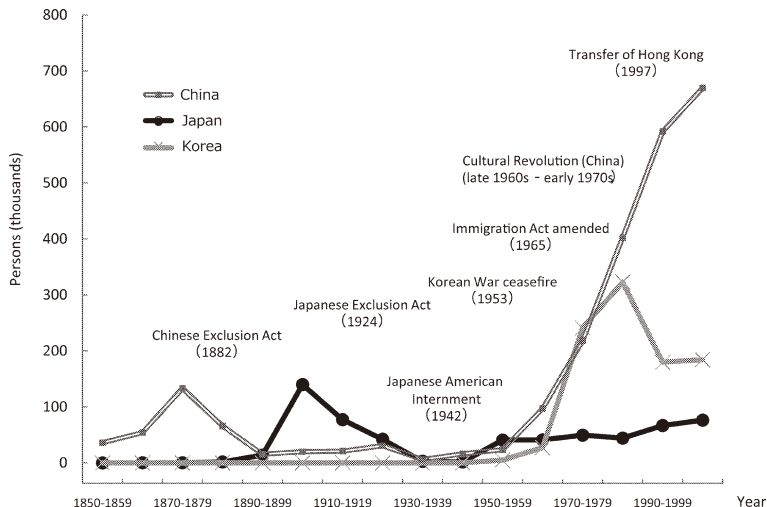


Figure 5 Persons originally from China, Japan and Korea who obtained permanent legal resident status in the U.S., 1820-2008

Source : U.S. Department of Homeland Security

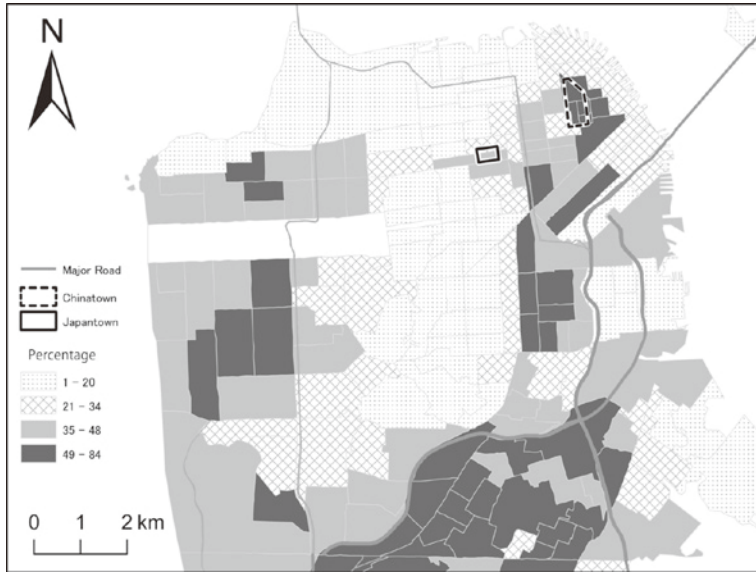


Figure 6 Percentage of foreign-born residents in San Francisco by census tract 2000  
Source : U.S. Census, 2000

Table 1 Occupancies of residents by ethnic groups, 2000

	U.S. Total	California	San Francisco	S.F Ethnic Neighborhood	San Mateo County	Santa Clara County	Bay Area Metropolitan
Chinese	2,734,841 1.0%	1,046,775 3.1%	160,113 20.6%	11,387 83.7%	53,746 7.6%	122,790 7.3%	506,068 7.2%
Japanese	1,148,932 0.4%	394,896 2.3%	14,618 1.9%	806 10.8%	13,003 1.8%	35,124 2.1%	106,427 1.5%
Korean	1,228,427 0.4%	375,571 1.1%	8,706 1.1%	435 5.8%	5,374 0.8%	23,670 1.4%	65,218 0.9%
Total	281,421,906	33,871,648	776,733	see note*	707,161	1,682,585	7,039,362

\*Note : S.F Ethnic Neighborhood for Chinese refers here to Census Tract Nos. 107, 113, 114 and 118 that encompass Chinatown, San Francisco, and for Japanese and Korean, it refers to Census Tract Nos. 152 and 155, which encompass the Japantown area, which is sometimes referred to as Korea Town, San Francisco

Source : U.S. Census, 2000

sake of this analysis, the same census tracts as Japantown's are used for the *Ethnic Neighborhood*, since the presence of Korean residents and businesses is high and some Korean tourist guides call the area *Korea Town*. Although Chinese comprise only 1% of the entire U.S. population, they comprise 20.6% of the population in San Francisco and 83.7% in the Chinatown area. The ethnic Japanese populations comprise 1.9% of San Francisco's total population, and





Photo 6 Korean businesses in Japan Center Mall  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in June 2009

10.8% of the Japantown area residents are Japanese. There are 14,618 Japanese in San Francisco and 35,124 in Santa Clara County (a part of Silicon Valley), representing 2.1% of the total population. There were 435 Koreans living in the Japantown area in 2000; this shows the growing presence of Koreans in the neighborhood and reflects recent ethnic business trends in the community (Photo 6).

There are distinct differences in the sizes and compositions of Japantown and Chinatown. Japantown is much smaller in size, and the ethnic Japanese influx lacked ethnic residential representation. Given this demography, the existence of Japanese businesses in the neighborhood may be a key contributor to maintaining the ethnic character of the neighborhood. We will look at the ethnic business trends in the neighborhood within the context of the region as a whole.

### 3.2. Business trends

The anecdotes and narratives from local people that were included in this study concern the transitions in business trends, particularly where Japanese-affiliated businesses are located in San Francisco. After the redevelopment and arrival of major Japanese corporate offices as a showcase for Japan's high economic growth in San Francisco, Japantown flourished during the 1970s and 80s. The presence of iconic Japanese firms such as Nissan and Sony lured other Japan-related businesses and government offices. Years later, Japantown's economy — its very existence — has come to rely on the existence of such Japanese businesses.

Many Japanese firms and public agencies moved their Japantown offices back to Japan or to other locations in the early 1990s, as reported in community narratives and personal accounts

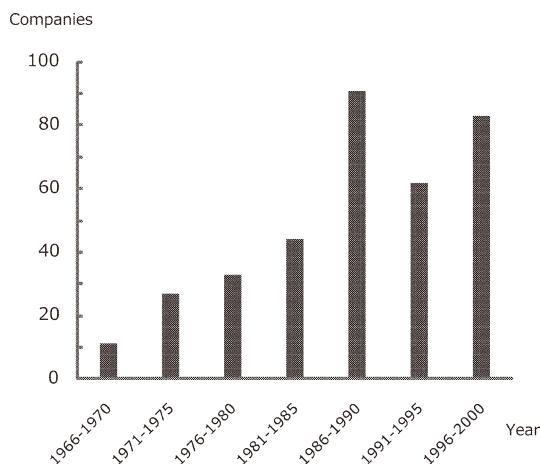


Figure 7 Number of Japanese-affiliated companies established in the Bay Area by year, 1966-2000  
 Note : The statistics includes data for Sacramento County in addition to the nine counties mentioned in 2  
 Source : JETRO San Francisco (1992 ; 1994 ; 1996 ; 1998 ; 2000 ; 2002)

by residents. Statistics on Japanese-related companies, based on surveys conducted by JETRO San Francisco in cooperation with the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California (JCCNC), are presented here. Figure 7 specifically shows the number of Japanese-affiliated companies<sup>5</sup> established in the Bay Area<sup>6</sup> between 1966 and 2000. It can be seen that the number of Japanese-affiliated firms gradually increased. The number doubled between 1986 and 1990, during the period when the U.S.-Japan trade friction of the 1980s reached its height, and Japanese companies moved Japanese manufacturing centers to the U.S. to avoid further friction. Although the growth of Japanese business investments in the Bay Area gradually slowed due to the 1991 collapse of the bubble economy in Japan, the figure shows how there was a return to growth in the 1990s due to the rise of the information technology industry. The locations of Japanese-affiliated firms in five Bay Area counties are presented in Figure 8 (*see also* Figure 1). The graph indicates the largest growth in Silicon Valley counties (such as Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties). In Santa Clara County, the number of Japanese-affiliated businesses doubled within ten years ; in San Mateo County, there was also an increase in Japanese-affiliated firms. However, the number in San Francisco remained steady throughout the decade.

After the 1991 financial crash in Japan, a number of Japanese-related businesses closed and left San Francisco's Japantown. This resulted in the closure of showrooms of major Japanese manufacturers. Government offices also moved out of the neighborhood. The Consulate-General of Japan was relocated to the financial district in 1988, and the JETRO San Francisco Center moved to the downtown area in 1993<sup>7</sup>.

After the postwar redevelopment that evicted a number of Japanese-American residents



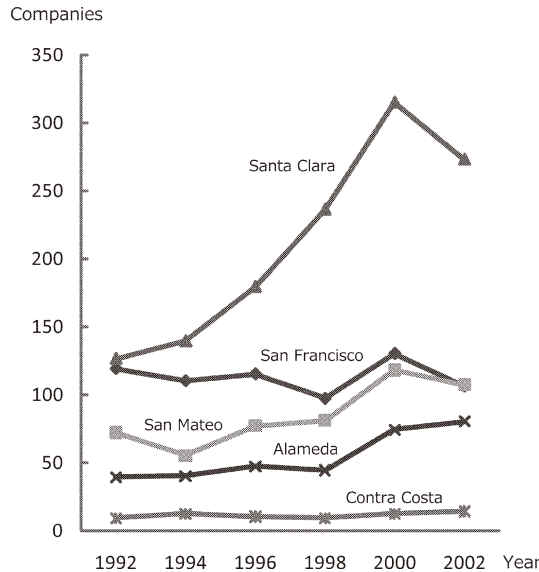


Figure 8 Number of Japanese-affiliated companies in major Bay Area counties, 1992-2002  
Source : JETRO San Francisco (1992 ; 1994 ; 1996 ; 1998 ; 2000 ; 2002)

and businesses, the Japantown community faced the reality that they were reliant on the existence of Japanese corporate businesses and organizations as contributors to the economic sustainability of the central Japantown area. However, due to the fact that the Japanese economy was based on the other side of the Pacific, along with the reconfiguration of Japanese-affiliated organizations in the Bay Area, the economic vitality the neighborhood had shown eventually started to wane. Internal neighborhood economic transitions, influenced by regional and international trends, can be seen in these statistics.

Members of the community experienced furthering “gentrification” and witnessed the transitional process occurring in their community with the closure of businesses and arrival of new, non-Japanese businesses to Japantown. Their concern over the future of the century-old community increased, later spurring them to take action to put preservation and revitalization planning programs in place.

### 3.3. The physically built environment and historic resource designations

Change and the rebuilding of physical building structures are often noticeable as indicators of neighborhood transitions and “gentrification” by residents, business owners, and community organizers. As San Francisco’s economy has been tied to the “tech boom” in nearby Silicon Valley, the developers sought investment opportunities that could accommodate highly paid professionals, including those commuting to high-tech business headquarters. Figure 9 shows the number of new condominium units recorded by the San Francisco Department of Public

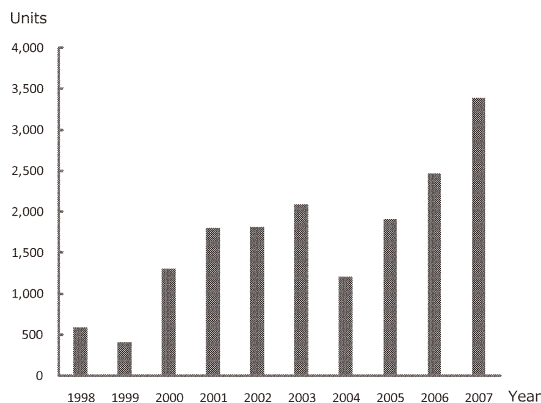


Figure 9 New condominiums recorded by Department of Public Works in San Francisco, 1998-2007  
 Source : San Francisco Planning Department (2008) ; reproduced from Oda (2010)

Works and reveals a significant increase between 1998 and 2007. San Francisco is a good market for investors and developers. The percentages of housing units built between 1990 and 2000 in the census tracts are described in Figure 10, with higher percentages around the Japantown area (*see also* Figure 1).

The state of the physical building environment in Japantown and historic resource designations, based on the spatial data up to 2005 provided by the Planning Department in 2009, will now be examined. The data contains the year that buildings were built and the status of historic resource designations by authorities. Figure 11 shows that the buildings in red were constructed before 1799 ; those in pink between 1800 and 1944 ; those in sky blue between 1945 and 1969 and those in dark blue between 1970 and 2005. In comparison to the buildings in the Japantown neighborhoods, it is clear that most of the buildings in Chinatown are old, while many Japantown buildings (except the ones that are churches and other “historic” buildings that survived redevelopment) were postwar, and encompass the A-1 and A-2 Western Addition redevelopment areas to the south.

While complex rules for building alterations and redevelopment often make it difficult for citizens, scholars, and even planning professionals to understand the overall state of historic preservation schemes, this study presents some of the major historic resource designations for protections on spatial distributions. The distributions of historic landmark sites and districts are shown on the same map. The dots in orange are the historic resource sites designated by Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code, set forth in 1967 by the City and County of San Francisco to protect designated historic resources from inappropriate alterations<sup>8</sup>. The assessment of the historic resource and environmental impact reviews are conducted by the standard set forth under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). According to the CEQA, building structures built more than 50 years ago with architectural or historic significance may be considered a potential historic resource and may require an Environmental Impact Review



Figure 10 Percentage of housing units built between 1990 and 2000 in San Francisco by census tract  
Source : U.S. Census, 2000

(EIR)<sup>9</sup>. Based on such standards, most Article 10 historic sites were built before World War II, as seen on the map (Figure 11). Different rules for what constitutes a place with historic significance are applied by local, state, and federal jurisdictions, and careful application and review processes were conducted to make the designations (Cresswell and Hoskins, 2008<sup>10</sup>). Some areas have been designated by the National and California Register<sup>11</sup> as historic places. These are shown in light green on the same map. It can be seen that many buildings and districts with historic significance designations, in some cases if not all with development restrictions, are located in the south part of Chinatown and in the downtown area in the southeast. Some buildings within the Chinatown area have historic resource status, though not very many in Japantown. Such older properties with more than 50-year historic and architectural significance can be listed as a historic resource and may be protected from “undue” alteration, demolition, and redevelopment.

Because many traditional buildings were demolished postwar, Japantown (Photo 2) lacks the physical architectural “significance” recognized and protected by planning and building regulations.

The community’s fear of market-oriented “gentrification” is due, in part, to the “lack of protection” expressed in public hearings and forums. The community’s concern about change and its expectations that more loss of the area’s character would occur eventually compelled them to work with the Planning Department and Supervisor’s office to adopt a special zoning code to regulate the change of use in properties designated in the Japantown area (*Japantown*

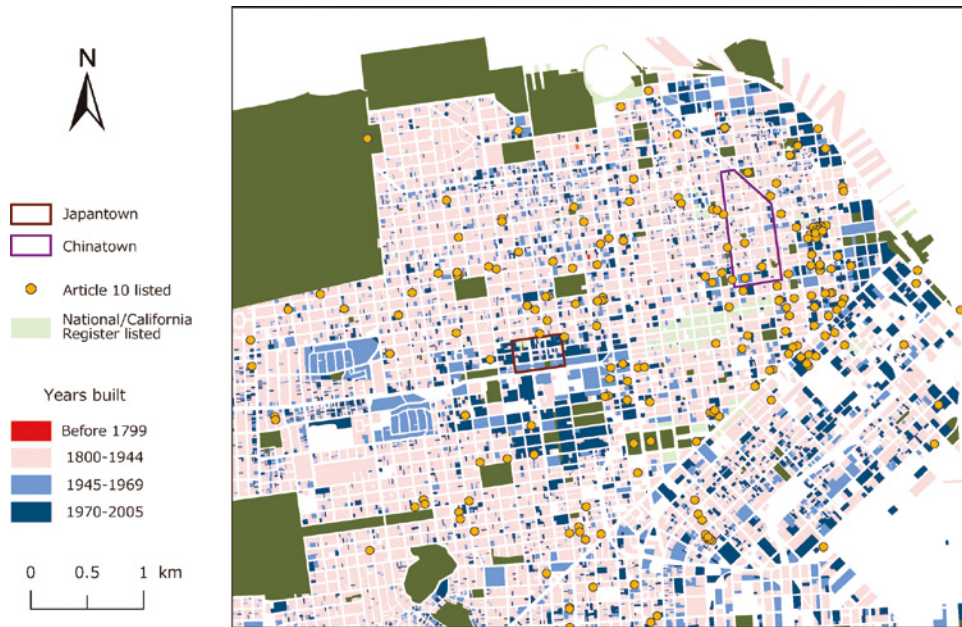


Figure 11 Years in which buildings were built and designated historic sites and properties in San Francisco  
 Source : Data up to 2005 obtained from San Francisco Planning Department in 2009

*Special Use District* legislation adopted on June 27, 2006) and an additional planning forum (*Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan*, 2007-) to discuss ways to preserve and revitalize the Japantown community (Oda, 2010).

#### 4. Gentrification re-examined

Earlier in this study, we attempted to gather, and then confirm, the Japantown community's knowledge, narratives, and anecdotes about neighborhood transitions using a variety of quantitative and spatial data. As mentioned earlier, community organizers and business people often cite the term "gentrification" when referring to (the fear of) change and decline in ethnic neighborhoods and, therefore, in defending the argument that some measures need to be taken to preserve and revitalize what was once an immigrant neighborhood.

The term "gentrification" was coined by Ruth Glass in 1964, and has been mostly used to describe the residential aspect of the process of reinvestment of capital for a more affluent class of people than currently occupies an area. However, the definition of gentrification is itself evolving. Gentrification is essentially about urban reinvestment, a process that includes not only residential rehabilitation and redevelopment, but also now embraces commercial redevelopment and loft conversions. It is often geographers that contribute to the growing amount of

literature on gentrification (Johnston, 2000, pp. 294-295).

In reference to these disciplinary discussions on the changing definition of gentrification, we will examine the changes in the demographic and housing characteristics between 1990 and 2000 using the U.S. Census taken in both years, and again make a comparative analysis among Japantown, its neighbors, and Chinatown.

Table 2 summarizes the statistics on population, education, household income, rent, and units from the 1990 and 2000 census. These are divided by the areas in San Francisco in total, the census tract areas of central Japantown, its neighboring tracts in the north and south, as well as tracts encompassing the Chinatown area. The areas that have or have not been affected by postwar Western Addition redevelopment are described in the column "P.W.R.D."

Among many suggestive characteristics of transitions, the median household rent in the southern neighborhood in Japantown (Tract No. 159) doubled between 1990 and 2000, while the central area of Japantown (No. 152) showed a 36% rise in rent. Newly developed condominiums and high-rise buildings seemed to have increased rent structures in the neighborhood (Photo 7 ; Figure 10).

In the central area of Japantown, a condominium was developed on Webster Street at Post Street (Photo 8). The 1600 Webster housing development replaced a former Japanese bowling alley and was sold to a non-Japanese developer in 2000 after a series of protests against demolition from members of the Japanese American community (Sugiura and Oda, 2009). This can also be considered a new form of gentrification, in which a former commercial building, due to the economic downturn, is replaced with an affluent, residential project.

These new housing projects have brought affluent professionals to the area and the total population of the neighborhood increased during the decade. The number of residents with a higher level of education also increased. According to the 2000 figure in Table 2, in the northern neighboring census tracts (No. 135) and central Japantown (No. 152), approximately half to 60% of the total residents hold Bachelor degrees (or higher). New, highly educated wealthy professionals began moving to the neighborhood during these years. The level of income also increased, especially in the northern Japantown neighboring tracts.

On the other hand, according to the figures for the Chinatown area, the number of newly constructed housing units was smaller (see Figures 10 and 11) with a decline in the total population. In addition, although these figures show an increase in educational attainment and household income in Chinatown, the increases are much smaller than those of Japantown. In the Chinatown tract (No. 107), 79% of the residents are ethnic Chinese, but there was no significant change between 1990 and 2000 in the annual income. In comparison, the annual median household income in the northern neighborhood of Japantown was \$78,215 in 2000. There is thus a huge economic gap between these two ethnic neighborhoods. The transitions in the Japantown neighborhood were identified with these comparisons of spatial statistics that recognize the changes of residential composition.

The Japantown area is sandwiched between a neighborhood with growing, highly educated,

Table 2 Changes in the residential and housing characteristics between 1990 and 2000

Area	Tract No.*	P.W. R.D.**	Total Population		Educational Attainment (Persons with Bachelor's degree or higher)		increase	2000	2000	increase
			1990	2000	1990	2000				
All S.F.	-	-	723,959	776,733	187,835	267,992	6.8%	25.9%	34.5%	29.9%
North	135	×	2,534	2,666	1,350	1,677	5.0%	53.3%	62.9%	19.5%
	155	○	3,527	3,857	1,509	2,128	8.6%	42.8%	55.2%	29.1%
South	155	○	3,505	3,591	830	1,347	2.4%	23.7%	37.5%	38.4%
	159	○	2,348	4,165	742	1,546	43.6%	31.6%	37.1%	52.0%
Chinatown	107	×	5,621	5,634	454	752	0.2%	8.1%	13.3%	39.6%
	113	×	3,361	3,264	341	436	-3.0%	10.1%	13.4%	21.8%
	114	×	3,260	3,175	93	140	-2.7%	2.9%	4.4%	33.6%
	118	×	1,642	1,528	148	181	-7.5%	9.0%	11.8%	18.2%

Area	Tract No.*	P.W. R.D.**	Median Annual Household Income (USD)*		Median monthly rent (USD)		Units built b/w 1990-2000				
			1990	2000	increase	1990	2000	increase	Total Units	Units built	%
All S.F.	-	-	33,414	55,221	39.5%	622	933	33%	345,912	14,061	4.1%
North	135	×	43,309	78,215	44.6%	955	1,058	10%	1,903	14	0.7%
	152	○	31,966	53,906	40.7%	616	961	36%	2,519	220	8.7%
South	155	○	20,975	36,190	42.0%	564	839	33%	2,280	153	6.7%
	159	○	30,474	41,671	26.9%	536	1,069	50%	2,250	673	29.9%
Chinatown	107	×	16,099	16,097	0.0%	324	344	6%	2,976	73	2.5%
	113	×	15,568	23,933	35.0%	320	422	24%	1,629	25	1.5%
	114	×	9,000	15,064	40.3%	233	323	28%	1,658	-	0.0%
	118	×	15,156	18,262	17.0%	281	448	37%	791	6	0.8%

\*Note : The 1990 incomes are from 1989, and the 2000 ones from 1999.

\*\*P.W.R.D.= Postwar Redevelopment

Source : U.S. Census, 2000





Photo 7 High-rise buildings near Japantown (south of Geary Blvd.)  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in June 2009



Photo 8 1600 Webster new housing on Post Street, Japantown  
Photograph by Takashi Oda, in June 2009

higher income populations in the north and neighborhoods with new housing developments in what used to be the postwar redevelopment project areas in the south. Chinatown is also surrounded by areas of redevelopment. However, Japantown has buildings built after the war that have not been designated historic resources and are thus not protected, and because of Japan-

town's proximity to downtown, this makes Japantown an ideal target neighborhood for redevelopment from an investors' perspective. These socioeconomic trends have generated fears among the community about the process they have identified as "gentrification."

## 5. Concluding remarks

This study aimed to grasp and confirm the community's knowledge and feelings about neighborhood transitions in and around Japantown through a variety of measurable data. The GIS and census statistical analysis found that the socio-economic situation of Japantown is quite different from that of Chinatown, where the majority of residents are Chinese immigrants living in buildings built more than 70 years ago. Japantown has already lost a number of pre-war traditional buildings, and the number of immigrants into the U.S. from Japan is very low. The construction of new luxury housing units in and around Japantown appear to have changed the socioeconomic composition and demographics of the neighborhood. It became clear through spatial statistical analyses that the community's understanding of the *status quo* and its sense that the neighborhood is undergoing a transition toward "gentrification" are true. Additionally, the process the community describes as gentrification is in accordance with how gentrification is defined in the field of urban renewal. The feelings that Japantown is changing have been felt by members of Japantown communities over the past decade. The community's fears that the character of Japantown was being eroded were confirmed when a series of sales of Japanese-owned properties to non-Japanese developers occurred, including a bowling alley in 2000 and two hotels and two shopping malls in 2006.

Political campaigns to *Save Japantown* ultimately gained support from local politicians (Photo 9), officials, and the wider San Francisco community. These institutionalized historic preservation and collaborative planning schemes are regarded as an entitlement acquired by the community as a result of the institutional framework for public participation and planning for the neighborhood's future (Oda, 2010). The community has been facing the need to take action.

The community's efforts to define what a community ought to be and how such an ethnic neighborhood should be preserved and revitalized have begun, but the process is a complicated one that requires them to deal with the socially constructed nature of ethnicity, culture, and history. Similar tasks conducted among academics in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences have often been complicated and controversial. To build consensus in real-world planning, it is essential to have at least a clear and shared understanding of the state of the neighborhood in question. Not only do planners have to assess the neighborhood itself at the neighborhood scale, but they also have to consider how wider urban and regional socioeconomic trends affect the neighborhood's transition. The work of geographers, through the use of GIS and spatial statistics, can provide accurate and comprehensive scientific analyses of the neighborhood in question. This can be achieved through interactions among geographers, policy-



Photo 9 Then San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom at a community meeting  
 Photograph by Takashi Oda, in February 21, 2006

makers, and those who participate in public planning and its assessment.

The quantitative analyses in this article have not reflected the impact of the financial crises following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September, 2008. The majority of the census statistics used in this study were from the years 1990 and 2000. The collapse of real estate investments and subprime loans has affected many developments in California and elsewhere. Future research based on the results of the Census 2010 will enable us to compare and analyze Japantown's changing demographics and housing characteristics. In addition, more detailed analyses on the state of growing Korean businesses in Japantown would be helpful in painting a comprehensive picture of "Japantown" as a more diverse, ethnic neighborhood in transition.

#### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the members of the Japantown community for supporting my study. I would especially like to thank the participants of the Japantown Better Neighborhood Planning forum organized by Mr. Robert Hamaguchi, Executive Director, Japantown Taskforce, Inc. Their kind assistance and friendship has sustained my interest in, and passion for, the Japantown community. I would like to thank Mr. Ron Miguel, the president of the San Francisco Planning Commission, and other commissioners, as well as Mr. Matt Weintraub and Ms. Rosemary Dudley of the San Francisco Planning Department, for streamlining my data collection and arranging meetings with planners. I am very grateful to my academic supervisors, Professor Michael Omi at the University of California, Berkeley, Professor Gen Ueda at Tohoku University, and Professor Keichi Kumagai at Ochanomizu University, for their insightful comments and tireless assistance. Many thanks

to the graduate students at the Institute of Geography, Tohoku University, particularly Mr. Tadayoshi Tada, for providing technical assistance.

This research was conducted under the 2008-2009 Fulbright Scholarship Program at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. David Satterwhite and Ms. Mizuho Iwata at the Japan-U.S. Educational Commission (JUSEC), Tokyo and Ms. Kate Leiva at the Institute of International Education (IIE), San Francisco, greatly assisted me with my studies in the U.S. The San Francisco Office of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), directed by Dr. Seishi Takeda, provided continuous assistance as I conducted my field research. The views expressed here, and any errors herein, are my own.

This paper was accepted on February 14, 2011.

### Notes

- 1) The field study was conducted between August 2008 and June 2009, and the data used in this study were collected during the field study and examined thereafter. Some of the analyses reported here were presented and discussed at the Association of American Geographers 2009 annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada.
- 2) It is part of the University of California System, and has graduate schools, a hospital, and research center in the health and medical sciences.
- 3) The number includes those who were from Japan, Republic of Korea, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, Peoples' Republic of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.
- 4) The "ethnic group" figures include both U.S.-born and foreign-born respondents, and do not define and categorize these groups into, for example, Japanese and Japanese-Americans, as this would require additional discussion and operations.
- 5) As identified by JETRO/JCCNC.
- 6) The "Bay Area" in this survey source includes Sacramento County, in addition to the nine counties mentioned in 2, seven of which appear in Figure 1.
- 7) Confirmed by phone with a JETRO Tokyo official, December 2, 2009.
- 8) San Francisco Preservation Bulletin No. 9 published in January 2003 at <http://www.sf-planning.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=5081> (Last visited on January 20, 2011).
- 9) Also referred to in San Francisco Preservation Bulletin No. 16 available at <http://www.sf-planning.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=5339> (Last visited January 20, 2011).
- 10) Refer to Cresswell and Hoskins (2008) for procedures on the federal historic resource designations where the authors discuss the importance of physical materiality in evaluating properties for historic significance.
- 11) Properties with California Historical Resource Status Code "1D" as defined as a contributor to a district or multiple resource property listed in the National Register by the keeper and listed in the California Register were extracted from the database.

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