

The Culture of Chinatown

Chinatown, filled with the aroma of fresh dumplings, is a wonderful place. During the California gold rush of 1849, many Chinese men came to America for money. They all lived together and created the first Chinatown. Today, Chinatowns can be found all around the world, and they are one of many representations of the influence of Asian culture.

One of the earliest examples of a Chinatown was in California. Apparently, a man started a hand-laundry business and many more such businesses popped up around it. Because the Chinese liked living near other Chinese, more Chinese people began to live in the same area. As the community grew larger, people began calling it Chinatown. Unfortunately, the original Chinatown was built on what was later considered valuable land and was bought and demolished to make a train station. Even though Old Chinatown was demolished, the economic opportunity presented by it motivated the construction of a New Chinatown, which remains to this day. Today, there are over 30 Chinatowns spread across 19 countries in Europe, North America, and Asia.^[1]

A distinct feature of Chinatown is the noticeably Asian feel to the area. There are multiple restaurants on the same street next to each other, and there are fancy arches at the ends of the Chinatown to show visitors where the Chinatown begins and ends. The arches often emulate ancient Chinese architectural style, and there are Chinese characters written on the arches. The Chinatowns are a familiar sight to most travelers, so everyone will have a relatively familiar area within a city.

Chinatowns are among some of the most common celebrators of Chinese holidays, such as Lunar New Year and the Moon Festival. These holidays are throwbacks to the Chinese homeland and contribute to the feeling of an Asian cultural identity. Many of the owners of shops in Chinatowns are themselves Chinese-American or direct immigrants from China, so the holidays hold much sentimental value for them. Thus, they often come out and celebrate alongside the street, and will often offer limited-time dishes to celebrate the holiday, such as moon cakes during the Moon Festival or special dumplings during the Lunar New Year celebrations. The festivals often attract a lot of attention and are



one of the primary reasons that Chinatowns are popular tourist destinations, as they feel a lot like being in mainland China.

Living in Maryland has afforded us many opportunities to visit the Chinatown located in Washington DC. Every time we go, it feels as though we just entered a small Chinese town, with the grand arch prominently showing our location and the shops full of red banners. We are able to experience the most prominent features of Chinese culture without having to spend a lot of money on plane tickets. We are also able to celebrate traditional festivals.

Every year the Chinese in Chinatown celebrate their holidays and spread the culture to interested Americans. In San Francisco, they have a Lunar New Year parade every year with various cultural performances. An example is the traditional dragon dance. Not only do the people perform the dance, but they also allow kids to participate in their own dance. This spreads the culture to everyone and creates an unforgettable memory for all.

Chinatowns all over the world have planted a seed in some of the most famous cities in the world. They have left their mark of Asian culture, and allow the world to experience the rich culture of China. Many other Asian cultures have caught on to this trend and have congregated together to form small communities much like Chinatowns. No matter if it is a Chinatown, Koreatown, or Japantown, they all impact their communities in the same way. Everyone's culture matters and these mini-towns are spreading theirs.

Citations:[1]: http://www.chinatownology.com/chinatowns_of_the_world.html

Picture 1: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mbell1975/16600105831>

Picture 2: <https://chineseparade.com/>