

Little Tokyo Reconsidered: Transformation of Japanese American Community through the Early Redevelopment Projects

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1960s, Little Tokyo, one of the oldest Japanese American communities in the mainland U.S., showed serious signs of decay. Many of the buildings in Little Tokyo were built at the turn of the century and devastated during the Second World War. In 1969, 32.6 percent of the total 138 buildings were categorized as “deficient/rehabilitation questionable” and 43.5 percent as “structurally substandard.”¹ Among 600 to 622 individuals and 41 families living there in 1969, those who were 62 or older composed more than 30 percent of the total population.² Faced with the expansion of the City Hall nearby, this area was about to lose its function as a viable “ethnic community.” At this point, the people of Little Tokyo started to advocate its redevelopment and the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA) decided to launch the Little Tokyo Redevelopment project in 1970.³

Thus far, transformation of Japanese American ethnicity in the domestic context has attracted wide scholarly attention. On the resilience of the Japanese American “ethnic community,” Fugita and O’Brien stress the significance of “a formal organizational base—a critical factor in the preservation of ethnic community life as individuals have moved from

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concentrated ethnic ghettos, sections of small towns and farming enclaves to predominantly white suburbs.”⁴ As Yasuko Takezawa has revealed, Japanese American ethnicity was re-articulated and reinforced while being more Americanized in the redress/repatriation movement.⁵ In addition, Lon Kurashige explores the dynamics of intra-ethnic reconciliation and conflict within this community by tracing the transformation of the Nisei Week Annual Summer Festival. Kurashige asserts that conflicts occurred where “*ethnic orthodoxy* concealed the opinions and experiences of those who did not (or could not) conform to the leadership’s sanguine image of Japanese Americans.”⁶ He then examines the voices of “internal others” such as “women, workers, radicals, and juvenile delinquents”⁷ in the intra-ethnic conflict.

On the other hand, recent historical studies have shed light on the transnationalism of Japanese Americans. Refuting a polarized position between Japan and the U.S., a more dynamic narrative has emerged. The pre-war dualistic/transnational history-telling by *Issei* intellectuals is presented as a strategy for survival under harsh social and legal discrimination.⁸ Masako Iino complicates the images of Japanese Americans’ all-out denial of “Japanese-ness” after WWII by drawing an example of their extensive contribution to assist war-devastated Japan.⁹ Albeit in different historical settings, these studies present a new perspective by exploring Japanese Americans’ active and strategic involvement in U.S.-Japan relations.

This paper will scrutinize the process of the Little Tokyo Redevelopment projects from the 1960s to the early 1980s.¹⁰ Little Tokyo redevelopment involved not only Japanese Americans, but also many Japanese business people. With the inception of the projects, fear, misunderstanding and different interests among them made anti-Japanese protest hover in this area in the 1970s. Hence, studies have depicted the Little Tokyo redevelopment in its early phase as a contested arena of Japanese Americans versus Japanese corporations.¹¹ Kurashige’s above-mentioned book gives a comprehensive, persuasive overview of Little Tokyo redevelopment: “the phenomenal growth of foreign businesses in Little Tokyo introduced new constituents to the Japanese American community and consequently restructured its indigenous power relations and ethnic construction.”¹² He devotes one chapter to examining conflicts of “nationalism” versus “internationalism” in the redevelopment process. However, while admitting that redevelopment projects such as construction of the Japanese American Culture and Community Center (JACCC)

“would not have been possible without Japanese money,”¹³ his description of conflicts in terms of “nationalism” versus “internationalism” or “community” versus “outsiders”/“foreigners” seems dichotomous and does not pay enough attention to efforts by the *Nisei* generation to reach out to Japanese businesses in trying to save Little Tokyo.

However, did the “anti-Japanese” sentiment really represent the voices of the “community”? Was the “community” totally against “outsiders”? Was the boundary of “community” versus “outsiders”/“foreigners” clear and fixed? To answer what the question of redevelopment meant to Japanese Americans and how they reacted in the transnational context throughout the 1970s, this study aims to reveal the complexities of the process of Little Tokyo Redevelopment. It will examine both successful and controversial projects undertaken throughout the 1970s, and their impact on “ethnic resurgence.”¹⁴ Through an examination of anti-Japanese sentiment and the diversified community response toward it, this paper will shed light on the non-passive, strategic involvement of various community members and explore how they rearticulated the functions and significance of Little Tokyo.

THE LAUNCH OF THE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT AND “SUCCESSFUL” CASES

In the early 1960s, many Japanese Americans were doubtful about the redevelopment plan, posing questions like “Why do we need Little Tokyo?” or “It’s an anachronism and the future is in the suburbs.”¹⁵ As Gloria Uchida, long-time CRA officer says, “there were 15 areas in Southern California where Japanese Americans were concentrated. [Moreover,] they didn’t interact with each other much.”¹⁶ However, others who felt the urgency of responding to the growing concern over the eastward expansion of the Civic Center into Little Tokyo and the physical and economic blight of the area formed the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Association (LTRA). Believing that there was “a sentimental attachment toward Little Tokyo as their natural and historical ‘hometown,’”¹⁷ the LTRA sought to bring Japanese Americans in the suburb back to this area. Given the fact that the majority of those living in this area were 45 years or older, LTRA was also keenly aware of the everyday needs of “ethnic clientele” since Little Tokyo was in fact the “only place . . . where all kinds of Japanese goods and services are available.”¹⁸ Emphasized also was the possibility of Little Tokyo’s becoming a

“tourist attraction.” LTRA believed that “a thoughtfully designed community with a high quality oriental atmosphere in its architecture and landscaping could be an asset to all of Southern California.”¹⁹ Though very little happened during the next seven years, this redevelopment blueprint remained thereafter: to attract both Japanese Americans in Southern California and tourists and to facilitate Japanese services for the people of this community.

In 1969, the Little Tokyo Community Development Advisory Committee (LTCDAC) was organized. The LTCDAC was the official citizens’ committee for the Little Tokyo redevelopment project, appointed by the Mayor of the City of Los Angeles. Together with the CRA, the Committee was expected to “act as a responsible, objective, and knowledgeable conductor of information from the CRA and the City to the people of the area, and vice versa.”²⁰ The Committee endeavored to serve as a “bridge” between community members and Japanese firms. In order to fulfill this difficult task, the 50-member committee held monthly general meetings “supplemented by additional meetings of standing subcommittees and task forces to discuss issues at hand.”²¹ Katsuyo Kunitsugu, recalling those days said, “my husband [Kango Kunitsugu] and I literally went to meeting after meeting every night.”²²

The 67-acre Little Tokyo project was formally adopted by City Council on February 24, 1970. The CRA put projects into four categories: housing, commercial, cultural/institutional, and special, and concrete projects included the construction of housing units for residents of all incomes, improvement of parking spaces and transportation, and development of commercial facilities. Nevertheless, as CRA itself announced, the overriding goal for this redevelopment project was to “reconstruct and preserve a comprehensive community which will continue to serve as the cultural, religious, social and commercial center of the Japanese American community in Southern California.”²³ In sum, what was sought was a restoration of Little Tokyo’s various functions as a community for Japanese Americans.

At the time of the adoption of the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project in 1970, two specific and one general source of funds were identified. The Neighborhood Development Program (NDP) along with conventional federal loans and grants were the first specific sources. Tax increments generated by the project itself was the second. Due to the amendment of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, which enlarged the rights of cities in pursuing CRA’s general goals, the

NDP was replaced by the Housing and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program in 1975. Since the financial orientation was changed, the budget for the development projects had been tightened, being influenced more by the respective local governments. This also meant that CRA needed more “outside” money to implement the original blueprints. Thereafter, financial difficulties delayed the construction of some key projects, including Little Tokyo Towers, a 300-unit housing project for senior citizens. From around 1973, frustration among citizens began to surface primarily because they felt a “serious inadequacy of public information.”²⁴

In 1975 the long-awaited Little Tokyo Towers was completed. In 1976, Higashi Honganji Temple returned to Little Tokyo.²⁵ Among “cultural/institutional” projects in this first phase, the JA Community Center and the adjacent Japan-America Theater were largest in their original development values. These were also the cases in which both local people and Japanese businesses collaborated, which led to a strengthening of the cultural significance of the community. These became “successful” projects in which Japanese involvement did not create major controversy.

The construction of the JA Community Center was completed in 1980 by Kajima International, a subsidiary of Kajima Construction Company. The total budget of \$12 million to build the center was raised from five major sources: 1) the US Government through Housing and Urban Development funds (HUD); 2) American corporations and foundations; 3) the Japanese government; 4) business under the aegis of the *Keidanren* (Japan Federation of Economic Organization); and 5) other sources in Japan and Japanese corporations in the United States.²⁶ Among these, sources from Japan became the integral part.

JACCC Chairman of the Board Katsuma Mukaeda and President George Doizaki received valuable support from Japanese Consul General of Los Angeles Yukio Takamastu for fund-raising trips to Japan. Takamastu not only “personally contacted Foreign Ministry officials to convince them of the need for the cultural/community center in Los Angeles, but took every opportunity to introduce JACCC leaders to visiting officials from Japan.”²⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs then contacted *Keidanren* as well as the *Nihon Shoko Kaigisho* (Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry). Delighted by the news of an initial \$50,000 donation by the Government of Japan, Mukaeda commented, “This is the official Japanese government recognition of our efforts to build a

‘Japan House’ of the West.”²⁸ It was reported that the Foreign Ministry endorsed the plans with high expectations that it would “contribute greatly to mutual understanding between Japan and the United States and would promote greater cultural inter-change between the two nations.”²⁹ George Doizaki was *Kibei*, an American-born citizen who had been taken to Japan at an early age by his parents and did not return to the United States until he was 16 years old. He was “more comfortable expressing himself in Japanese than in English.”³⁰ His background gave him a great advantage in promoting the cultural center as an ideal “cultural bridge between the two nations.” Aside from \$2 million generated through the Redevelopment Agency, fund-raising efforts got \$3 million from American corporations and foundations. As for the contribution from Japan, over \$4 million was donated from 245 corporations.

Mukaeda and Doizaki continued their fund-raising trips to Japan, and given the CRA’s tight budgets, the Committee encouraged and endorsed their efforts.³¹ The Japan America Theater, completed in 1982, was also funded by hundreds of Japanese companies, organizations and individuals. Among the total budget of \$6.4 million, the Japanese donation amounted to \$4.4 million, while \$75,000 was from HUD and the rest came from local organizations. The successful fund-raising spearheaded by Mukaeda and Doizaki was clearly a case of joint efforts across national borders: it was continually negotiated through dialogue between the leaders of various American and Japanese organizations, including the Japan Foundation, the *Koenkai* (support group), and the JACCC.³²

In this phase of Little Tokyo redevelopment, centered on the construction of the Community Center and Japan-America Theater, the considerable involvement of Japanese business and government did not create sharp angry voices from the community. The Center became a highly symbolic entity, which could serve people’s different hopes and interests. As outlined in the initial blueprints of redevelopment, community members thought the Center would fulfill the *Issei*’s dream of transmitting their culture to younger generations. A Japanese cultural center in Little Tokyo was “one that the *Issei* immigrants from Japan had cherished and dreamed about as they struggled to establish themselves in the new land, where language and customs were so different from their homeland.”³³ In addition, many *Nisei* thought that a “cultural center was necessary” because they were concerned that “the younger generation of Japanese Americans was getting farther and farther away from their roots.”³⁴ This comment symbolizes a hope for the resurgence of

“Japanese American ethnicity” among younger generations through a “Japanese cultural center.” In other words, founders of the JA Community Center hoped that younger generations would be exposed more to Japanese traditions and culture. Furthermore, the Center was expected to serve as a “cultural bridge” between the U.S. and Japan. Faced with the CRA’s tight budget, people like Doizaki, who was *Kibei*, played a crucial role as “cultural bridges” themselves by implementing fund-raising activities in Japan. It can be construed that founders of the Center chose to be pragmatic in presenting it as a “Japan House of the West,” knowing it would boost donations from Japan. In the end, although Japanese Americans, the Japanese government, and Japanese businesses had somewhat different interests at stake in these redevelopment projects, each group’s interests were served by completion of the projects, which thus became “successful” examples of Little Tokyo’s redevelopment.

SPURRING CONTROVERSY AND CONFLICT: THE CASE OF THE NEW OTANI HOTEL

As noted before, when the CRA’s financial orientation changed in 1975, more community members became concerned that small businessmen would have problems if too many large companies came into Little Tokyo. A concern over massive development and fear of “outsiders” was typically expressed as follows: “It would be almost impossible to continue business, especially for older people. They would just be forced out.”³⁵ The visible “outsider” in the early redevelopment phase was Kajima International, which had built a 15-story structure in Little Tokyo in 1960. Some thought the construction of this building was intended to make “local people get their confidence back” in the heart of the “dying ghetto.”³⁶

However, fears deepened and were transformed into mistrust as community activists interacted more with them. In 1973, they were upset by the following comment by a public relations representative of Kajima International: “Many of the local Japanese business people still operate with a *Meiji-Taisho* business mentality. We must now instill the expanding business philosophy of today’s generation. So long as they live fearing the competition from large enterprises, the whole town must suffer in this age of competition. . . . Besides, at this time, the reality is that Japanese corporations have been hesitant to join in the redevelopment

of Little Tokyo.”³⁷ A Honolulu-based Japanese business monthly magazine echoed this view that Little Tokyo “is an old, shabby place with an atmosphere far from the modern mammoth Tokyo. . . . It is after all, almost like an exhibition place for Japan in America; Japanese corporations and Government ought to assist in redevelopment by constructing new buildings. Though Little Tokyo is said to be the largest Japanese town overseas . . . all visitors from Japan find the place rather humbling . . . [U]rgent moves are required to redevelop the area.”³⁸ The involvement of Kajima and other Japanese corporations in the redevelopment project was seen as a way for Japanese corporations to realize their image of Japan’s expanding economy.

Many of the activists also felt that the philosophy of “survival of the fittest” that Japanese companies expressed did not appreciate the history of Japanese Americans. “Long and arduous struggles of our forefathers are about to be cast aside brutally by the profit-seeking newcomers from Japan.”³⁹ According to the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Taskforce, “*Issei* people who have continually resided in Little Tokyo, once again, are faced with the distinct possibility of mass evacuation without any guarantee for acceptable resettlement in Little Tokyo. The encroachment by both expanding government through a massive redevelopment of the whole downtown area and expanding firms from Japan is threatening to remove our heritage.”⁴⁰

Naturally, the Kajima representative denied the fear of a takeover as follows: “We don’t consider our involvement as a takeover of Little Tokyo. This redevelopment is an effort of the local people. We are here merely to assist [with] what’s not available locally. This is definitely not a takeover by Japanese capital. We are confident that the total will of the local community is accurately reflected in the present plans and redevelopment.”⁴¹ When asked about delayed citizen housing projects, though, the same Kajima representative answered, “Their problem is not ours. It is an issue that the Government (CRA) must resolve in accordance with the local needs and situation. We are really concerned to provide services that are beneficial for both parties.”⁴² He denied Kajima’s responsibility for the designing and executing process.

According to Joe S. Fukuhara, a *Sansei* businessman working for Union Bank, what Kajima lacked was awareness as a member of the “community.”⁴³ Fukuhara had been involved in the CRA projects through the Union Church. When referring to the relationship between the Japanese businesses and Japanese Americans, he said, “once the

Japanese firms start their business, they have to be a part of the Little Tokyo Business Association, and they are expected to take part in the *Nisei* Week donation. In essence, the important thing in the relationship is ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do.’”⁴⁴ Fukuhara recalled, “People living here for a long time had pride because they built Little Tokyo, they don’t like strangers (*yosomono*) to move in. Little Tokyo is a Japanese town, and Japanese corporations may have a certain priority in this project, but those Japanese should know the rules (*Kimari*) of Little Tokyo.”⁴⁵

In late 1976, mistrust and fear surfaced in a heated controversy over the construction of the New Otani Hotel and Garden. To provide access to the New Otani Hotel and its parking, the 62-room Sun Hotel and Sun Building, which housed many Japanese American community and cultural offices, were scheduled for demolition. When the CRA originally purchased the Sun Hotel, the majority of the residents were Japanese Americans, but since 1972, they had come to be replaced by Latinos. The angry citizen’s group, Little Tokyo’s People’s Rights Organization (LTPRO), directed much of its anti-eviction campaign against the CRA as well as the New Otani. The LTPRO, “backed by various community groups, churches, student organizations and some residents of other Little Tokyo hotels,” asked the council for a “‘fair and just’ solution for the remaining tenants of the Sun Hotel asking for assurance of adequate relocation of the residents.”⁴⁶

The LTPRO called on the redevelopment agency to stop all evictions and to halt the “dispersal and destruction” of Little Tokyo. The *Rafu Shimpo* of December 2, 1976, reported that Sun Hotel tenants “had no place to relocate and living conditions in the hotel have steadily deteriorated. Many of the residents do not have hot water or adequate lighting.”⁴⁷ In contrast, the CRA contended that only nine of the hotel residents were eligible for Housing and Urban Development assistance, federally funded relocation benefits. According to the CRA, “tenants must have resided in the hotel at least 90 days prior to the date of the CRA’s first offer to purchase the site.”⁴⁸ In this case, when the CRA bought the Sun Hotel and Sun Building, the agency officials decided to allow tenants of the two structures to continue living or working there until demolition time neared. The agency also contracted with the former owner of the Sun to run the hotel. Thus, tenants legally qualified for benefits must have resided in the hotel before May 1972.⁴⁹ The *Los Angeles Times* of January 18, 1977, reported that the issue in this case was “whether 30 tenants, those still living in the old structure, will remain

there or be forced out by Feb. 28, the target set by the CRA to take over the four-story Sun Hotel.”⁵⁰

While the LTPRO charged that the CRA was doing nothing about the eviction problem, Ed Helfeld, then CRA administrator, admitted that the issue was “both a moral and legal one,” and that they were trying to do everything possible to relocate the Sun Hotel residents.⁵¹ The CRA in fact hired a full-time staff, Bernardo Medina, who himself was a Latino, to take care of the Sun residents who only spoke Spanish. According to Helfeld, LTPRO’s charges about evictions were “unfair since we have been doing everything to avoid any kind of forced eviction, and putting a moratorium on that would be unfair and unreasonable.”⁵² Angered by the adverse publicity being created by the LTPRO, he accused them of “seeking to make political capital out of a situation that is not what they say it is.”⁵³

Indeed, younger activists presented the New Otani case and the demolition of the Sun Hotel and Sun Building as a minority issue, using the rhetoric of racial/class oppression. In the case of the Sun Hotel, the residents were not of Japanese descent, but Latinos who worked in nearby factories and Japanese, Chinese, and Mexican restaurants. At the same time, activists also protested on behalf of *Issei* who would feel uneasy if they had to leave Little Tokyo. In fact, at that time there were still many elderly *Issei* living in various hotels. It was repeatedly claimed that those who were evacuated during WWII once again faced eviction from their home.

As younger activists stressed the symbolic historical significance of Little Tokyo through the anti-redevelopment and anti-Japanese movement, they rediscovered Little Tokyo as an “indigenous base of Japanese American ethnicity”⁵⁴ and realized the need to preserve their national roots while the *Issei* were still alive. They also became more conscious that minority issues were not confined to Japanese Americans. The discourse of the anti-redevelopment movement and the dichotomy of “community” versus “outsider” reinforced their consciousness of Japanese American ethnicity as a minority identity. As an embodiment of minority issues within Little Tokyo, the dichotomy of “community” vs. “outsider” symbolized the activists’ roots as a minority in America and underscored the ethnic significance of the *Issei*’s history.

COMMUNITY DIVIDED AND RELATIONSHIP WITH JAPANESE
BUSINESSES

In the process of the anti-eviction movement by younger, mainly *Sansei* activists, conflicts within the community surfaced. The *Sansei* activists charged that the construction of the New Otani Hotel and Garden would turn Little Tokyo into a giant tourist trap. Labeling the New Otani Hotel a symbol of “imperialist land-grabbers,” they showed up at City Council with picket signs and leaflets, and published leaflets and newsletters. On the other hand, most of the local business people favored the construction of the hotel. As Archie Miyatake commented, “the hotel will generate more business for the small businessmen here, definitely increase the foot traffic. Just its being there will help the community.”⁵⁵

In the midst of the anti-eviction campaign, as activists became more visible and vocal, elders got “so angry, in fact, that they went public, a thing they do not often do for they like to maintain a low profile and work out their problems among themselves.”⁵⁶ On Feb. 28, 1977, responding to a demand by LTPRO, a public hearing was held before the City Council where representatives of both sides presented conflicting views on the redevelopment. From the elders’ side, Edward Matsuda, president of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce (JCC), spoke on behalf of JCC and the Little Tokyo Businessmen’s Association. Matsuda read his statement as follows: “If the CRA made an honest error of judgment in selecting the developer of the Weller Triangle, LTPRO’s protest comes too little and too late. . . . Any attempt to turn the clock back may jeopardize the progress of the entire Little Tokyo revitalization program.”⁵⁷ Other members of Little Tokyo’s business community denounced younger activists’ vocal protests as “a disgrace to the community.”⁵⁸ For example, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* quoted an elderly shopkeeper as saying that “you can’t throw people out on the street. But these young people with the LTPRO don’t understand. The only thing they have succeeded in doing is getting publicity. They haven’t helped the people at the Sun.”⁵⁹ This shopkeeper added that, “what they don’t realize is that their noise has actually caused other people, not in those in the Sun, to be deprived of housing. But you can’t blame the CRA. At least this way, people aren’t going to end up being evicted.”⁶⁰ Howard Nishimura, who was the head of the LTCDAC, denounced the activist group, insisting that *Sansei* activists did not represent the true feelings of the community. Nishimura, who had been working as a certified public accountant in Little Tokyo

for ten years, was critical about *Sansei* activists. He said, “I have tried to tell them they aren’t helping anybody, [and] that they could really offer some constructive criticism and input to the community. But they didn’t listen.”⁶¹

Other *Nisei* elders or local business people were less angry, but nonetheless expressed their disagreement with the activists. Katsumi Kunitsugu said, “It was much easier to raise protest papers [signs] and say ‘big government is stepping on little guy’ and it just happened to be that the protest was very popular at that time. It was a way of life.”⁶² Harry Honda, editor emeritus of the *Pacific Citizen* and a long time witness of Little Tokyo’s transformation, also remained unsympathetic toward the anti-redevelopment movement and evaluated it as “a common problem whenever you have redevelopment. If I were there, I don’t see it [moving out] as a sacrifice. It was just a relocation to other hotels or apartments. The CRA is not a hotel business.”⁶³ Honda then added that “maybe there were some fears because they thought they might be taken over . . . [I]t was not a real fear, though, we *Nisei* experienced a real fear before WWII.”⁶⁴ Even Joe Fukuhara, a *Sansei*, admitted that “although the process of the development might be somewhat problematic, I appreciate the redevelopment. Without the redevelopment, Little Tokyo was embarrassing (*hazukashii*) to the Japanese Americans.”⁶⁵

It can be argued that those who knew Little Tokyo was a “dying and embarrassing ghetto” and were deeply involved in the redevelopment process chose a realistic option for the survival of the Japanese American community. For that reason, business owners and other community members thought the injection of “outside” expertise and money would be needed anyway. Unlike the *Sansei* activists’ symbolic anti-eviction/redevelopment campaign, they took a more practical standpoint towards the influx of Japanese resources. They hoped that an infusion of “Japan” in various forms—money, culture, food, and people—would rejuvenate the commercial and cultural functions of Little Tokyo.

Meanwhile, the New Otani and its developer, East-West Development, maintained a low profile throughout the anti-eviction demonstration. East-West Development, a consortium of 30 Japan-based firms, was formed in September 1973 with Kajima International Inc. One of the executives of the New Otani said that they would “try to blend the two cultures, taking the best from both the Japanese and the American.”⁶⁶ Thus, according to the New Otani, the “mixture of two cultures” was the biggest feature of the hotel. However, it was clear that the hotel’s appear-

ance was intended to be “international” rather than a “mixture of two cultures.” It was reported that “personal touches are unmistakably Japanese in origin, but the emphasis will be on the international,” and only “three of the hotel’s 448 rooms” were Japanese style. This was done in order to “draw 70% of the hotel’s guests from the international market and 30% from Japan, and to limit the hiring of Japanese employees to one concierge and one corporate staff.”⁶⁷ Located in the heart of Little Tokyo, erasing “Japanese-ness” was regarded as somewhat odd, but the New Otani chose to be ethnically neutral, or “international.”

In addition, the East-West Development president and manager of the project stressed the “harmonious coexistence of local businesses with those from Japan”⁶⁸ to spur business in Little Tokyo. Another executive of the East-West commented: “[W]e were pessimistic over the project. The hotel business is very competitive and the area was not the most desirable.”⁶⁹ An invitation to join the consortium was also extended to American companies, but they did not accept because of the declining business in Little Tokyo. As Kunitsugu recalls, the East-West “had a hard time convincing twenty-four Japanese companies to invest funds to develop a hotel there. There were local people who were interested in trying their hand at the development bid. [However,] they had no development background, no experience, which was a scary thing.”⁷⁰

Kunitsugu’s sympathetic comment about Kajima was in line with the following comment by East-West: “East-West does not expect to make a profit on its investment for seven to ten years. . . . The Japanese companies look at the investment in Little Tokyo as a contribution. That is why they will wait for a future return on the investment. But we’re representative of large companies in Japan. People think of a takeover of the Japanese American community, which is not our interest.”⁷¹ Kunitsugu thought the construction of the hotel “was sort of out of the goodness of their hearts because they didn’t see much future for Little Tokyo.”⁷² She continued, “There were some criticisms because the job went to a Japanese company rather than [to] local people. But at the time, it was probably a good decision because they wanted it built by people with experience. And they have kept it up as a first class hotel all these years whereas [the] track record of local people keeping up the building has not been that good. . . . It is much easier to raise protest papers[signs] and say ‘big government is stepping onto little guy’.”⁷³

In the midst of the controversy, it was the LTCDAC which was indeed caught between the East-West and the community activists. As

mentioned earlier, the Committee had to respond to the various interests of the community members. Here, their primary role to “promote understanding by the CRA, the City, and the community itself, the general and specific desires, hopes, interests, and needs of the property owners, residents, business and professional men and all persons affected directly or indirectly by the Little Tokyo Redevelopment project,”⁷⁴ faced the most difficult challenge. Their efforts to serve as a “bridge” were directed first toward the younger activists. At the meeting prior to the rally before the City Council, Eddie Wong of the Little Tokyo People’s Rights Organization announced their plan for the rally and asked the Committee for support. The Committee decided that they could not support the demands of the LTPRO. However, they agreed to pressure CRA to provide more support for the tenants of the Sun.⁷⁵

The Committee also tried to put pressure on the East-West. To the East-West, the delay because of “snarls in relocating businesses and tenants from the Sun” was nothing but a frustration. They did not hesitate to complain: “We’re telling CRA that this is our last concession. Time is money and this is costing us money.”⁷⁶ While all the parties were frustrated and angered, the Committee was aware that practically the only channel between activists and business representatives from Japan was the Committee’s meetings. Article XXII of the Committee designated that “all LTCDAC meetings shall be open to the public,”⁷⁷ but at first regular “guest” participants seldom included those from Japanese corporations. Later, on March 3, 1977, the Committee decided to “send a letter of request to East-West Corporation to have an authorized representative attend further LTCDAC meetings.”⁷⁸ Thereafter, representatives from the East-West showed up at the Committee meetings along with community members including LTPRO. The Committee thus tried to treat Japanese businesses as part of the “community”.

Nonetheless, the LTCDAC’s efforts as a “bridge” between Japanese corporations and younger activists were not always successful. Opportunities for direct communication were limited, and the Japanese businesses never fully transmitted the “goodness of their hearts” to the younger activists. As Fukuhara recalled, many activists thought that the issues involved the decision-making process. He said: “When the city began the projects’ design, they [young activists] weren’t against them” and “the sentiment against Japanese business came after the decision-making process. They might have asked how and why the decision was made.”⁷⁹ He then added: “The attitudes must be different depending on

whether or not they live in the community. The city government planned the projects and these companies only joined after plans were prepared.” And the suspicion among the activists—“After all, Kajima does not live in this community”⁸⁰—could not be easily diluted.

CONCLUSION

As exemplified in this paper, in the early years of the redevelopment, there were successful projects made possible by the efforts of both Japanese Americans and Japanese. In order to save Little Tokyo, community members, mainly of the *Nisei* generation, took an active part in the redevelopment process. Their efforts to have the Japanese government and businesses substantially involved in the early redevelopment projects negates the conventional narrative of conflict between “outsiders” and the “community.” Although the fear of “Japanization” was commonly heard, the Japanese American community showed diverse interests and sentiments instead of being all-out hostile against “outsiders.”

This active involvement of the older generation reinforced the significance of Little Tokyo as both “Japan-town” and a “bridge between two cultures.” Seeing Little Tokyo as a “dying ghetto,” they sought to revive the community and rejuvenate Little Tokyo by injecting new waves of Japan in various forms: money, culture and people. As Kurashige argues, putting “economic power as the baseline for Japanese American ethnicity”⁸¹ was surely promoted by the City and Japanese business. At the same time, it was also in accordance with Japanese Americans’ pragmatism to save Little Tokyo.

Therefore, Kurashige’s observation that “the wave of foreign investment associated with Little Tokyo redevelopment began to erode the indigenous base of Japanese American ethnicity” can be argued from a different perspective.⁸² With no massive immigration after World War II, Little Tokyo redevelopment was a continuous process of rearticulating what kind of “indigenous” culture Little Tokyo possessed. It also rearticulated the boundary of community and its members, who carry and transmit Japanese American culture. The early redevelopment process revealed that the minorities in Little Tokyo in fact included members who were not Japanese Americans, people such as Latino residents and *shin-Issei*. In other words, in the midst of the larger structural change of Japanese American ethnicity, various functions of the community—

cultural, historical, institutional, and commercial—came to be transmitted not only through Japanese Americans but Japanese and other multi-ethnic groups.

The signs of this transformation were already seen in the early redevelopment projects of Little Tokyo. In due course, the redevelopment projects became touchstones for Little Tokyo to transform itself, in the eyes of Japanese Americans, into a “cultural bridge in several directions—from generation to generation of our own community, from Japan to America and from our community to the U.S. culture at large.”⁸³ In this sense, Little Tokyo redevelopment facilitated the transformation of Japanese American community by rearticulating “ethnic indigeneness” and the boundary of “internal others.”⁸⁴ In the early phase of the redevelopment, this rearticulation occurred in the form of developing Little Tokyo into a “Japan-town” while reconfirming it as a historic/symbolic homeland of Japanese Americans.

NOTES

¹ Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, *Fact Book/Little Tokyo*, January 1970.

² *Ibid.*

³ The redevelopment project was adopted by the Los Angeles City Council on February 24, 1970 and ended on February 24, 2000. The CRA was established in 1948 under the California Urban Development Act. The responsibilities of the CRA included the “clearance of the slum area, rehabilitation of the blight, construction of the housing for low-middle class income holders, and promotion of the economic growth and job opportunities.” Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, *Pamphlet 10/6/86*, June 1986. (In Japanese, translated by the author.)

⁴ Stephen S. Fugita and David O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity: The Persistence of Community* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), 184.

⁵ Yasuko Takezawa, *Nikkei Amerikajin no Ethnicity: Kyoseishuyo to hoshoundo niyoru henshen* (The Transformation of Japanese American Ethnicity: The Effect of Interment and Redress) (Tokyo: Univ. of Tokyo Press, 1994).

⁶ Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934–1990* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Teruko Kumei, *Gaikokujin o meguru Shakaishi: Kindai America to Nihonjin Imin* (Social History of Foreigners: Japanese Immigrants and Modern Japan) (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1995), 220–221; and Eiichiro Azuma, “The Politics of Transnational History Making: Japanese Immigrants on the Western ‘Frontier,’ 1927–1941,” *The Journal of American History* (March 2003): 1402–1405, 1429–1430.

⁹ On Japanese American’s involvement in Licensed Agencies for Relief in America: LARA project, see Masako Iino, *Mou hitotsu no Nichibei-Kankeishi: Funso to kyocho no naka no Nikkei Amerikajin* (Another Japan-U.S. relation: Japanese Americans in

conflicts and cooperation) (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 2000), 156–166. Iino presents the fact that an organizing committee of LARA in NY included some *Nisei* members. *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰ Using “Stress-Symbolization process” concept, geographer Sugiura discusses that the Little Tokyo redevelopment was not a single, monolithic process, therefore should be construed as cyclical and flexible one. Tadashi Sugiura, “Bunka/shakai kukan no sei-sei henyō to symbol ka katei: Little Tokyo no kansatsu kara” (Sociocultural Space and Symbolization Process: A Case Study of Little Tokyo, Los Angeles) *Geographical Review of Japan*, 71A, (December 1998): 905.

¹¹ Steven Mori, “Little Tokyo Redevelopment; Who is it For?” (Student paper submitted to Asian American Studies Center, UCLA, 1970); Jim H. Matsuoka, “Little Tokyo, Searching the Past and Analyzing the Future,” Amy Tachiki et al. eds., *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971), (see especially the discussion on the redevelopment and Japanese influx, 329–334); and Candice Ota, “Radical Awakening, Community Strength,” *Nisei Week Festival Inc., 1990 Nisei Week Japanese Festival 50th Anniversary 1934–1990* (Los Angeles: Nisei Week Festival, Inc., 1990), 122–125. On *Sansei*’s activism in Little Tokyo redevelopment through examining their principle of “national development,” see Tomoyasu Taketomo, *Little Tokyo Monogatari: Nikkei communist to sono shison tachi* (Stories of Little Tokyo: Nikkei Communists and their Descendants) (Osaka: Shiki Shobo, 1978), 190–229.

¹² *Ibid.*, 205.

¹³ Kurashige, *Japanese American*, 193. For the demographic change including the number of the new immigrants from Japan in the post WWII Little Tokyo, see *Ibid.* 190.

¹⁴ The images of Little Tokyo with historical accounts are provided in Ichiro Mike Murase, *Little Tokyo-One Hundred Years in Pictures* (Visual communication/Asian American Studies Central), 1983. On community moral movements in the pre-WWII Little Tokyo from a racial formation perspective, see Fuminori Minamikawa, “Ethnic Town ni Okeru Jinshu Hensei: 1910 Nendaimatsu Los Angeles Nikkei Imin niyoru kyōhū undo o chūshin ni (Little Tokyo and Moral Reform Campaign in the Late 1910s),” *Studies of American History*, No.26 (July 2003): 71–87.

¹⁵ Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, *Redevelopment Project Report 1970–1980* (Los Angeles, CRA, 1980), 4.

¹⁶ Author’s interview with Gloria Uchida at CRA Little Tokyo Office, 9 September 1993.

¹⁷ Little Tokyo Redevelopment Association, *General Plan for Little Tokyo*, 27 November 1963, 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Little Tokyo Community Development Advisory Committee, *Purpose of the Little Tokyo Community Development Advisory Committee*, preface.

²¹ Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, *Redevelopment Project Biennial Report 1980–1990* (Los Angeles, CRA 1990), 12.

²² Author’s interview with Katsumi Kunitsugu, at JACCC office, September 9, 1993. She served as one of the active members of the LTCDAC, and later became an executive secretary of the JACCC.

²³ CRA, *Pamphlet 10/6/86*, June 1986, 12.

²⁴ Little Tokyo Redevelopment Taskforce (LTRT), *Little Tokyo Redevelopment*, August 1973, 2.

²⁵ Other projects included: Union Church was moved in 1976. Japanese Village Plaza, a shopping center, built by the efforts of David Hyun, “local Korean” businessman was completed in 1978.

- ²⁶ Japanese American Community Center, *10th Anniversary Commemorative Book, 1980–1990* (Los Angeles: JACCC, 1990), 8.
- ²⁷ *Rafu Shimpo*, 23 December 1976.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ *Rafu Shimpo*, 12 January 1977.
- ³⁰ JACCC, *10th Anniversary Commemorative Book*, 7.
- ³¹ LTCDAC, Minutes of Meeting, Thursday, 24 February 1977, 2.
- ³² JACCC, *10th Anniversary Commemorative Book*, 91. The exact date of the creation *Koenkai* is unknown. However, as of November 18, 1977, the motions had been made to set up “a non-profit organization in Japan to run the campaign of funds there.” LTC-DAC, Minutes of Meeting, Thursday, 18 November 1976 2.
- ³³ JACCC, *10th Anniversary Commemorative Book*, preface.
- ³⁴ *Asian Week*, 6 February, 1987.
- ³⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1977.
- ³⁶ Kajima Associates, *Kajima Associates* (Pamphlet), 1.
- ³⁷ LTRT, *Little Tokyo Redevelopment*, 3.
- ³⁸ Keizai Salon, *Keizai Salon*, Spring Special Issue, 1973.
- ³⁹ LTRT, *Little Tokyo Redevelopment*, 6.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Author’s Interview with Joe S. Fukuhara at the Union Bank Little Tokyo Branch on 8 September 1993. (The interview was conducted in Japanese. In this paper, the author translated it into English.)
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Nisei Week Festival Inc., *1990 Nisei Week Festival*, 125.
- ⁴⁷ *Rafu Shimpo*, 2 December 1976.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1977.
- ⁵¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1977.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Kurashige, *Japanese American*, 195.
- ⁵⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1977.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1977.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1977.
- ⁶² Interview with Kunitsugu.
- ⁶³ Author’s Interview with Harry Honda at Pacific Citizen Little Tokyo Office, 9 September 1993.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Interview with Fukuhara.
- ⁶⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1977.
- ⁶⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1977.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Interview with Kunitsugu.

⁷¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1977.

⁷² Interview with Kunitsugu.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ LTCDAC, *Purpose*, preface.

⁷⁵ LTCDAC, *Minutes of Meeting*, Thursday, 24 February 1977, 2.

⁷⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March, 1977.

⁷⁷ LTCDAC, Section 1, Article XXII of the *LTCDAC BYLAWS*, 6.

⁷⁸ LTCDAC, *Minutes of Meeting*, Thursday, 3 March 1977, 2.

⁷⁹ Interview with Fukuhara.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Kurashige, *Japanese American*, 205.

⁸² Ibid, 195.

⁸³ *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 1983.

⁸⁴ Closely related to the discussion of “internal others,” as the referees rightly suggested, further discussion of multi-ethnic/national relations in Little Tokyo, especially in the 1970s, should be explored. In writing this paper, I felt that a more articulate description of “internal others” in Little Tokyo should especially include *shin-Issei* (the new first generation immigrants). Therefore, further examination of the involvement of *shin-Issei*, Latino and other Asian workers in Little Tokyo redevelopment will be my next research agenda.