

# Spark igniters

A Community Platform to Foster Engagement  
and Revitalize Chinatown, NYC

—Mouhui Sun, April 2023





*I express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout my journey. I am especially thankful to my mother for her encouragement and unwavering support, providing me with the opportunity to embark on this incredible adventure.*

# The Social Designer's Odyssey

## Contents

msun16@sva.edu  
+1 917-783-8122

## Transformation, Empathy, and Unity



Mouhui (Mariah) Sun  
(She/Her)  
Brand Strategist|Packaging and  
Display Designer|Project Manager

Born in a quaint coastal city in northeastern China, my journey as a social designer began in 2020. As a brand and exhibition designer, I found myself yearning to align my values with my actions, with an unwavering commitment to creating a more inclusive, vibrant, and connected world. Through this journey, I uncovered the true essence of a designer's role, transcending aesthetics and commercial value, to actively nurture

As the first child in my family to study abroad, I delved into a world rich in diversity, encountering remarkable individuals and immersing myself in the tapestry of cultures and rights movements. These experiences ignited a fire within me, fueling my determination to create meaningful change. Stepping into my first Environment Ethics class at DSI, my perspective shifted, with a newfound focus on unraveling the intricate dynamics of systems within environments and the profound impact of communities on their residents.

This transformative journey has inspired my thesis work, in which I document my life, growth, and the

pursuit of my passion for social innovation. Driven by the lessons learned, I am now determined to reinvigorate a community, sparking a ripple effect that reverberates across broader society. My ultimate goal is to cultivate an environment grounded in respect, equality, inclusivity, and freedom.

With a heart filled with gratitude for the experiences that have shaped me, I stand at the threshold of a new chapter in my life. Embracing action wholeheartedly, I embark on a further journey, eager to leave an indelible mark on the world through my passion for social design and my unwavering belief in the power of human connection.

# Spark Igniters

## Table of Contents

01 - 05	Dedication(s)
08 - 15	Preface
16 - 27	About
28 - 49	Process
50 - 65	Intro to Problem
66 - 87	Development
88 - 115	Intervention
116 - 119	Credits, Citations and Resource Links
120 - 125	Gratitude

# Preface

## Who am I

My name is Mouhui Sun, a proud native of Dalian, China, and a member of the Han ethnicity. I embarked on my creative journey at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, where I pursued my undergraduate degree in Exhibition Design and Planning. This educational experience served as a foundation for my professional career as a brand and exhibition designer in the bustling city of Shanghai.

Over the past six years, I have had the privilege of working with numerous Fortune 500 companies and consumer goods organizations. My diverse portfolio showcases my expertise in

visual innovation and design. While I am proud of these achievements, I came to realize that my true passion lies in social innovation design - a field where I can harness the power of design to address pressing societal issues.

With a renewed sense of purpose, I now employ systems design, critical thinking, and imagination to explore the potential of community and public services. My goal is to create change, disrupt the status quo, and generate value for society at large. By leveraging my background in visual arts and my passion for social impact, I aim to create innovative solutions for a better world.

I Come From China AM  
MOU  HUI  
SUN

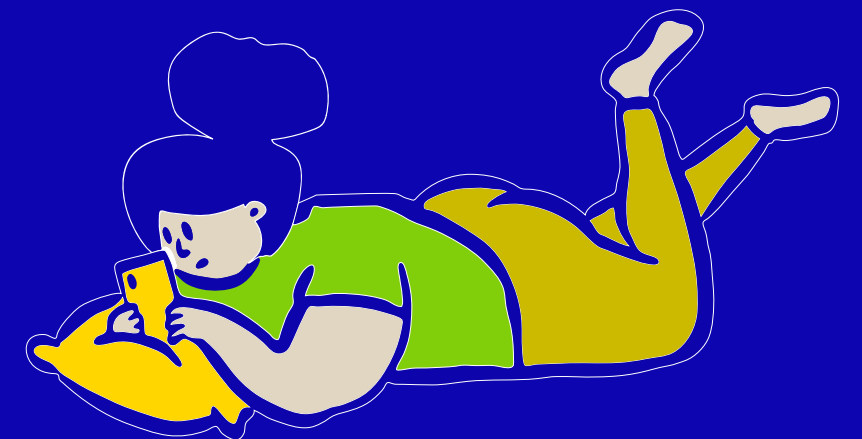




Photo by Chalo Gallardo on Unsplash

# Preface

## Why I am here, why I came to the community

My journey to the community began in 2021 when I arrived in New York City, in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As a non-native English speaker, I faced numerous challenges, from language barriers to adapting to different food habits and modes of transportation. Amidst these obstacles, I discovered Manhattan's Chinatown, a haven just a 15-minute drive from my home that soon became my most frequented space over the next two years.

In Chinatown, I could communicate in Chinese without any barriers and access everything I needed. However, I also witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of the pandemic on this once-thriving community. One week I would be conversing with a shop owner, and the next, their store might be closed indefinitely. The pandemic's adverse effects were all too evident, with businesses collapsing and many closing their doors permanently.

Unable to stand idly by as the historically rich and vibrant Manhattan Chinatown succumbed to the pandemic's challenges, I began to reflect on the factors that once made it so lively and prosperous. I recognized the importance of residents, workers, small industries, community organizations, services, and deeply rooted social networks in shaping the community.

Motivated by my values and passion, I started volunteering in the community, taking on various roles that ranged from food bank worker, community service provider, parade participant, researcher, coordinator, language assistant, to community supporter. Fueled by my desire to make a difference, I focused my thesis on designing for Manhattan's Chinatown community, aiming to promote its revitalization and help it recover from the ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic.

# Preface

## How I began my thesis journey

To kick off my thesis journey, I immersed myself in the history and culture of Manhattan's Chinatown through volunteer activities, which provided me with invaluable opportunities to research the social issues and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community. Over the past year, I have engaged with local community members, volunteers at senior centers, social workers, community-based organizations, event specialists, and immigrant-owned small business owners to gain a profound understanding of their experiences, challenges, and aspirations.

Through these interactions, I identified key issues and opportunities that would shape the focus of my thesis. This immersive, participatory approach enabled me to develop a project deeply rooted in the realities and needs of Manhattan's Chinatown community, ensuring its relevancy and impact.

“We take Chinatown for granted, thinking it will always be here but the pandemic showed us how fragile Chinatown is.”

—Grace Young

(award-winning cookbook author, culinary historian, and Chinatown activist)



# Glossary Bank

## ***New York Mandarin Playback (NYMP):***

A theater group that uses Playback Theatre, an improvisational form of theater, to foster individual growth and create a non-judgmental environment. Their unique approach to performing arts, which focuses on spontaneity and accessibility, makes them an ideal partner for engaging seniors and community members who may face barriers to traditional theater participation.

## ***AAAAH!Culture :***

A New York-based organization comprised of Asian artists and youth promoting diverse art and cultural experiences. Their inclusive and visually-oriented approach to art and design minimizes language and literacy barriers, making their events and workshops accessible to a broader range of community members.

## ***Open Door Senior Center:***

A community center that caters to seniors' needs in social services, nutrition, education, and recreation. Their established presence within the Chinatown community and deep understanding of the seniors' needs make them valuable partners in co-creating events and activities that resonate with the older population.

## ***Imperial Ballroom Dance Studio:***

A dance studio specializing in traditional and Latin ballroom dancing for all ages and skill levels. Their focus on providing a welcoming and supportive environment for learning dance makes them an ideal collaborator for events that promote physical and emotional well-being within the community.

## ***Welcome to Chinatown:***

A non-profit organization dedicated to supporting local businesses and addressing the critical needs of the Chinatown community. Their existing connections with local businesses and commitment to fostering economic growth make them crucial partners in promoting small business development.

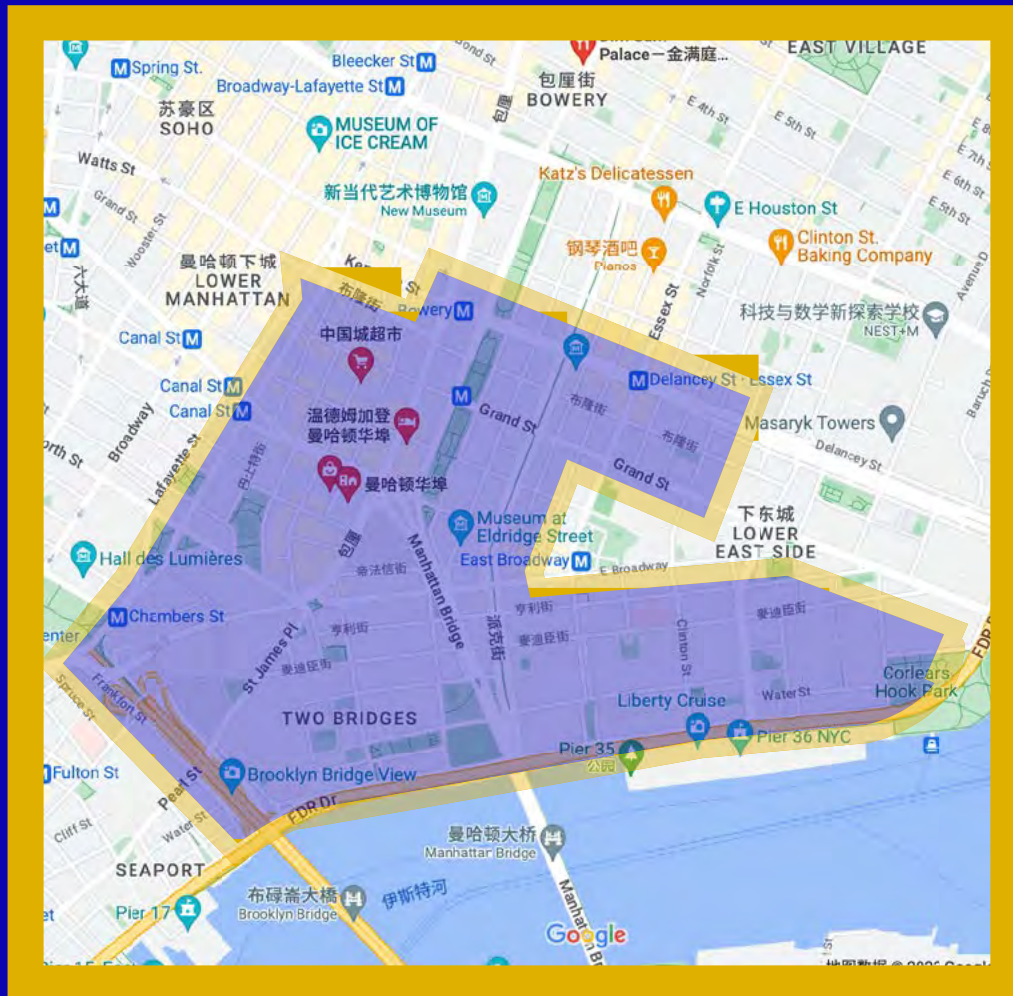
## ***Chinatown Business Improvement District (BID):***

A non-profit organization dedicated to Manhattan's Chinatown's economic and cultural development. They support local businesses, enhance streetscapes, and organize cultural events. Their established presence makes them an ideal partner for co-creating community initiatives.



A B O U T I

# Broader Context and History



Google Map screenshot of the Chinatown area in Manhattan, New York City. Source: Google Maps, accessed on [4.23, 2023].



Photo by Robin P on Unsplash

## Chinatown Context Introduction:

Chinatown, located in downtown Manhattan, is a vibrant neighborhood bordered by the Lower East Side, Little Italy, the Civic Center, and Tribeca [1]. It is one of the largest Chinese immigrant communities in the Western Hemisphere and one of the oldest in the United States [2]. The history of Manhattan's Chinatown can be traced

back to its early days as a refuge for Chinese immigrants seeking shelter from anti-Chinese violence. Today, this community has become a thriving global hub, where you can savor authentic Chinese cuisine, shop for affordable goods and treasures, visit historical and cultural landmarks, and experience the rich Asian cultural atmosphere.

# Chinatown Community:

67,000 Residents (55% AAPI)

38,000 Workers

Up to 4,000 Businesses

*Photo by Clay Banks on Unsplash*

*Sources:  
American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 & 2020 5-Year estimates,  
Longitudinal Employer-Household  
Dynamics (LEHD) OnTheMap, Reference Solutions*

## Historical Overview:

The first Chinese immigrants arrived in New York City in the late 1850s, and by the 1870s, the population had grown to over 2,000[2]. However, this growth was met with hostility from the white working class, who feared job competition. A violent anti-Chinese movement led to the expulsion of many Chinese immigrants from the West Coast. Faced with external discrimination and hostility, Chinese immigrants congregated along several core streets in lower Manhattan - Mott St., Pell St., and Doyers St. - which eventually expanded into Chinatown[2]. The working tensions between the new Chinese immigrants and the local residents eventually led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the wives and children of male Chinese laborers from entering the United States and led to a gender imbalance in the community. Until 1965, the majority of Chinatown's population was male[2].

The Chinese community in Manhattan's Chinatown built their enclave and contributed to the local economy through various businesses, including laundries, restaurants, and small shops[5]. These businesses served

both the local Chinese population and non-Chinese customers, helping to establish a thriving community despite the challenges posed by the Chinese Exclusion Act[5].

In 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act was officially repealed as the United States and China were allies during World War II, but quotas were established, limiting Chinese immigration to 105 persons per year[3].

The Hart-Celler Act of 1968 abolished racial quotas, leading to a surge of Chinese immigrants from mainland China. This influx ultimately diversified the community and created a "Little Hong Kong" with Cantonese as the primary language[4]. Many of these new immigrants established businesses in the neighborhood, contributing to the growth and development of Chinatown's economy[6].

During the 1980s and 1990s, Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese immigrants, as well as many other non-Cantonese Chinese immigrants, also began to arrive in New York City, contributing to the evolving cultural landscape of Manhattan's Chinatown[4].

## Current State:

Today, Manhattan's Chinatown remains the largest Chinese enclave in the Western Hemisphere and a thriving global hub. It is a popular tourist destination and a cultural landmark,

offering a diverse array of food, art, and entertainment. Its rich history and evolution[1] continue to shape the neighborhood and its people.

# Disproportionate Impacts of Disasters on Chinatown's Small Businesses



Photographer By Mouhui Sun

## Introduction:

Chinatown, located in Lower Manhattan, is a hub for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) small businesses. However, during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinatown's small businesses have suffered

significant losses. This section aims to examine the disproportionate impacts of disasters on Chinatown's small businesses, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Who is affected?

Chinatown has suffered more significant losses during economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic than the rest of New York City. From 2019 to 2021, Chinatown lost 26% of job opportunities, compared to the city's 14% [5]. AAPI small businesses

have been severely impacted by the pandemic-related shutdowns, and existing aid systems have failed to address the community's needs. Anti-Asian bias has also had a disproportionate impact on AAPI small businesses [6].

## Lack of Aid During COVID-19:

Systemic issues have hindered access to aid for small businesses during the pandemic, particularly for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)

businesses. Federal, state, and local governments introduced aid programs to help small businesses cope with the income losses from pandemic-related

shutdowns. However, more than half (53%) of AAPI small business owners encountered difficulties when applying for the help they desperately needed[7]. As a result, AAPI-owned small businesses applied for financial assistance in smaller numbers compared to general small businesses[7].

Even when AAPI small business owners managed to apply for aid, a significant proportion (13%) had their applications rejected, including those who suffered considerable losses[7]. Notably, even

among those who reported income losses of 75%, one-sixth (14%) had their applications rejected[7]. Limited English proficiency (LEP) among immigrant small business owners and lack of technical knowledge often restricted their access to computers or the internet. Providing translated information about programs is crucial for reaching affected communities[7]. LEP immigrant small business owners were left to fend for themselves at the onset of economic shutdowns, lacking access to relevant information or guidance[7].

## *Impacts of COVID-19:*

Chinatown is facing its biggest crisis since the destruction of Lower Manhattan on 9/11. By mid-February 2020, business revenues in Chinatown had declined from 30% to 80% due to the pandemic[8]. Concerns about anti-Asian sentiment have also increased due to the pandemic[8]. Business closures in Chinatown have led to job losses, with Pew Research Center reporting that AAPI unemployment rates may have reached 20.3% in May 2020, compared to 2.5% in February[8]. This is the most significant increase among all racial groups[8]. The China

Planning Committee announced in May that unemployment claims by AAPIs had increased by 6,900%[8], in stark contrast to the experience of AAPIs during the Great Depression when their unemployment rate did not increase as much as other groups<sup>4</sup>. Bloomberg Business Week reported in June that only 46% of Chinatown restaurants had reopened, compared to 63% citywide[8]. The lack of tourists and white-collar workers in Lower Manhattan had been a significant reason for the widespread difficulties faced by businesses in the area[8].



# PROCESS

# Jump-starts

As a social designer, my journey of research into Manhattan's Chinatown began with a passion for indulging in the delicious food and drink on offer. I was captivated by the unique blend of traditional and modern flavors, distinct from anything I had experienced in China.

But my fascination didn't stop there - I was drawn to the old-style grocery stores and specialty food shops that were so rare to find in China. It was a fusion of styles, not limited to any particular region or time period.

I soon found myself living in the heart of this vibrant community, eager to learn and explore more. As I delved deeper, I became a volunteer for various community organizations, allowing me to connect with locals and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics at play in this diverse and bustling neighborhood. From the bustling streets to the hidden alleys, my journey through Manhattan's Chinatown has been a rich and rewarding experience, inspiring me

about their challenges and needs. I delivered over 60 packages twice a month, working alongside eight

dedicated volunteers who continuously served this community. This experience allowed me to immerse myself in

## Volunteer experience (learning):

### *Hamilton-Madison House:*

During my volunteer experience at Hamilton-Madison House[16], a non-profit settlement house established in 1898 and located in Manhattan's Chinatown/Lower East Side Two Bridges community, I had the opportunity to deliver essential supplies to Asian elderly residents[17].

These seniors eagerly awaited our arrival, appreciative of the support they received. Through this process, I gained a firsthand understanding of the community's support system, engaging in in-depth conversations with community workers and residents

Photographer  
By Mouhui Sun





# Throughout the project

---

Interviews Small  
Business Owner

---

OVER

6+  
Person

---

Expert Interviews

---

8  
Person

---

Interviews  
Social Worker

---

7  
Person

---

---

Community  
Observation

---

OVER

50h

---

Volunteering

---

15+

---

Literature  
Review

---

10+

---

## Think! Chinatown:

I also participated in community volunteer training and contributed to various events at Think! Chinatown[17], a non-profit intergenerational organization located in Manhattan's Chinatown that aims to listen, respond, and build the capacity of Chinatown as a strong and vibrant immigrant community[18]. I began my involvement with the Chinatown Night Market at Forsyth Plaza[18]. The Night Market serves as a space for the community to gather, celebrate, and seek safe spaces in public areas while supporting local vendors and attracting more foot traffic to Chinatown[18]. As a community researcher, I engaged with event attendees through random

interviews, utilizing a questionnaire<sup>7</sup> to identify critical factors that drive community engagement and spending and uncover potential areas for improvement in future events.

In addition to the Night Market, I participated in more Think! Chinatown community events, such as storytelling sessions and Chinese New Year celebrations[18]. Through these events, I connected with locals, learned about their needs and challenges, and gained insights into the community's social fabric. As a coordinator in various activities, I engaged with community residents, social workers,





Following my experience at the Chinatown Night Market, I had the opportunity to participate in other Think! Chinatown events, such as storytelling sessions and Chinese New Year celebrations[19]. These events allowed me to engage more deeply with local residents and understand their needs and desires for the community. I recall an intriguing conversation with two elderly women who shared their affection for Chinatown. Despite helping their daughter care for her children in New Jersey during the week, they cherished their weekends spent in Manhattan's Chinatown, feeling truly at home. Although they expressed concerns about safety and vitality following the pandemic, they maintained an optimistic outlook for the future.

My efforts were recognized by Think! Chinatown, who sent me a heartfelt thank-you email, praising my performance and inviting me to contribute to even more community events. This greatly encouraged me to further my dedication and commitment to supporting the vibrant immigrant community in Chinatown.

To recap, my involvement with Think! Chinatown has allowed me to better understand the community's dynamics and needs, while deepening my connections with local residents. Through various activities, I've collaborated with a diverse array of individuals, including social workers, volunteers, and artists, enriching my perspective on Chinatown as a strong and vibrant community.



# Community Study

## *Mott Street Girls x Welcome to Chinatown*

Walking Tour[20], I had the opportunity to learn more about the community's history and residents. Mott Street Girls, founded by Anna Huang and Chloe Chan during the pandemic, offers walking tours of New York City's Chinatown to help educate people about the history and culture of Chinese Americans while supporting the community they love[20]. This event allowed me to connect with locals on a deeper level and gain a better understanding of the community's social fabric. My experiences at Hamilton-Madison House, Think! Chinatown, and the Mott Street Girls Walking Tour have significantly

deepened my understanding of the community and its events, allowing me to better address the needs and challenges faced by Chinatown's residents and businesses[21]. By actively listening and learning from those directly involved, I am better equipped to develop and implement effective strategies for fostering a sense of belonging, social support, and interest in local businesses, ultimately contributing to a vibrant recovery for Chinatown.

# Process Outline

## Ideology and Guiding Values:

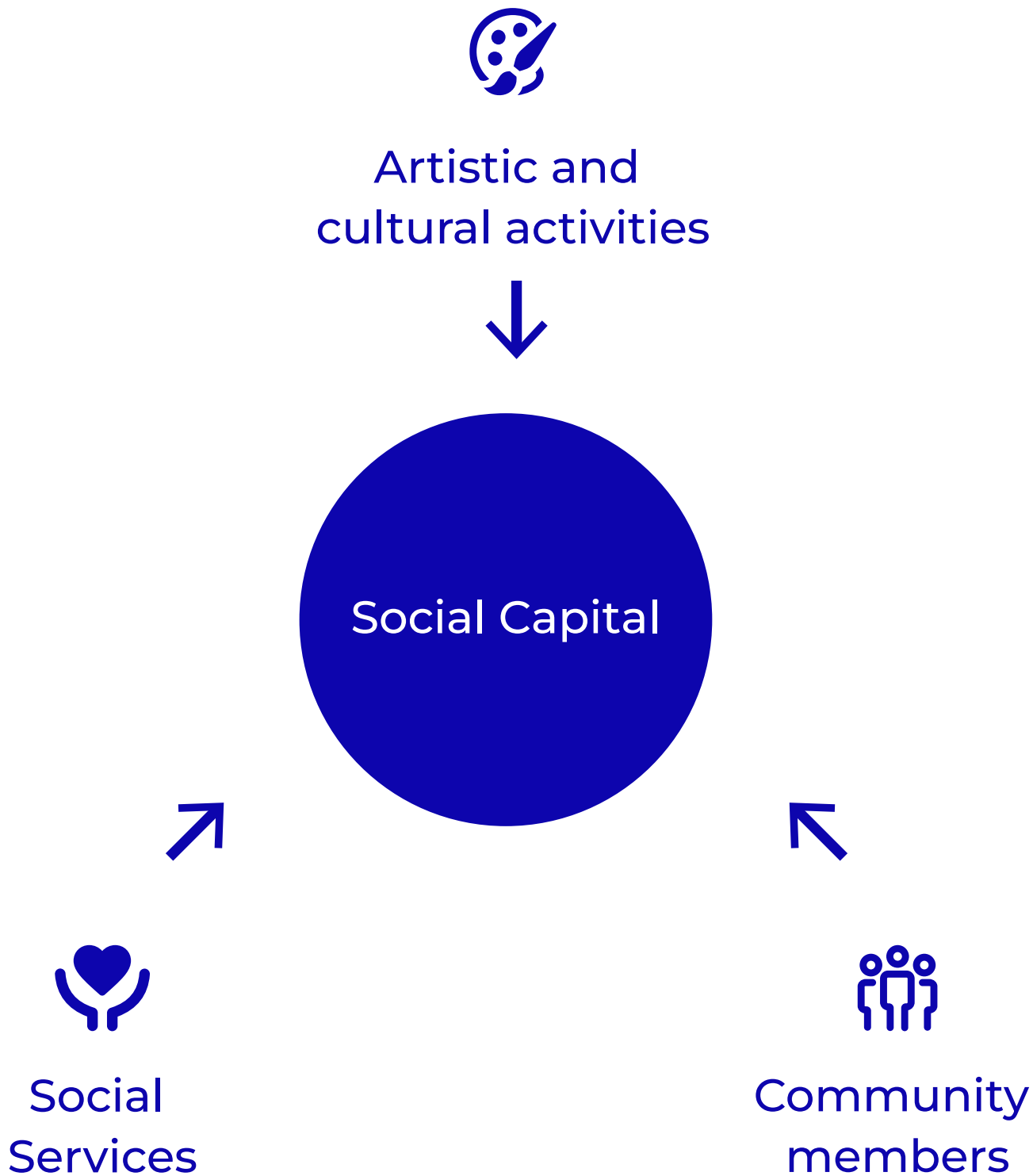
### *The Social Capital Theory*

The Social Capital Theory is an influential concept that emphasizes the significance of relationships, trust, and cooperation between individuals and groups in fostering community cohesion[22]. This theory posits that strong social networks and a sense of shared values can enhance a community's capacity to collaborate and tackle common challenges, ultimately contributing to sustainable development[23].

In the context of my thesis paper, the Social Capital Theory provides a valuable framework for designing interventions aimed at strengthening Manhattan's Chinatown. By focusing on initiatives that promote social connections and trust among community members, we can contribute to the recovery and revitalization of this unique cultural

hub. This approach is rooted in the principles of the Social Capital Theory, which advocates for the cultivation of robust networks and relationships to facilitate collective action and support sustainable community development.

Informed by my personal experiences in Chinatown, as well as insights gained through interviews and event participation, I will apply the Social Capital Theory to develop strategies that foster a sense of belonging, mutual support, and shared purpose among residents and businesses. By leveraging the power of art and cultural events, we can create opportunities for community members to connect, collaborate, and build trust, ultimately enhancing the cohesion and resilience of Manhattan's Chinatown as a whole.



# Connecting with Partners



## Chinatown Business Improvement District (BID):

Chinatown BID, also known as the Chinatown Business Improvement District, is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the economic and cultural vitality of Manhattan's Chinatown[24]. Established in 1994, the BID has been working to enhance the quality of life and business in the community[24]. Chinatown BID focuses on four key areas: sanitation, public safety, marketing, and advocacy[24]. They work to keep the streets clean, provide a safe environment for locals and visitors, promote local businesses, and advocate for policies that benefit the community.

The BID also provides a range of services to local businesses, including marketing and promotional support, assistance with regulatory compliance, and technical assistance. They host events and activities throughout the year to promote tourism and celebrate the

cultural heritage of Chinatown. As the core partner for my intervention, I collaborated with the Chinatown BID in my capacity as the founder of AAAAH! and served as the Assistant Project Manager, assisting Chinatown BID's Office Manager and Business and Community Liaison, Derong, in executing community events. This partnership allowed me to leverage the BID's established presence and expertise in the community to effectively implement my proposed initiatives aimed at enhancing social capital and cohesion. In summary, Chinatown BID is a non-profit organization that not only enhances the economic and cultural vitality of Manhattan's Chinatown but also serves as a crucial partner in my intervention, providing essential services to local businesses, promoting the area to visitors, and advocating for policies that benefit the community.

# Community Engagement and Research

During my community engagement, I had the opportunity to conduct interviews and research within the community, connecting with experts, residents, business owners, and volunteers in Manhattan's Chinatown.

These conversations provided valuable insights into the needs and concerns of the community, which helped shape our understanding of the issues to be addressed:

*1.Safety: Residents expressed concerns about crime prevention and surveillance, highlighting the need for a safer environment within the community.*

*2.Culture: The community values cultural preservation and diversity, emphasizing the importance of promoting and celebrating Chinatown's rich cultural heritage.*

*3.Business: Supporting small businesses' survival is essential to maintaining the economic vitality of the community.*

*4.Activities: There is a high demand for community events and programs that foster social connections and enhance community cohesion.*

*5.Communication: Enhancing intergenerational dialogue is crucial for fostering understanding and unity within the community.*

*6.Entertainment: Providing diverse leisure options can cater to the varying interests of community members and encourage more active participation.*

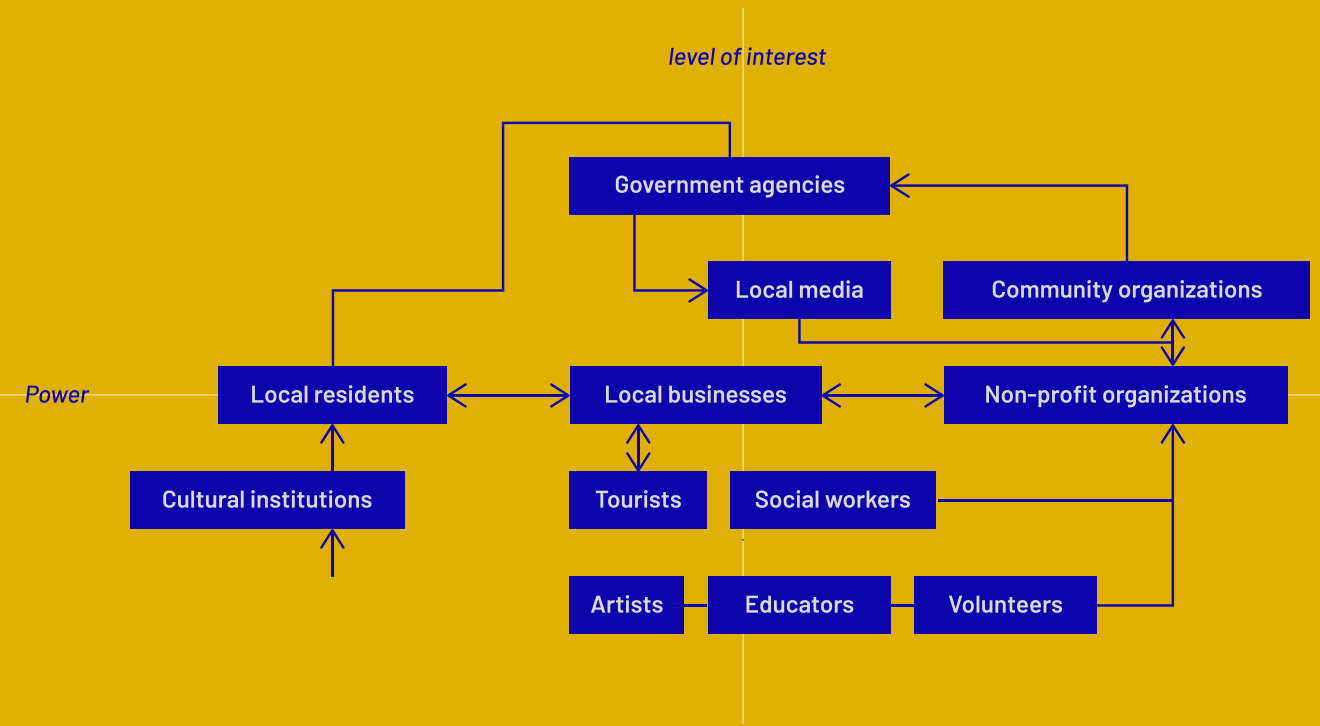
With these insights, it became clear that the community would benefit from more opportunities for connection and collaboration. This understanding informed our approach and guided us in identifying potential solutions to address the concerns raised by the residents. By focusing on initiatives that enhance safety, culture, business, activities, communication, and entertainment, we can create an environment that fosters a sense of belonging and supports the vibrant recovery of Manhattan's Chinatown.

Our research and community engagement have allowed us to better align our goals with the community's needs and expectations, ensuring a more effective and sustainable outcome. In the next section, we will discuss the specific issues we have identified and explore possible interventions to address these concerns and strengthen connections within the community.





# Stakeholder Map



I was deeply moved by the warmth and support from community stakeholders in Manhattan's Chinatown. My Chinese heritage seemed to



# INTTRO TO PROBILHEM

# Target Audience

*The target audiences for this research are immigrant small businesses, particularly those owned by Chinese immigrants, and residents of Chinatown. The analysis and recommendations presented in this paper are based on a mix of secondary research, literature reviews, and interviews with key stakeholders in the community.*

## Chinese Immigrant-Owned Small Businesses in Chinatown

### *Why they are the target audience:*

Immigrant-owned small businesses are a crucial target audience due to their shared post-pandemic challenges, such as community disconnection, weakened cultural vibrancy, and struggling local enterprises[9]. Their success and prosperity are vital for the overall vitality and cultural atmosphere of Chinatown, as their businesses and services contribute to community cohesion and cultural exchange[9].

### *Characteristics:*

Many immigrant small business owners in Chinatown have limited English proficiency (LEP) and face technology adoption challenges, making it difficult for them to adapt to online operations during the COVID-19 pandemic[10]. Many of them are not members of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or chambers of commerce, making it difficult for them to quickly access information about available aid[10]. Moreover, their cash-only business models can hinder their ability to provide necessary financial documentation for assistance applications[10]. Additionally, these businesses often lack the resources or capacities to effectively market themselves through social media.

### *Impact of social issues on them:*

Community disconnection and weakened cultural vibrancy hinder the establishment of new connections and collaboration opportunities, further limiting their potential for growth[9]. Additionally, struggling local enterprises face financial challenges and reduced customer traffic, which can lead to closures and loss of cultural touch points within the community<sup>1</sup>. These social issues create a challenging environment for these businesses to thrive and maintain their unique cultural identity[9].

### *Needs and expectations:*

According to Wellington Chen, the Executive Director of the Chinatown Business Improvement District (BID), businesses in Chinatown need support during weekdays, as the return of tourism on weekends is not enough to sustain them[9]. The shift to remote work has reduced regular lunchtime customers, making it difficult for restaurants to survive[9]. To ensure the sustainability of these businesses, Chinatown needs to attract more local residents to patronize the small business hub[11].

## *Potential behaviors and actions of the target audience:*

Busy immigrant-owned small business owners may be reluctant to actively participate in events due to time constraints; however, they genuinely

need information and are keen to engage in activities that can bring them benefits and publicity without incurring additional costs.

## *Relationship with the target audience:*

I have established close connections with small business owners in Chinatown over the past year. I have conversed with barbers, restaurant owners, and food store proprietors on Pell Street, once a thriving salon hub. I

have witnessed the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the community, even though the worst has passed.



## **Residents living in Chinatown**

### *Why they are the target audience:*

Residents living in Chinatown are another essential component of the target audience because they, along with local immigrant small businesses, shape the community's daily life and cultural atmosphere. These residents have immediate needs and interests in Chinatown's commerce, dining, and cultural activities, and their consumption and participation are

crucial for supporting local businesses and maintaining community vibrancy. By engaging and involving this target audience, the platform advocated by the thesis can effectively strengthen community ties, enhance cultural exchanges, and further support the growth and prosperity of local businesses.

### *Characteristics:*

Manhattan's Chinatown residents comprise a culturally diverse and multigenerational community, predominantly from Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Fujian, Taiwan, and increasingly from mainland China. They face varying language barriers, mainly speaking Chinese dialects and Mandarin, which may limit their access to information or resources outside their community. This makes Chinatown

an essential hub for their social, cultural, and economic lives. Chinatown residents typically hold a solid attachment to their cultural heritage, with older generations often serving as cultural and social pillars for the younger ones. They rely on Chinatown as a culinary and cultural destination, a community gathering place, a food distribution center, and an affordable source of goods and services.

## *Impact of social issues on them:*

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified fear and anxiety among Manhattan Chinatown residents, giving rise to "coronavirus anxiety" (fears associated with infection)<sup>1</sup>. As cultural vibrancy declines, residents experience weakened cultural connections, potentially leading to a loss of cultural identity and a diminished sense of belonging within the community[14]. Struggles faced by local businesses result in job losses and reduced income for residents in the area, exacerbating economic hardships and negatively affecting their overall quality of life[14]. The decrease in cultural events and community gatherings further limits residents' opportunities to interact and develop relationships within the community, potentially leading to increased feelings of loneliness and isolation[14]. Additionally, the ongoing struggles of local businesses make it more challenging for residents to access essential goods, services, and culturally specific resources, such as traditional food, healthcare services, or language assistance[14].

## *Needs and expectations:*

Residents desire more accessible and affordable goods and services, such as healthcare, education, and language assistance, as well as culturally-specific resources like traditional food and products[14]. The neighborhood's older architecture may not provide appealing spaces for community gatherings and social activities, highlighting the need for accessible and attractive community spaces[14]. Residents require opportunities to connect with their neighbors and engage in community activities, which helps foster a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation[14]. They expect local businesses to thrive, offering job opportunities and contributing to the overall well-being of the community[14]. At the same time, residents need an inclusive and supportive community that embraces diversity and promotes cross-cultural understanding, where people of different backgrounds, identities, and ages can come together and support one another.

## *Potential behaviors and actions of the target audience:*

Residents living in Chinatown may actively seek out cultural events, community gatherings, and opportunities to interact with

their neighbors to maintain their cultural connections and build social relationships[13].

## *Relationship with the target audience:*

Over the past year, I have participated in numerous volunteer activities organized by different groups, allowing me to engage with Chinatown residents through conversations, interviews, and collaborative work. Two instances stand out in particular:

First, while volunteering at Hamilton-Madison House to distribute food through their food bank, I encountered a resident who sought my help. She wrote a heartfelt, lengthy handwritten letter requesting assistance connecting with volunteers who could provide essential services. She could not speak English and felt unsafe venturing outside her home due to the fear of anti-Asian sentiment. These experiences have deepened my understanding of the Chinatown community and its residents'

challenges. They have inspired me to create a movement to help bridge the gaps and revitalize the connections within this vibrant neighborhood.

Second, during a Think! Chinatown [15] community event, I befriended two elderly women who lived in the neighborhood. Think! Chinatown is a grassroots organization started by Chinatown neighbors with diverse professional backgrounds, such as urbanists, artists, journalists, lawyers, architects, designers, tech specialists, photographers, and poets. They all share a common love for Chinatown and have come together to work on various community projects. These two elderly women spent weekdays helping their daughter in New Jersey and returned to Chinatown on weekends

to enjoy their activities and social life. However, their community has become more closed-off and disconnected since the pandemic. Before COVID-19, they had opportunities to participate in community dance teams or singing events, but the pandemic ended these activities. Their sense of connection to the

community diminished, but they remained hopeful for a chance to re-engage with their community.

## Problem Framing:

*Throughout the initial research process, we identified three key themes that defined the course of our thesis work.*



## Social Disconnection

The COVID-19 pandemic has left Manhattan's Chinatown community disconnected and less culturally vibrant. The residents, who once enjoyed a strong sense of community and participated in various cultural

events, now face difficulties in maintaining social connections and engaging in community activities. This disconnection has led to a decline in the community's cultural identity and vibrancy.

## Struggling Local Businesses

As a result of the pandemic, many local businesses in Manhattan's Chinatown are struggling to survive. These businesses, which once played a crucial role in preserving the community's cultural heritage and sustaining its

economy, now face challenges in attracting customers and generating revenue. This threatens not only the livelihoods of business owners but also the overall economic prosperity of the neighborhood.

# Community Empowerment

Despite the challenges faced by the Chinatown community, there is a strong desire to reconnect, preserve its rich cultural heritage, and support local businesses. The key to achieving this is to empower the community members,

especially the residents, business owners, and community leaders, by involving them in the decision-making process and developing initiatives tailored to their unique needs and aspirations.

## Problem Statement:

*The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in social disconnection, diminished cultural vibrancy, and struggling local businesses within New York City's Manhattan Chinatown community.*

## Why it's important to address this issue:

*Addressing this issue is crucial as it will help reconnect the Chinatown community, preserve its rich cultural heritage, and support the growth and sustainability of local businesses. This, in turn, will contribute to the overall well-being, resilience, and economic prosperity of the area and its residents.*



# How Might We

*How Might We spark a sense of belonging and social support, while igniting interest in local businesses, to facilitate a vibrant recovery for Manhattan's Chinatown community after the pandemic?*

## Thesis Statement :

*Thesis Statement: We aim to establish a community-driven platform that fosters connections and collaboration within Manhattan's Chinatown, enabling residents to engage with and appreciate art and culture, access vital social services, and build relationships that inspire and sustain the community and local businesses. By doing so, we seek to create a more inclusive, resilient, and culturally rich neighborhood that thrives in the face of adversity and embraces its individuality.*





# Development

# Prototype 1

## *Reigniting Salon Business: A Prototype for Strengthening Immigrant-owned Small Businesses in Chinatown*

### Small Business Marketing.

#### *Abstract:*

This paper presents a prototype developed for a small immigrant-owned beauty salon, New China Beauty Salon, to address the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted in Pell Street, Chinatown, with the salon owners Ming and Lou as the target population. A participatory design approach was employed, involving the business

owners, loyal customers, and design experts in the co-creation process. The primary learnings from the prototype were: building community connection through targeted intervention design, leveraging participatory design to develop effective solutions, and strengthening small business resilience through community engagement.

#### *Background and Target Group:*

1. New China Beauty Salon is owned by Ming, a woman from Fujian, China.
2. The salon has two branches on Pell Street, which have suffered due to the pandemic.
3. Ming and her husband, Lou, are busy and cannot leave the salons unattended.

#### *Methodology:*

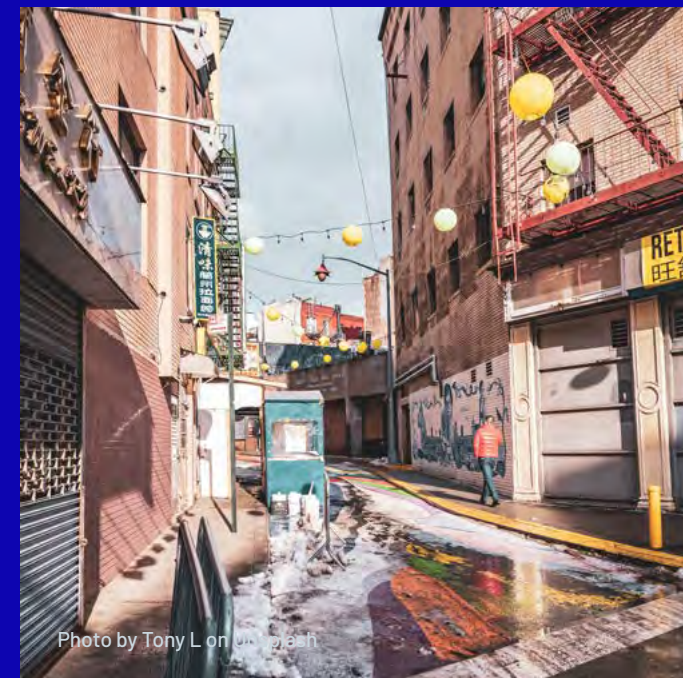
A participatory design approach was employed, where business owners, customers, and design experts were invited to participate in a design workshop at the salon. The workshop involved brainstorming sessions and reflection on existing products, which

revealed that Ming and Lou rarely updated their printed materials, such as business cards and price lists. The pandemic made it even more crucial for them to develop new ways to connect with their community and attract customers who had left due to the crisis.

#### *Prototype Development and Testing:*

Based on the insights gained from the workshop, a new set of business cards and price flyers were designed, along with a reimagined salon promotion strategy. The prototype was tested with Ming and Lou, as well as the

target community. Their feedback was collected and incorporated into the final prototype, ensuring that it met the community's needs.





## Findings and Reflection:

1. Building Community Connection through Targeted Intervention Design: The redesigned promotional materials helped strengthen the salon's connection with the community and attracted new business opportunities.
2. Leveraging Participatory Design to Develop Effective Solutions: Involving stakeholders in the design process led to a better understanding of their needs, resulting in more impactful solutions.
3. Strengthening Small Business Resilience through Community Engagement: New business cards and price flyers improved the salon's visibility and appeal to younger and foreign customers. However, limited digital literacy hindered the owners from fully embracing digital promotion. This highlighted the need to explore alternative methods for deepening community connections.

Design by Mouhui Sun

## Conclusion:

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of a participatory design approach in developing prototypes for small immigrant-owned businesses. By involving stakeholders in the co-creation process, the prototype addressed the unique challenges faced by New China Beauty Salon, paving the way for improved resilience and community

engagement. Future research could explore additional methods for strengthening community connections and supporting small businesses in a post-pandemic world.



# Prototype 2

## *Community Living Room: Fostering Connection and Collaboration in Manhattan's Chinatown*

### Community Art Activities

#### *Abstract:*

This paper presents a prototype called "Community Living Room," a community-driven platform aimed at promoting connection and collaboration in Manhattan's Chinatown. The project is a collaboration between the Chinatown Business Improvement District (BID), Chinatown Partnership, and multiple supporting organizations. The platform is integrated with the existing "Open Streets" event and

includes traditional art workshops, live painting, discussions, health check-ups, street libraries, and other activities. The primary insights include the high demand for community services, the importance of active participation in cultural and artistic activities, and the potential for diverse activities to meet community members' needs for connection.

#### *Background and Target Group:*

Manhattan's Chinatown is a vibrant neighborhood with rich cultural heritage. However, there is a need to strengthen community connections and provide a platform for residents to engage in and appreciate arts, culture,

and social services. The "Community Living Room" project aims to address this need by creating a space that encourages and sustains relationships between the community and local businesses.

#### *Methodology:*

The project involves collaboration between various stakeholders, including the Chinatown BID, Chinatown Partnership, local artists, and volunteers. The platform is set up in the triangular area next to 88 East Broadway Shopping Center, under the Manhattan Bridge. It offers a range of activities, including art workshops, live

painting, discussions, health check-ups, street libraries, and ping pong tables. Through interactive activities, games, and public spaces, the project fosters relationship building among participants and creates opportunities for them to connect and share their experiences.

#### *Findings:*

1. High Demand for Community Services: The success of the "Open Streets" event and the high attendance in various activities indicated a market for art and cultural activities in Chinatown.
2. Active Participation Enhances Community Cohesion: The engagement of community members in cultural and artistic activities contributes to stronger community bonds and a sense of belonging.
3. Diverse Activities Foster Connection: Offering a range of art and cultural activities caters to the diverse needs of community members, providing more opportunities for them to connect and collaborate.

## Conclusion:

The "Community Living Room" prototype demonstrates the potential for community-driven platforms to foster connection and collaboration in Manhattan's Chinatown. The project brings together various stakeholders to create a space for residents to engage in arts, culture, and social services

while strengthening relationships within the community. Future research could explore additional methods for promoting community cohesion and supporting local businesses in diverse urban neighborhoods.



# Theory of Change:

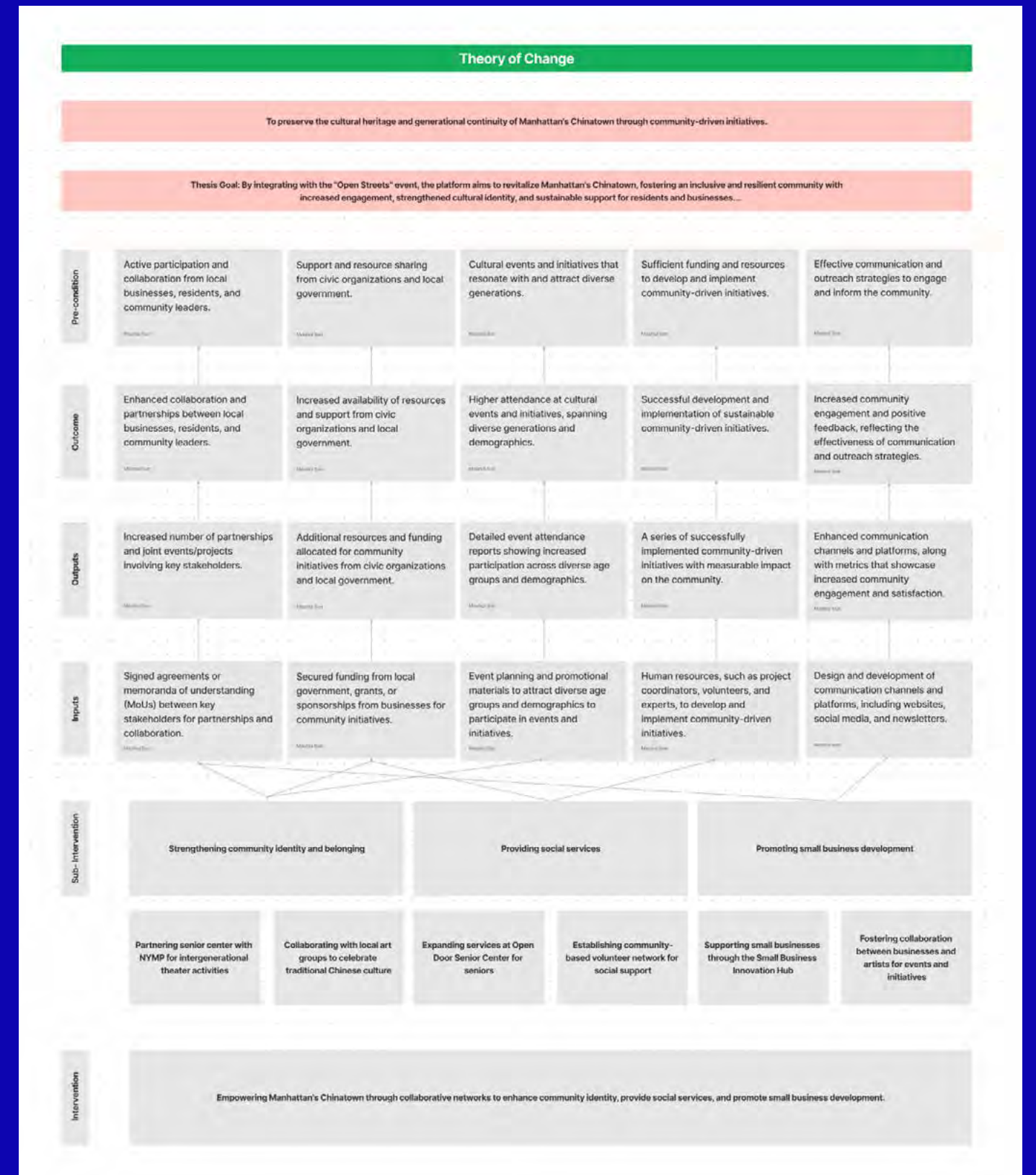
## TOC Narrative

Through our intervention, our goal is to enhance the sustainability and vibrancy of Manhattan's Chinatown by increasing community engagement, strengthening cultural identity, and supporting social services and local businesses.

I have identified three preconditions that must be met to achieve this goal: building a collaborative network, providing social services, and promoting small business development.

*Our intervention will lead to the following outcomes:*

1. Increased community engagement through events and workshops
2. Strengthened cultural identity through partnerships with local artists and cultural organizations
3. Improved access to social services for community members in need
4. Enhanced support for local businesses through partnerships and a small business innovation hub



*To measure the success of our intervention, we will aim to achieve the following targets:*

1. Increased attendance and participation at events and workshops, with a goal of reaching 300 community members
2. Increased engagement with local businesses, artists, and organizations, with a goal of establishing 10 new partnerships
3. Improved sense of belonging and community satisfaction among residents, as assessed through surveys
4. Enhanced well-being of community members through access to social services, as evaluated through qualitative feedback and data analysis

## *Conclusion:*

In conclusion, through our intervention, we aim to create a more resilient and vibrant Chinatown community by increasing community engagement, strengthening cultural identity, and supporting social services and local businesses. Our targets and outcomes will guide our efforts, and we believe that our interventions will have a positive and lasting impact on the community.

## Assumptions

1. Small businesses will be willing and open to participating in the community-based cultural events and marketing campaign.
2. Civic organizations and community members will be open to partnering and sharing resources for the success of the interventions.
3. Increased visibility of the neighborhood through the community-based cultural events and marketing campaign will attract more visitors and customers.
4. Increased economic activity in the neighborhood will lead to job creation and improved quality of life for residents.
5. The targeted interventions will be accessible and appealing to elderly and diverse populations, leading to their increased engagement and participation in the community events.

## Key Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent did the interventions increase community engagement and volunteering in the Chinatown community?
2. How effective were the interventions in preserving and strengthening cultural identity among community members?
3. To what extent did the interventions contribute to the success and viability of local small businesses?
4. What was the impact of the community network and collaborations established by the interventions?
5. How successful were the interventions in providing social services and addressing community needs, such as mental health support or language courses?
6. What were the unintended consequences of the interventions, if any?
7. What were the most successful and least successful aspects of the interventions, and what improvements could be made for future implementation?



8. What lessons can be learned from this project that can inform future efforts to enhance community resilience and inclusivity in Chinatown or other similar contexts?

9. What recommendations can be made for scaling up or replicating this project in other communities or neighborhoods?

## Key Monitoring Questions

1. How many community members and stakeholders are participating in events and workshops? What is the level of engagement and satisfaction among participants?

2. How many local businesses, artists, and organizations are involved in collaborations?

3. How effective are social services in meeting the needs of community members?

4. What is the level of participation and satisfaction among seniors at the Open Door Senior Center? How many volunteers are involved in translation/interpretation services, social support, and event coordination?

5. How successful is the Small Business Innovation Hub in supporting existing businesses and incubating new ones?

6. What feedback do community members and stakeholders provide on the interventions, and what changes can be made in response to their feedback?

7. What adjustments are made to the interventions based on ongoing monitoring, and what impact do these adjustments have on the outcomes?



Photo by Walid Amghar on Unsplash

# Environmental Impact Assessment Form

## Project Description:

### *Project Location:*

The platform will be integrated with the existing "Open Streets" event organized by the Chinatown BID. The event occurs under the Manhattan Bridge between Chinatown and Two Bridges, in the triangular area next to 88 East

Broadway Shopping Center. The event includes street libraries, colorful building toys for families, health check-ups, and ping pong tables, attracting a diverse crowd.

### *Description of Proposed Activity and Purpose:*

Spark Igniter is a community platform designed to foster a sense of belonging and social support in Chinatown by connecting art, culture, and social

services, igniting interest in local businesses, and facilitating a vibrant recovery for Manhattan's Chinatown community after the pandemic.

## *Location Environmental Priorities:*

Revitalizing Manhattan's Chinatown is crucial for promoting economic recovery and community resilience in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the oldest and most vibrant Chinese enclaves in New York City, Chinatown has played a significant role in shaping the city's cultural and economic landscape. Its unique ecosystem, which includes small businesses, community organizations, and a tight-knit social network, has been essential to its success.

The economic recovery of Manhattan's Chinatown is not only important for the neighborhood itself but also for the entire city. Chinatown is a major tourist destination, attracting visitors from all over the world and contributing significantly to the city's economy. Its small businesses, which include restaurants, souvenir shops, and groceries, provide essential goods and

services to residents and visitors alike. Therefore, supporting the economic recovery of Chinatown is critical to the overall prosperity of New York City.

### **New York Resources:**

Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation (CPLDC) - A non-profit organization that strives to promote and preserve the unique cultural and economic characteristics of Manhattan's Chinatown, working with local businesses, community organizations, and other stakeholders.

New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) - A public-private partnership that aims to create economic growth and improve the quality of life for New Yorkers by investing in infrastructure, real estate, and workforce development initiatives.

## *Project Type: Event / Workshop*

## *Required Actions/Assessments:*

*Energy & Power / Overconsumption / Manufacturing*

## Probable Impacts Assessment:

Action/Activity	Related Factors	Probable Impacts
Hosting a street theater festival that requires electricity for lighting and sound systems.	Energy & Power	Increased energy usage and potential reliance on non-renewable sources of energy.
Creating promotional materials for the street theater festival, such as flyers, posters, and banners.	Manufacturing, Deforestation	Deforestation, air pollution, loss of biodiversity, and contribution to climate change.
Serving food and beverages at the festival, potentially using single-use plastic or non-recyclable materials.	Manufacturing, Overconsumption	Increased consumption and potential waste, increased waste, pollution, and contribution to climate change.

## Conservation Techniques

Activity	Mitigation Technique
Implementing the community platform as part of the "Open Streets" event, which may require electricity for electronic displays, lighting, and sound systems.	Use energy-efficient electronic displays, lighting, and sound equipment to minimize energy consumption and carbon footprint. Consider solar-powered solutions when possible.
Creating promotional materials for Spark Igniters, such as flyers, posters, and banners.	Use responsibly sourced FSC certified paper for all promotional materials. Alternatively, consider using digital promotion methods or using recycled paper for printed materials.
Organizing workshops and events that may generate waste from materials and refreshments.	Encourage the use of reusable or compostable materials for event supplies and serving ware. Promote waste reduction and recycling efforts among event participants.

## Alternatives Analysis

### No-action Alternative:

Without any intervention, Chinatown may continue to struggle with social isolation, disconnection, and

difficulties in economic recovery post-pandemic. To avoid these negative outcomes, it is necessary to take action.

### Alternatives:

#### 1. Focus on Digital Community Engagement: Balancing Economic Support and Environmental Sustainability

One possible alternative is to create a digital platform that connects local businesses, residents, and community organizations. This approach can help reduce the environmental impact by minimizing physical event-related waste and transportation emissions. However, this may not fully address

the needs of elderly residents who may have limited access to technology or may prefer in-person interactions.

#### 2. Partner with Community Organizations for Sustainable Event Management:

A second alternative is to collaborate with existing community organizations like Think!Chinatown or Welcome to Chinatown to plan and manage eco-friendly events. By leveraging their resources and expertise, the events can focus

on sustainability and environmental consciousness while addressing the community's social and economic needs. This partnership would require clear communication, shared goals, and a commitment to sustainable practices.

3. Adopt a Sustainable Framework for Event Planning and Management: An alternative approach for Spark Igniters is to adopt a sustainable

framework that prioritizes eco-friendly practices and engages community volunteers. This framework would include guidelines for waste reduction, resource management, and community involvement to minimize environmental impact. Furthermore, by recruiting university student volunteers, the project could benefit from their enthusiasm, knowledge, and commitment to sustainability.

*Are there reasonable alternatives appropriate for your project? Y/N*

### *No-action Alternative:*

Describe your final conclusion and any adjustments you may consider as a result of your alternative analysis.

After conducting an alternative analysis, my final conclusion is that a combination of digital engagement and collaboration with community organizations can effectively address

Chinatown's social and economic challenges while minimizing environmental impact. In addition, adopting a sustainable framework and involving community volunteers can enhance the project's long-term effectiveness and eco-friendliness.



Photo by Clay Banks on Unsplash

# INTERVENTION



# Spark Igniters

*Spark Igniters is a community platform designed to foster a sense of belonging and social support in Chinatown by connecting art, culture, and social services, igniting interest in local businesses, and facilitating a vibrant recovery for Manhattan's Chinatown community after the pandemic.*

# FINAL DELIVERY

## Chinatown Community Connection Platform - Spark Igniters

### Objective:

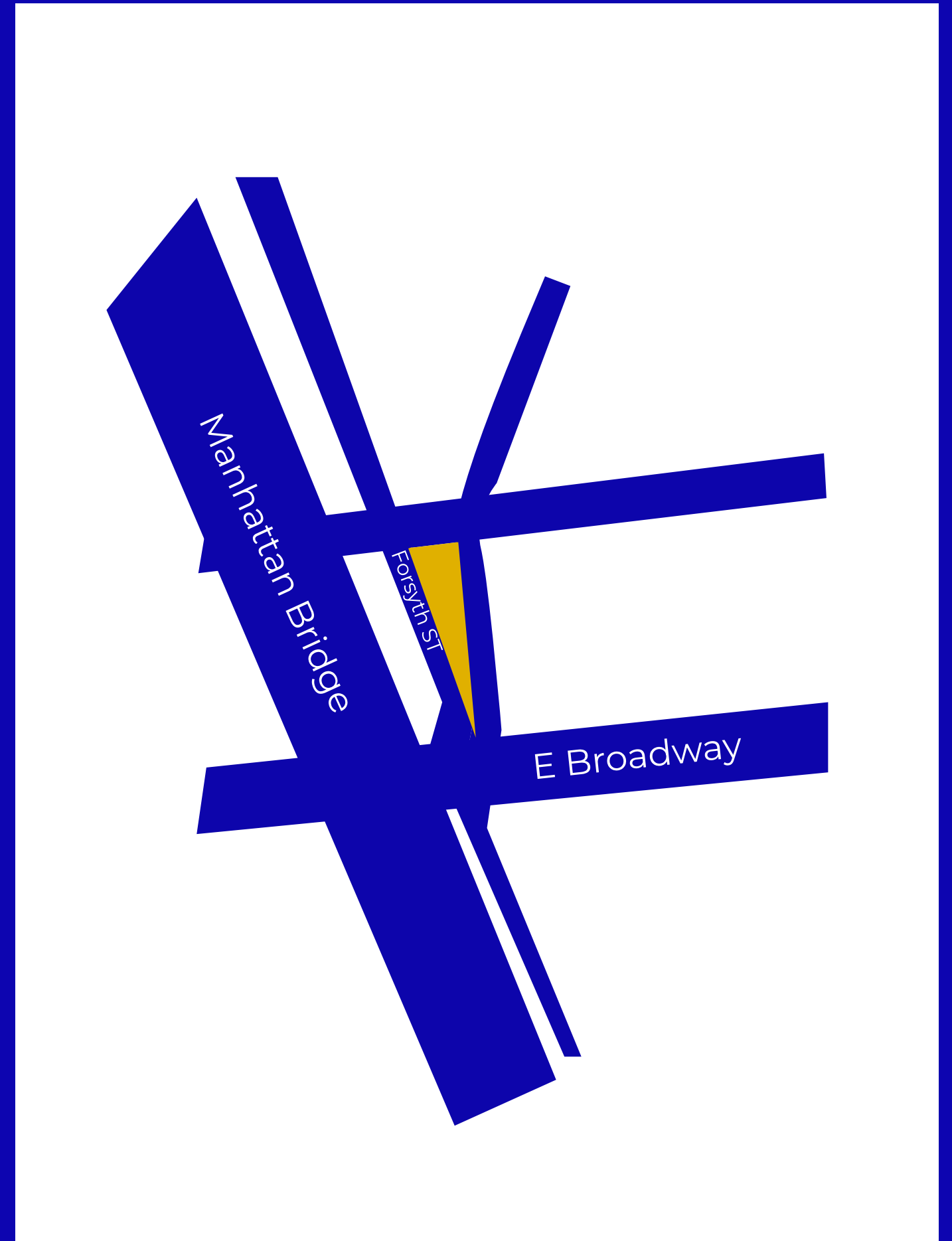
Develop a community platform that aims to bring people together in Chinatown to experience art and culture, access social services, and build relationships that ignite and sustain community and local business development. This objective represents the future goals of Spark Igniters, as the platform is currently in its early stages of development and implementation.

It's essential to differentiate between Spark Igniters' current accomplishments and its intended future impact. While the project has made progress in conducting research, engaging with the community, and identifying key needs, the platform's full realization and potential to facilitate social connection, cultural experiences, and economic development in Chinatown is a work in progress.

### Location:

The platform will be integrated with the existing "Open Streets" event organized by the Chinatown BID. The event occurs under the Manhattan Bridge between Chinatown and Two Bridges, in the triangular area next to 88 East Broadway Shopping Center. The event includes street libraries, colorful building toys for families, health check-ups, and ping pong tables, attracting a diverse crowd.

It's essential to differentiate between Spark Igniters' current accomplishments and its intended future impact. While the project has made progress in conducting research, engaging with the community, and identifying key needs, the platform's full realization and potential to facilitate social connection, cultural experiences, and economic development in Chinatown is a work in progress.



# SPARK IGNITERS Goals

*Empowering Chinatown's Small Businesses  
Enhancing Community Resilience  
Fostering Inclusive Economic Development*



# Core Strategies:

*Establish a network of key stakeholders that can collaborate on events and projects to create a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive Chinatown community.*

## Enhancing Community Identity and Belonging

### Open Door Senior Center

X

### New York Mandarin Playback

#### Objective:

The primary objective of this initiative was to lower the barriers that hindered seniors from actively participating in theater activities. By creating opportunities for them to share their stories and engage in performances in a more accessible manner, we aimed to empower seniors, reduce social isolation, and promote emotional health. Through intergenerational connections, we sought to foster a sense of belonging and community vitality among seniors.

#### Partnership with NYMP:

In collaboration with NYMP, we focused on introducing improvisational art to a senior center, allowing a larger number of seniors to express themselves and participate in performances more comfortably. By providing a supportive and inclusive environment, we encouraged seniors to unleash their creativity and share their unique narratives. This collaboration not only enabled seniors to experience the joy of performing but also facilitated the preservation of their stories and memories.

#### Impact:

The upcoming performance on the open street stage, resulting from our partnership with NYMP, promises to be an exciting showcase of the progress made during this initiative. By actively involving seniors in the theater arts, we anticipate a range of positive outcomes:

**Lowered barriers:** Through the introduction of improv art, seniors encountered fewer obstacles to participation, including concerns related to performance skills or age-related limitations.

**Increased engagement:** By providing a platform for seniors to share their stories, they were able to actively contribute to the cultural fabric of the community, resulting in enhanced emotional and mental wellbeing.

**Intergenerational connections:** The collaboration fostered intergenerational bonds between seniors and younger performers, promoting mutual understanding, empathy, and a sense of shared purpose.

**Reduced isolation:** Through

participation in theater activities, seniors experienced a heightened sense of social connectedness, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

**Emotional health:** Engaging in theater activities allowed seniors to explore and express their emotions, leading to improved emotional health and overall life satisfaction.

**Community vitality:** By integrating seniors into the vibrant theater community, this initiative contributed to the overall vitality of the local community, promoting a sense of inclusivity, diversity, and cultural enrichment.



# Open Street X Local Art Groups

## Objective:

The main aim of this initiative was to celebrate and preserve Chinese culture while fostering a greater sense of belonging and cultural pride. Through collaboration with local art groups, we sought to create opportunities for the community to engage with and appreciate Chinese traditional art forms. By showcasing these performances on open streets, we aimed to attract a diverse audience and promote cultural exchange. Furthermore, we recognized the potential economic benefits for local businesses through increased foot traffic from tourists.

## Partnership with Traditional Chinese Theater Group:

Our collaboration with a traditional Chinese theater group in New York played a crucial role in the success of this initiative. By partnering with them, we were able to bring continuous traditional art performances to the open street setting. These performances showcased various aspects of Chinese culture, providing a unique and immersive experience for the audience. Notably, the Guzheng performance, known for its rare and mesmerizing nature, captivated the spectators and received

overwhelming appreciation.

## Impact:

The collaborative efforts and the inclusion of traditional Chinese art performances yielded several positive impacts:

- Cultural Celebration and Preservation:** By showcasing Chinese traditional art forms, we actively celebrated and preserved Chinese culture, ensuring its continuity and appreciation within the community.
- Enhanced Belonging and Cultural Pride:** Through this initiative, community members, particularly those with Chinese heritage, experienced an increased sense of belonging and cultural pride, fostering a deeper connection to their heritage.
- Cultural Exchange and Appreciation:** The open street performances attracted a diverse audience, facilitating cultural exchange and fostering greater appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture among both local residents and tourists.
- Economic Prosperity:** The arrival of tourists to witness the traditional art performances resulted in increased foot traffic, benefiting small businesses in the area and contributing to the local economy.



Photo credit: Avery

## Providing Social Services :

### *Enhancing Social Cohesion and Cultural Promotion:*

#### Language Services:

Spark Igniter recognizes the importance of overcoming language barriers and promoting effective communication within the community. Language services are provided to facilitate access to vital resources, ensure clear understanding, and promote inclusivity among diverse cultural and linguistic groups.

#### Social Assistance:

Through Spark Igniter, a comprehensive social assistance framework is established, encompassing various services such as social support, counseling, and referral programs. This initiative aims to address social challenges faced by

community members, foster a sense of belonging, and strengthen social connections among individuals and families.

#### Legal Aid and Insurance Support:

Recognizing the need for legal and insurance assistance, Spark Igniter offers access to legal aid services and insurance support to community members. This ensures protection of their rights, promotes fair treatment, and enhances their overall well-being and security.

## *Empowering Education, Healthcare, and Safety:*

#### Education:

Spark Igniter emphasizes the importance of education by providing resources, mentorship programs, and educational workshops. This initiative aims to empower individuals with knowledge and skills, enhancing personal growth, and promoting economic opportunities within the community.

#### Healthcare:

Access to quality healthcare services is a vital aspect of Spark Igniter. By collaborating with healthcare providers and organizations, the initiative

ensures that community members have access to affordable healthcare services, preventive care, and health education programs.

#### Safety Protection:

Spark Igniter prioritizes the safety and protection of community members by implementing initiatives such as community policing programs, safety workshops, and awareness campaigns. These efforts aim to create a safe and secure environment for residents, promoting peace of mind and overall well-being.

## *Strengthening Local Businesses:*

#### Business Support and Promotion:

Spark Igniter actively supports and promotes local businesses in Chinatown by providing resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. This collaboration aims to enhance the

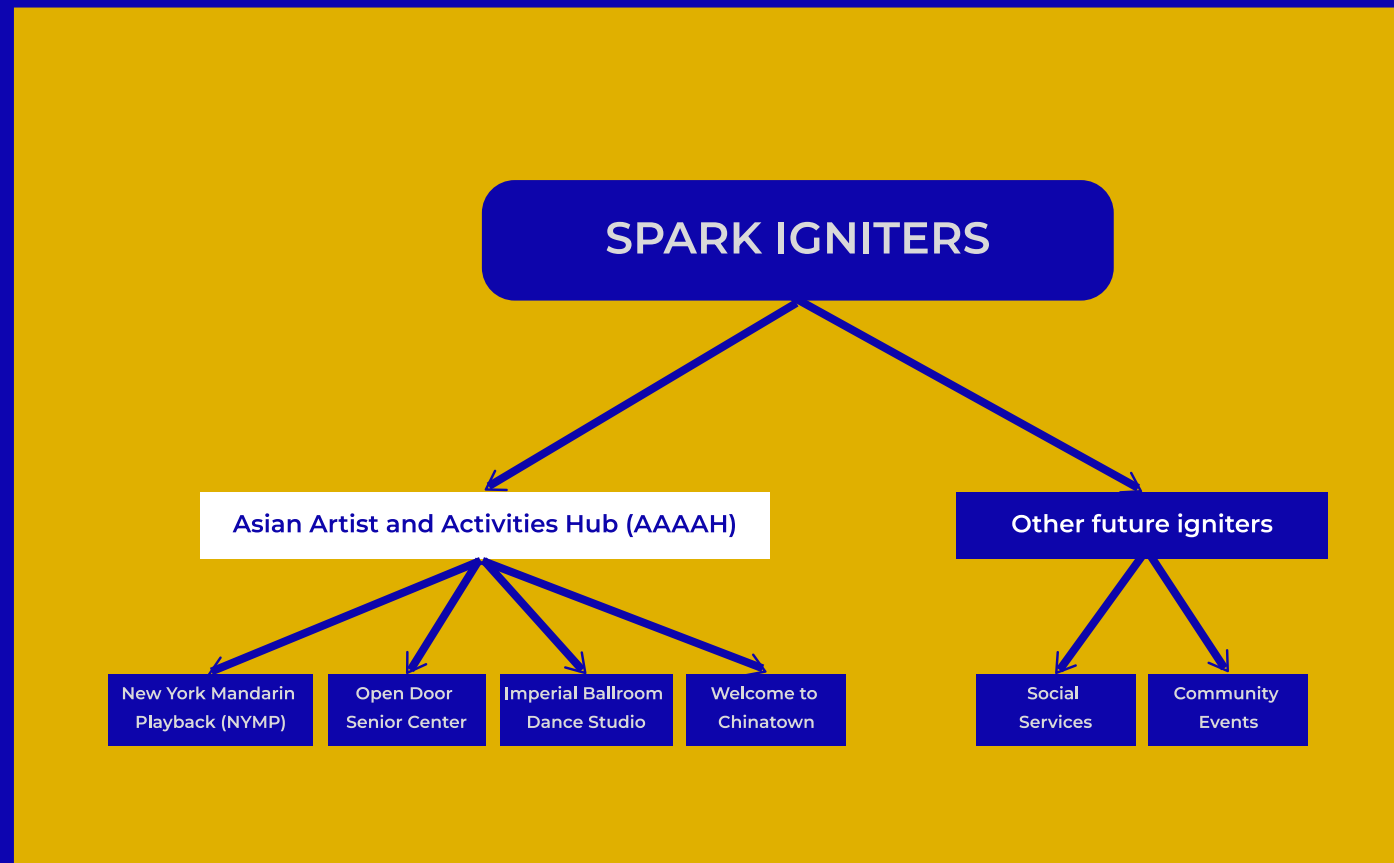
growth and sustainability of small businesses, fostering economic empowerment and community vitality.



Photo credit: Avery



Photo credit: Avery



## Potential - impact

1. *Improved social cohesion and sense of belonging among Chinatown residents.*
2. *Increased engagement with and appreciation for local art and culture.*
3. *Enhanced access to vital social services for community members.*
4. *Strengthened local businesses through increased visibility, partnerships, and collaboration.*
5. *Creation of a more inclusive, resilient, and culturally rich neighborhood.*





# AAAAH!WEEKEND



## AAAAH !

*In our first event, AAAAH! Weekend successfully collaborated with over 70 talented artists, bringing an amazing cultural event to Chinatown. It attracted more than 3,000 visitors and made over \$50,000 in sales. You could enjoy traditional music, art, and experience Asian life here.*

*This mission attracted over 20 volunteers, and we're constantly building community cohesion!.*

*We brought this success back to the community, and as AAAAH! became more well-known, more great organizations contacted us and brought more vitality to the community.*

## What I have learned

*Through this project, I have learned the importance of a human-centered and collaborative approach in addressing complex community challenges. By engaging diverse stakeholders, prioritizing empathy and inclusivity, and adopting an iterative and adaptive process, I was able to develop creative and sustainable solutions that effectively addressed the unique needs and aspirations of the Chinatown community.*



# References:

1. "Chinatown New York City Fact Sheet." Web. 11 May 2014. <\*[ [www.explorechinatown.com/](http://www.explorechinatown.com/)](<http://www.explorechinatown.com/>)\*\*>.
2. Lin, Jan. "Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change." Vol. 2 Edition: NED – New Edition (1998): n. pag. JSTOR. Web. 11 May 2014.
3. Zai Liang and Wenzhen Ye, "From Fujian to New York: Understanding the New Chinese Immigration," in David Kyle and Rey Koslowski, eds., *Global Human Smuggling* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2001). Web. 11 May 2014. \*(<https://chat.openai.com/#user-content-fnref-3>)\*\*
4. Kenneth J. Guest. "From Mott Street to East Broadway: Fuzhounese Immigrants and the Revitalization of New York's Chinatown." *Journal of Chinese Overseas*. Vol. 7 No. 2. Liu Hong and Zhou Min. Singapore: Brill, 2011. 24-44. Web. 11 May 2014. <\*[ <http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/wsas/academics/anthropology/documents/JCOGuestMotttoEB>](<http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/wsas/academics/anthropology/documents/JCOGuestMotttoEB>)\*\*
5. Emsi. Jobs data excludes the self-employed and excludes the "government" 2-digit NAICS code to capture only private sector, nonprofit, educational, and institutional jobs.
6. "Small Business, Big Losses: Asian American Businesses and the Impact of COVID-19." Asian American Federation, 22 Sept. 2020, \*[<https://www.aafederation.org/small-business-big-losses/>](<https://www.aafederation.org/small-business-big-losses/>)\*\* .
7. "Small Business, Big Losses: The Impact of the Covid Crisis on Asian Small Business in New York City," 2021. Copyright ©2021 Asian American Federation. \*[<https://chat.openai.com/c/b0c019af-1c66-453f-b46d-07de878a7d30#user-content-fnref-7%5E>]\*\*
8. Bloomberg News. (2020, June 14). New York City reopens, Chinatown is starting over. Bloomberg. \*[<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-14/new-york-city-reopens-chinatown-is-starting-over?leadSource=verify%20wall>](<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-14/new-york-city-reopens-chinatown-is-starting-over?leadSource=verify%20wall>)\*\*
9. Chen, W. (2021) Chinatown: A Neighborhood Fighting to Survive. *Gotham Gazette*. [online] Available at: \*[<https://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/10251-chinatown-neighborhood-fighting-to-survive>](<https://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/10251-chinatown-neighborhood-fighting-to-survive>)\*\* [Accessed 5 May 2023].
10. Asian American Federation (2020) Small Business, Big Losses: Asian American Businesses and the Impact of COVID-19. [online] Available at: \*[<https://www.aafederation.org/small-business-big-losses/>](<https://www.aafederation.org/small-business-big-losses/>)\*\* [Accessed 5 May 2023].
11. NYC Department of Small Business Services (n.d.) Chinatown Commercial District Needs Assessment. [online] Available at: \*[<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/sbs/downloads/pdf/neighborhoods/avenyc-cdna-chinatown.pdf>](<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/sbs/downloads/pdf/neighborhoods/avenyc-cdna-chinatown.pdf>)\*\* [Accessed 5 May 2023].
12. Bloomberg News (2020) New York City Reopens, and Chinatown is Starting Over. [online] Available at: \*[<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-14/new-york-city-reopens-chinatown-is-starting-over>](<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-14/new-york-city-reopens-chinatown-is-starting-over>)\*\* [Accessed 5 May 2023].
13. Chu, L. W., et al. (2021). Loneliness and Its Association with Psychological and Somatic Health Problems among Chinese, Singaporean, and American College Students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*,

18(8), 4194. [<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084194>](<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084194>)

14. Chu, L. W., et al. (2021). Loneliness and Its with Psychological and Somatic Health Problems among Chinese, Singaporean, and American College Students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(8), 4194. [<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084194>](<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18084194>); Hamilton–Madison House. (n.d.). Hamilton–Madison House. [<https://www.hamiltonmadisonhouse.org/>](<https://www.hamiltonmadisonhouse.org/>); Think!Chinatown. (n.d.). Think!Chinatown. [<https://www.thinkchinatown.org/>](<https://www.thinkchinatown.org/>)

15. Think! Chinatown. (n.d.). About Us. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[https://www.thinkchinatown.org/about-us\]\(https://www.thinkchinatown.org/about-us\)\\*\\*](https://www.thinkchinatown.org/about-us) [Accessed 5 May 2023].

16. Hamilton–Madison House, 2023. Our Programs. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[http://www.hamiltonmadisonhouse.org/\]\(http://www.hamiltonmadisonhouse.org/\)\\*\\*](http://www.hamiltonmadisonhouse.org/) [Accessed 30 April 2023].

17. Think! Chinatown, 2023. About Us. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[https://www.thinkchinatown.org/what-we-do\]\(https://www.thinkchinatown.org/what-we-do\)\\*\\*](https://www.thinkchinatown.org/what-we-do) [Accessed 30 April 2023].

18. Think! Chinatown, 2023. Chinatown Night Market. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[https://www.thinkchinatown.org/night-market\]\(https://www.thinkchinatown.org/night-market\)\\*\\*](https://www.thinkchinatown.org/night-market) [Accessed 30 April 2023].

19. Think! Chinatown, 2023. Events. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[https://www.thinkchinatown.org/events\]\(https://www.thinkchinatown.org/events\)\\*\\*](https://www.thinkchinatown.org/events) [Accessed 30 April 2023].

20. Mott Street Girls, 2023. About Us. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[https://www.mottstreetgirls.com/about\]\(https://www.mottstreetgirls.com/about\)\\*\\*](https://www.mottstreetgirls.com/about)

[Accessed 30 April 2023].

21. Welcome to Chinatown, 2023. About Us. [online] Available at: [\\*\\*\[https://www.welcometochinatown.com/about\]\(https://www.welcometochinatown.com/about\)\\*\\*](https://www.welcometochinatown.com/about) [Accessed 30 April 2023].

22. Social Capital Research. "What is social capital?" Accessed May 5, 2023. [\\*\\*\[https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/\]\(https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/\)\\*\\*](https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/).

23. Social Capital Research. "The benefits of social capital." Accessed May 5, 2023. [\\*\\*\[https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/theory/the-benefits/\]\(https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/theory/the-benefits/\)\\*\\*](https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/theory/the-benefits/).

24. Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation. Accessed May 5, 2023. [\\*\\*\[https://chinatown.nyc/bid/\]\(https://chinatown.nyc/bid/\)\\*\\*](https://chinatown.nyc/bid/).

# Credits, Citations and Resource Links

*Translation and Writing Assistance:*

*This paper was translated and written with the support of AI and translation tools,*

*including GPT-4.0, DeepL, and Grammarly.*

*Their assistance has been invaluable in helping me effectively communicate my ideas and findings.*

*I would like to express my gratitude to the developers and teams behind these technologies for their work in advancing language processing capabilities and*



# Gratitudo

# Big Thanks

*I would like to sincerely express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Mari Nakano, for her unwavering dedication, invaluable guidance, and meticulous refinement of my thesis. Her time, effort, and support have been instrumental in shaping and improving my work. I am truly fortunate to have had such an exceptional mentor.*

*I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the DSI chair, Miya Osaki, for her continuous support, encouragement, and belief in my abilities. Her guidance and motivation have been vital in helping me navigate through the challenges of this thesis journey. I am immensely grateful for her mentorship.*

*A special appreciation goes to my partner, Effy Tam, whose unwavering support and diligent collaboration have been instrumental in establishing AAAAH! Together, we have been able to create something meaningful and impactful. I am truly grateful to have shared this journey with her by my side.*

*Additionally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the entire DSI faculty and my fellow classmates. Their collective wisdom, camaraderie, and unwavering support have enriched my academic experience and made it truly memorable. I am grateful for the insights, discussions, and collaborative spirit that have shaped my growth throughout this journey.*

*Lastly, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who has been a part of this incredible journey. Your presence, encouragement, and contributions have played an invaluable role in shaping my thesis and making this experience both meaningful and rewarding. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.*



WONG RESTAURANT

POPPIES

12-608

WONG RESTAURANT

