

## LEISURE PREFERENCES AND OPEN SPACE NEEDS IN AN URBAN CHINESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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*Leisure preferences and open space needs were explored within a discrete, homogeneous ethnic community: the Chinese Americans of Chicago's Chinatown. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were used to identify outdoor leisure patterns and preferences, in general, and with respect to new park development being planned for the community. Findings show that although some popular activities are no different from what might be expected for the mainstream Anglo American population, the meaning and significance of these activities have clear and unique ties to Chinese culture. Preferences for the new Chinatown park development mirror activity preferences, emphasizing facilities that enhance the natural environment for passive activities. Notable differences in activity preferences were found within the sample of respondents according to age, generational status, and other factors. Park planning considerations and future research needs are identified.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Professionals in open space planning, design, and management face new challenges in serving an increasingly diverse urban population. Studies conducted in urban areas such as Chicago have shown that racial and ethnic groups differ in how they use open space for recreation (e.g., group size) and in what activities they pursue there (Hutchison, 1987; Gobster and Delgado, 1993). Although these and other comparative studies in urban and wildland contexts have identified racial and ethnic group differences in leisure and recreation, information about *why* such differences exist remains scarce. This knowledge is essential for creating and improving recreational areas, programs, and services for a diverse population.

To build upon the findings of comparative research on broadly defined social aggregate groups, Alison suggests "we begin focusing on the role, nature, and meaning of leisure within different cultural groups" (1988:253). Studying the leisure preferences and open space needs of a single group may also help reduce biases such as judgments about "underparticipation" of one group relative to another (Woodard, 1993) or stereotyping a group as culturally monolithic (Floyd and Gramann, 1993).

This paper attempts to describe the dynamics of leisure preferences and open space needs of one such group, Chinese Americans who live in Chicago's Chinatown community. The ethnic homogeneity of the Chinatown community in Chicago makes for an ideal case study of ethnically based leisure preferences. Plans to build a new park in Chinatown also provide a pragmatic and timely context in which to understand open space needs.

Existing research on ethnicity and leisure provides useful theoretical guides for this work. Comparative studies of recreational activity participation by Washburne (1978) and others (e.g., Washburne and Wall, 1980; O'Leary and Benjamin, 1982; Hutchison, 1987; West, 1989; Dwyer and Hutchison, 1990) offer two reasons why groups may or may not engage in a given activity. The "marginality" thesis poses that historical repression has placed minority groups at the margins of society, resulting in lower participation in some recreation activities due to social impacts like discrimination, or economic hardships due to outlays of time, travel, or money. Researchers have found partial support for the marginality thesis in data showing that African Americans and some other racial and ethnic minority groups tend to recreate closer to home and in activities that do not require high user fees or equipment expenditures. Additionally, West (1989) and others (e.g., Blahna and Black, 1993; Gobster and Delgado, 1993) have found racial discrimination to be a significant problem in minority use of urban parks, and one that might act as a barrier to greater participation.

The "ethnicity" thesis poses that distinct ethnic or subcultural preferences among ethnic groups result in relative differences in activity participation. Researchers (e.g., Washburne and Wall, 1980) who have controlled for economic effects have found that some activity participation differences between racial and ethnic groups persist, providing at least partial support for the ethnicity thesis. Although difficult to generalize, there is often a lower participation among minority individuals in nature-based outdoor recreation activities (e.g. camping) and higher participation in some group sports (e.g., basketball, soccer) and passive social activities (e.g., picnicking).

Currently, many researchers (e.g., Floyd and Gramann, 1993) feel both marginality and ethnicity influence participation, and in this study in Chinatown the authors sought to examine how these factors might operate for the Chinese American community. However, as discussed below, additional theoretical explanations might also help provide a clearer picture of leisure needs and preferences of Chinese Americans and other racial and ethnic groups.

Floyd and Gramann (1993) identify two such additional concepts. *Acculturation* is a process through which a minority group adopts cultural characteristics of a dominant group. *Assimilation* is a related process through which a minority group joins the society of the dominant group, interacting and participating in activities with the dominant group. In their study of Mexican American and Anglo American households in Arizona, Floyd and Gramann found that Mexican Americans who were least acculturated or assimilated participated in significantly fewer water/snow-based, urban, consumptive, and travel-oriented activities and did so at fewer National Forest locations than did Anglo Americans

or Mexican Americans who were most acculturated. To expand upon these findings in the context of Chinese Americans in Chinatown, for acculturation one might not only investigate the activities that a group engages in, but also the social, spatial, and temporal contexts in which they are performed. For assimilation, one might examine how individuals move outside the ethnic community for recreation engagements, as well as the social nature of those engagements.

The spatial and temporal dimensions of behavior are two other concepts that might also provide guidance for understanding the meaning and practice of leisure within ethnic groups. One writer whose work has particular relevance for architectural and planning research is the anthropologist Edward Hall (1969, 1983; Hall and Hall, 1990). Among his research on the spatial dimensions of behavior, Hall's work on proxemics (1969) shows that different cultural groups exhibit different standards for what they consider to be appropriate distances for interpersonal contact and privacy. These and other culturally-based spatial patterns have implications for open space design, the arrangement of amenities like benches, and other park facility development. Hall and Hall's (1990) findings that cultural groups sometimes differ in how they conceive of time may also have relevance in understanding leisure preferences and behavior. Some cultures operate on *polychronic time*, a time system that is characterized by "the simultaneous occurrence of many things and by a great involvement with people" (p. 14). Mainstream American culture, in contrast, is highly influenced by *monochronic time*, a linear time system in which activities like work and leisure are "scheduled and compartmentalized; making it possible for a person to concentrate on one thing at a time" (p. 13).

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework for addressing issues related to leisure preferences and open space needs in the Chinese American community of Chicago's Chinatown. This paper addresses three research objectives:

- To characterize leisure patterns of the Chinese American community in Chicago's Chinatown in terms of activities, frequency, and location;
- To understand preferences and problems relative to leisure and recreation, in general and in relation to new park and open space development;
- To identify variations in leisure activities and open space preferences as a function of age, gender, generational status, and other factors.

### ***Asian American Leisure Perspectives***

In addition to the theoretical and applied research reviewed for this investigation, information was sought specifically on the leisure patterns and preferences of Asian American groups. This work is best characterized by its sparseness, recency, and diversity of methods and findings (Dwyer, 1994; Allison and Geiger, 1993). Additionally, much of the research on Asian Americans has been conducted in a comparative context, addressing Asian Americans as one racial or ethnic minority along with African American and Hispanic American groups. In work of this nature, sample sizes are often small and thus results must be interpreted cautiously.

Dwyer's (1994) study of recreation participation in Illinois included telephone survey data from a sample of Asians ( $n = 56$ ) in 31 specified outdoor activities. Findings showed significantly higher participation by Asian Americans in picnicking and tennis compared with Anglo Americans.

Blahna (1991, 1992) examined the outdoor recreation activities of ethnic minority groups in Chicago using a multi-method approach. An on-site survey (1992) found Asian Americans ( $n = 14$ ) and other minority anglers traveled further to reach a metropolitan area state park to fish than did Anglo American anglers. Asian Americans and other minority anglers also tended to fish the developed river site in the park, while Anglo Americans tended to fish the rustic, walk-in lake site. A telephone survey (1991) found low rates of participation among Asian American college students ( $n = 36$ ) in most nature-related activities compared with Anglo American students, except for the consumptive activities of apple and berry picking and fishing. Focus groups (1991) with Southeast Asian college students ( $n = 43$ ) found similar rates of participation in nature recreation, especially by recent Cam-

bodian arrivals who before coming to America had escaped to mountainous rural areas to live during that country's upheaval. Gender differences in recreation participation were also reported by Southeast Asian focus group participants: several young adult females reported that rigid, culturally-defined gender roles barred them from activities like camping without being chaperoned by an older male family member, while brothers of similar age had much greater freedom choosing activities and social groups.

Hutchison's (1993) study of the Hmong population in Green Bay, Wisconsin, provides a detailed look at leisure and recreation activity within a new immigrant community. Through open-ended questions in face-to-face interviews, Hutchison concluded that while the recreation and leisure activities of Hmong survey participants (n = 125) closely resembled that of other groups in the local community, survey participants' integration of leisure with daily household activities and with the extended family contrasted strikingly with the dominant population.

An on-site survey of Asian, Hispanic, Anglo, and African American groups in Chicago's Lincoln Park (Gobster and Delgado, 1993) provided some baseline information about park use by Chinese Americans. The greatest diversity of use patterns and activity participation in these groups was found within the Asian American sample of participants (n = 167). This diversity was partly attributable to the diversity of Asian ethnic groups that use the park. Chinese American park use (n = 28) was characterized by high participation in picnicking, swimming, and volleyball; a high preference for facility development; and visitation to the park in relatively small groups as compared with other Asian ethnic groups. Travel to the park reflected Chicago's homogeneous ethnic communities, with most Chinese Americans coming from the Chinatown area.

Finally, Allison and Geiger (1993) used open-ended personal interviews to collect detailed information about the leisure time of a sample (n = 25) of elderly Chinese Americans living in the urban Southwest U.S. Like Hutchison (1993), Allison and Geiger found that reported activities only told part of the story about the place of leisure in people's lives. For Chinese American elderly, leisure is often viewed as an inseparable part of daily life and serves many functions including the maintenance of ethnic culture and identity.

### ***Problem Setting***

Chicago's average park area of 2.67 acres per 1,000 persons ranks far behind most other major U.S. cities (Chicago Park District, 1993) and the National Recreation and Parks Association's recommended 10-acre standard (NRPA, 1990). The uneven distribution of park space exacerbates the problem, with 8 of the city's 77 community areas having less than 1 acre of park space per 1,000 residents. Three of these areas classified as being in "greatest need" of additional park space (Chicago Park District, 1990) are clustered just southwest of downtown, in the aging industrial/working class residential section known as Chinatown.

Open space needs in today's Chinatown stem from historical, cultural, and geographical factors. As one of Chicago's earliest (and first non-European) immigrant groups, Chinese first began to settle north of the current location of Chinatown in 1870. By 1890, sharp increases in apartment rental rates forced tenants to relocate south to lower cost housing in a small residential area surrounded by railroad tracks, factories, and the South Branch of the Chicago River (Kiang, 1992) (Figure 1). In this constricted area of about 1 square mile, Chicago's Chinese American community grew and prospered. Strong intergenerational ties, language, commercial interests, discrimination, and other factors have kept the Chinatown community tightly knit (Kinkead, 1992). The ethnicity of the six census tracts that define Chinatown's core area ranges from 55 to 100 percent Chinese American, and a full 42 percent of all Chinese Americans living in Chicago (9,266 of 22,295) reside in Chinatown (Zhang, *et al.*, 1992).

The only public park in the core Chinatown area is the Sun Yat-Sen Playground Park, a 1/3-acre park with some seating and playground equipment for tots. Concern about this lack of community open space was voiced in a recent survey of Chinatown opinion leaders (n = 51), in which 75 percent of community leaders and 49 percent of business leaders felt "the lack of open space in the Chinatown

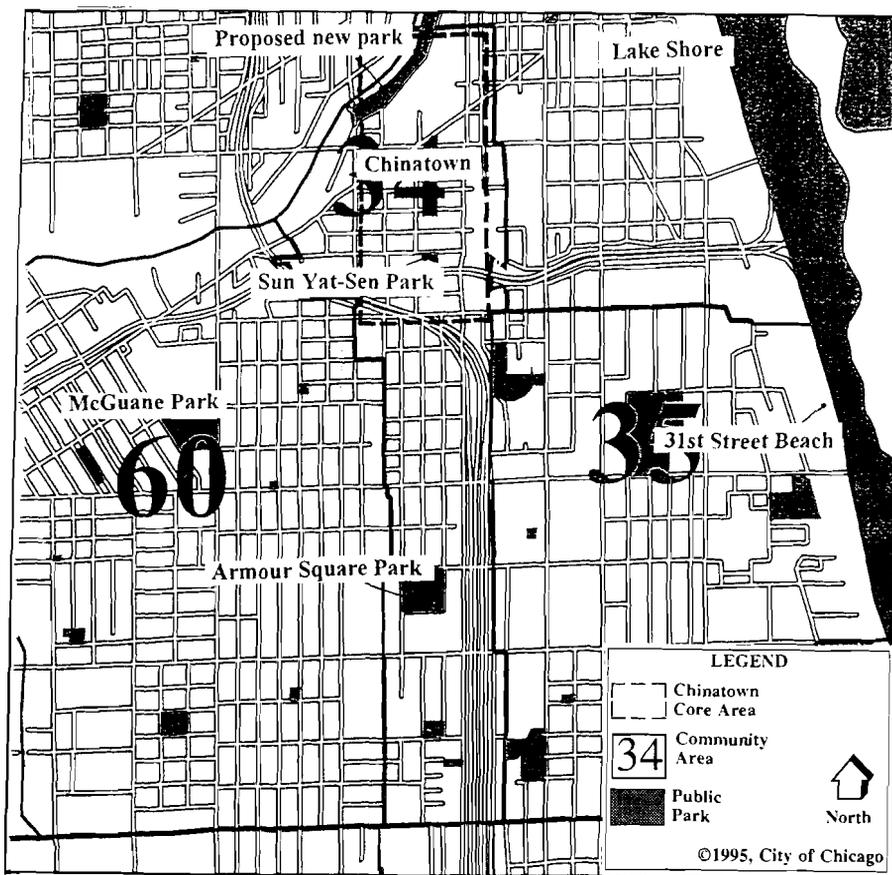


FIGURE 1. Map of Chinatown and vicinity.

area is one of the most serious problems facing the community" (Zhang, *et al.*, 1992). Both groups ranked open space problems first among 15 community issues, including crime, education, housing, and employment.

In recognizing this deficiency, the Chicago Park District proposed creating a new park on vacant industrial land along the South Branch of Chicago River. The recently purchased 12-acre parcel lies just north of Chinatown and is awaiting plans and funding for development. A park design workshop was held in 1991, and a written survey provided some initial ideas from those in the community who attended. This survey and the opinion leader survey spurred interest to further study the leisure preferences and open space needs of the Chinatown community.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The data for this paper come from several related studies that focused in whole or in part on Chinese Americans and the Chinatown community. Face-to-face interviews and focus groups were used to expand upon the original base of information collected from the opinion leader and park design workshop surveys.

### *Face-to-Face Interviews*

Face-to-face interviews provided the major base of quantitative information for this paper. Experiences gained from the opinion leader and park design workshop surveys proved helpful in implementing the interviews. Although most opinion leaders were fluent in Chinese and English, English-only surveys returned from the park design workshop may have limited responses from some older residents

TABLE 1. Age and gender of the respondent sample, face-to-face interviews.

Age (years)	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
12-25	30	30	60
26-59	50	52	102
60	20	21	41
Total	100	103	203

who were not fluent in English. So, a verbal survey was conducted by interviewers who could speak Cantonese and Tui-Shan, dialects used in Southern China from where most Chinatown residents originated, as well as English. Despite its relative economy, a telephone survey was dismissed because past experience

showed that many first generation Chinatown residents who came from rural China were not comfortable talking with strangers by telephone and that face-to-face communication was required to build the trust needed for residents to share their concerns and feelings. For these reasons, a face-to-face interview was the chosen survey method.

The study population consisted of Chinese Americans residing within the core area of Chinatown as shown in Figure 1. The initial sampling focused on household residents. All residential buildings in the core area were identified, and buildings with odd-numbered addresses on east-west streets and even-numbered addresses on north-south streets were targeted. All household members present who were older than 12 years were interviewed, the rationale being that males and females and adults and children could each supply unique information about recreational needs and preferences. This strategy was also used to avoid response bias because in traditional Chinese culture, the male head of household (father, husband, or adult son) speaks for the whole family. However, when residential interviews took place, many men were at work in the daytime and either at work or at friends' homes or tea houses in the evening. As a result, this residential sample (n = 129) had a majority of adult female respondents.

For a better age and gender balance, sampling was expanded to include commercial stores and community organizations in the core area. First, all commercial store properties were identified, and business owners, salespersons, and customers present were interviewed. This yielded another 39 persons from 17 stores. Second, all community organizations in the core area were identified and three major non-profit organizations were selected to sample: the Chinese American Service League, the Chinatown Youth Center, and the Chinese Benevolent Association. From these, 35 visitors and staff were randomly selected for interviews. In total, the sample included 203 individuals. As shown in Table 1, the sample was distributed well across gender and age categories, except for persons 12 years and under. This sample represents about 1/50 of the study population of 9,266 Chinese American residents of Chinatown.

The face-to-face interviews focused on leisure preferences and open space needs. Basic demographic information was also collected. Respondents were asked about their current outdoor activities, locations where they participated in these activities, frequency of participation, size of group in which they participate for stated activities, and problems encountered when engaging in or attempting to engage in activities. Other questions focused on activity and environmental preferences, in general and as they related to the proposed new Chinatown park. Open-ended questions were used to obtain free responses on use patterns, perceptions, and preferences, while closed-ended questions queried respondents on key questions relating to traditional Chinese leisure activities, the experience of discrimination, and the use of specific places in and around Chinatown. In addition to the standard demographic questions, information was obtained about place of birth and the number of years the respondent had lived in the U.S. These latter questions would provide information about the influence of generational status on the maintenance of traditional and/or the adoption of Western leisure patterns and preferences.

### *Focus Groups*

Focus group information is included in this paper to help interpret and lend further insight into the findings of the face-to-face interviews. Two focus group sessions were held with adults and teens, and two with children. An adult/teen group was conducted at the outset of this research, and was one of

eleven focus groups held as part of a larger project called *ChicagoRivers* that examined leisure preferences and open space needs along the entire Chicago River corridor (Gobster and Westphal, in press). For the Chinatown group, a small, random sample of individuals (n = 6) living in the core Chinatown area was recruited. Due to the abilities of the facilitator for the study, participation was limited to those who could speak English. This skewed the participation of the group to teens and younger adults, but one older male was also in attendance. Questions in the discussion guide focused on current outdoor recreation activities pursued by participants, perceptions of the ideal recreation setting, images of the Chicago River in their neighborhood, and ideas about river development for recreation.

TABLE 2. Top-ranked outdoor activities, face-to-face interviews.

Activity	n	Percent (%)
Relaxing	96	47.4
Swimming	37	18.2
Basketball	34	16.8
Tennis	30	14.8
Biking	26	12.8
Volleyball	25	12.3
Taiji	15	7.4
Running	15	7.4
Baseball	13	6.4
Roller skating	13	6.4

A second adult focus group was held with elderly Chinese Americans and was one of 35 focus groups conducted to examine perception and use of Chicago's Lincoln Park by ethnic minority groups (Gobster and Delgado, 1993). The group discussion did not focus on Chinatown open space issues per se, but addressed open space needs — in general and as they pertain to Lincoln Park — that were relevant to Chinatown. Five seniors participated in the focus group, which was facilitated by an English-speaking facilitator and translated into Cantonese by an interpreter.

Because young children are an important recreation user group in the Chinatown community, two additional focus groups were conducted with children 12 years and younger. One group included 9-to-12-year-olds who attended Healy Elementary, a public school in the Chinatown area (n = 10), and the other included 6-to-8-year-olds who attended a preschool program at the Chinatown Youth Center (n = 19). The children were asked a brief set of questions about outdoor activities they liked and locations where they played. They were also asked to draw pictures and to describe in words what their "ideal park space" would be like if one were built in their community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Current Use*

*Activities.* Findings from the face-to-face interviews showed that relaxing, swimming, basketball, tennis, and bicycling were the five top outdoor activities respondents did in their free time. Other popular activities mentioned in this open-ended question included volleyball, taiji, running, baseball, and roller skating (Table 2).

Although many of these activities parallel what might be found in recreation surveys of the mainstream American population, it would be wrong to conclude this participation is a direct result of acculturation. Participants in the face-to-face interviews provided some perspective on the distinct meaning and significance that such outdoor activity had within Chinese culture. A case in point is "relaxing." Relaxing — including walking, people-watching, sitting, and chatting — was clearly the dominant outdoor recreation activity of Chinatown residents, mentioned by nearly half (47.4%) of survey participants. Although the weight of this statistic may be in part a function of the multiple activities that compose it, most respondents found it difficult to think about their major leisure pastime as a series of independently defined activities. More significantly, the Chinese Americans in the sample did not consider the time they spent relaxing as "leisure" separate from the "non-leisure" activities of their daily life. A typical example given by an elderly man illustrates this. Early every morning he walks to the market. He walks around the neighborhood mini-park for several minutes and sits on a bench in the park, talking with neighbors while watching his friends engaged in taiji, a traditional Chinese exercise. Then he goes to the market for fresh foods and back home. This routine is fundamental to his daily life. All his activities — walking, watching other people, chatting, sitting

— are unified, and have multiple meanings. To separate these activities or label them as "leisure" and "non-leisure" would be to lose the meaning and significance of the routine. This description closely matches Hall and Hall's (1990) conception of polychronic time, where multiple activities are engaged in simultaneously. This contrasts with their description of the monochronic time typical of Anglo American culture, in which activities are dealt with in a discrete, linear fashion, and would thus tend to separate and compartmentalize leisure from non-leisure activity.

A second popular activity with a strong cultural tradition is swimming. More than 90 percent of Chinese Americans in the Chinatown area originally came from Guangdong (Canton) province, in the south part of mainland China, a region of numerous rivers and lakes. As a result, many people in Guangdong (the Cantonese) adopt swimming as an outdoor activity; its popularity is reflected by the high proportion of Chinese Olympic swimming team members and coaches who come from this province. This heritage plays a role in why nearly one in five (18.2%) survey respondents engaged in swimming.

A third activity having a cultural basis is taiji, a traditional Chinese exercise. Although only slightly more than 7 percent of the sample mentioned taiji, this level compares closely with survey data from South China that showed 11 percent of urban residents engaged in taiji (Zhang, 1984).

On the other hand, other popular activities listed by study participants might in fact reflect acculturation into mainstream culture, particularly among the younger and American born. Our focus groups shed some light in this respect, highlighting how activity differences varied with age. Among the younger adults in the ChicagoRivers focus group, sports activities in the Chinatown area included:

[Gene, a teen-age male:] *Tennis, basketball in McGuane Park.*

[Adrienne, a young adult female:] *I go jogging in the mornings around the block and sometimes in the park, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park. I really don't do anything there, just the little kids play over there. It's one block away so it is very convenient for me. The little kids roller-skate there and there is a playground.*

[Anson, a young adult male:] *Tennis at McGuane Park.*

[Brian #1, a teen-age male:] *... These last few weeks, down the next street I saw people set up their own volleyball net and played volleyball. Biking on the streets, it's not really dangerous.*

While outdoor activities for seniors in the Lincoln Park study included:

[Female #1:] *Many old people do taiji in the morning, along the beach ...*

[Female #2:] *There is a master teaching Chinese exercise. Not taiji ...*

[Interviewer:] *Do young people participate in it?*

[Female #1:] *No. Old people.*

[Interviewer:] *Do you ever go to the park just to watch people play baseball or soccer or volleyball?*

[Female #1:] *Very few. We are not interested in those games.*

[Female #2:] *We just go to the park for a walk, not for watching games.*

[Male #2:] *I go there for relaxing, not for watching games.*

Little evidence was found about why some outdoor activities were *not* popular. Some activities popular in mainstream Anglo American culture may not be frequently done by Chinese Americans in Chinatown because of "marginality" (economic) constraints; more than half of those responding to the income question in our face-to-face interviews had household incomes under \$20,000. Other activities may not be engaged in because of the influence of "ethnicity" factors in Chinese culture; for example,

TABLE 3. Locations of top-ranked outdoor activities, face-to-face interviews.

Activity/Location	n	%	Activity/Location	n	%
<i>Relaxing</i>			<i>Volleyball</i>		
Chinatown neighborhood	56	57	St. Therese School	12	48
Sun Yat-Sen Park	17	17	McGuane Park	5	20
Near senior's home	9	9	Neighborhood	2	8
Near Lake Shore	5	5	Chinatown church	2	8
			Other schools	2	8
<i>Swimming</i>			<i>Traditional/Taiji</i>		
McGuane Park	17	46	Near senior's home	10	67
Univ. of Illinois	5	14	Yard at home	3	20
River City Health Club	5	14	Sun Yat-Sen Park	2	13
<i>Basketball</i>			<i>Running</i>		
McGuane Park	24	67	Chinatown neighborhood	10	67
Armour Square Park	4	11	Other places	5	23
Chinatown church	2	6			
<i>Tennis</i>			<i>Baseball</i>		
McGuane Park	25	86	McGuane Park	7	50
Armour Square Park	2	7	Armour Square Park	3	21
			Schools	2	14
<i>Biking</i>			<i>Roller skating</i>		
Chinatown neighborhood	13	50	Chinatown neighborhood	6	46
Near Lake Shore	7	27	Rainbow Center	4	31
Various places	2	8			

seniors from the Lincoln Park focus group remarked that sunbathing was an activity that Chinese and Asians in general did not care to partake in for cultural reasons:

[Interviewer:] *Don't you like to be out in the sun when you go to the park?*

[Female 1:] *No, I don't like it. We don't like to get tanned.*

[Female 2:] *The sun is too strong sometimes, I don't go out under the sun. Asian people do not like to go out in the sun. We think it is better to look light.*

The two focus groups with children showed a range of individual and group activities. The younger children (6-to-8-year-olds) mentioned using playground equipment such as swings and slides, playing group games like "catch-up," and swimming. The older children (9-to-12-year-olds) mentioned organized games like basketball and tennis, as well as bicycling and swimming. Such activities are often done in school where Chinese American students interact with other racial and ethnic groups, perhaps indicating an assimilation into mainstream culture.

*Activity patterns.* Participants in the face-to-face interviews were also asked about the frequency and location of top-ranked activities. Frequency of participation varied by activity, with some activities taking place on a daily basis and others more occasionally. Three activities showed a particularly high frequency of participation. As mentioned earlier, relaxing was an activity many Chinese Americans in the sample considered "a part of daily life." This level of integration was reflected in the frequency data; the majority (62%) who mentioned relaxing said they did it on a daily basis. Taiji (100%) and running (53%) were two other activities participants often did on a daily basis. Although the cultural origins of these latter two activities may differ greatly, one could argue that they share many commonalities in terms of their ritual characteristics and their integration into daily routines.

For activities that did not require special facilities, respondents tended to stay within the Chinatown neighborhood. Commonly mentioned locations for relaxing, bicycling, taiji, running, and roller skating included people's yards, a small plaza at the senior citizen's home, the Sun Yat-Sen Playlot, and the "Chinatown neighborhood" (Table 3 and Figure 1). Except for play equipment at the Sun Yat-Sen Playlot, no developed public park facilities exist in the core Chinatown area. Thus, for swimming, basketball, tennis, volleyball, baseball, and other sports, Chinatown residents rely on facilities else-

TABLE 4. Activities engaged in at selected locations, face-to-face interviews.

Location	Activity	n	%
Sun Yat-Sen Park	Relaxing	82	40.4
	Swing/slide	6	30.0
Senior's home	Relaxing	42	20.7
	Taiji	2	1.0
Yard at home	Gardening	62	30.5
	Relaxing	14	6.9
	BBQ/picnic	6	3.0
31st St. beach	Relaxing	19	9.4
	Biking	6	3.0
	Swimming	3	1.5
Lincoln Park	Visiting zoo	96	47.3
	Relaxing	14	6.9
	BBQ/picnic	2	1.0
Grant Park	Relaxing	70	34.5
	Fairs	43	21.2
	Biking	7	3.4
State parks	BBQ/picnic	13	6.4
	Relaxing	4	2.0
	Fishing	4	2.0
	Camping	4	2.0
Forest preserves	BBQ/picnic	17	8.4
	Camping	5	2.5
	Relaxing	3	1.5

where. These facilities include a church and parochial school in the core area, as well as public parks and schools and private facilities located beyond a reasonable walking distance. Although this survey focused on outdoor activities, it was clear from people's responses that most swimming occurred at indoor facilities.

Respondents were also asked if and how they used each of eight specified locations, including three neighborhood sites, three lakefront parks in the city, and state parks and county forest preserves (no specific locations given). Results for the neighborhood locations paralleled findings from the open-ended questions about activities and locations (Table 4). One notable addition included those (30.5%) who mentioned "gardening" in their "yard at home." Frequently mentioned activities for lakefront parks were "visiting the zoo" at Lincoln Park, "attending fairs" at Grant Park, and "relaxing" at all three parks. These results

closely match the focus group discussion of Lincoln Park by Chinese seniors. State parks and county forest preserves were most often used for picnicking, though few participants used these types of sites.

Comments from two participants in the ChicagoRivers focus group provide another perspective on the need to travel outside Chinatown for most kinds of recreation that require facilities:

[Brian #1:] *I usually don't do many activities [here], there's really not much to do — the facilities are lacking. There's no tennis courts or basketball courts, really all there is, is restaurants and homes. There's no parks to play in.*

[Brian #2:] *There's a small park ... It's good for small kids — I mean like five or six [years of age] — but for teenagers there's nothing to do there ... There's a grade school next street over but it's under construction now — they're taking down the asbestos or something like that. It used to have a basketball court and in the back of the school there was a big lot where we played baseball and all that stuff. But it's under construction now and we don't have much to do now.*

To find out the locations of children's play activities, the two children's focus groups were asked to point out on a large community area map places they played. Only a few older children were able to locate popular play areas, but in subsequent discussions most mentioned school grounds and the Sun Yat-Sen Playlot, as well as yards and sidewalks.

Findings about activity location are difficult to interpret. The fact that many activities take place within the tight confines of the Chinatown core area despite the lack of public open space there might indicate a desire by residents to maintain the cultural-spatial boundaries of the Chinese American community rather than assimilate to the melting pot outside. Other explanations are equally worthy of consideration, including marginality factors such as economics and discrimination that may prevent

some Chinatown residents from seeking opportunities outside the community. Finally, the simple desire to seek opportunities close to home is a reason shared by many people, regardless of ethnicity. Participation in facility-dependent activities is another matter, for the lack of facilities in Chinatown leads many residents, particularly young adults, outside the community. Does this reflect a desire to acculturate, or is it due simply to lack of facilities in Chinatown? For both facility-dependent and facility-independent activities, a combination of factors — including ethnicity-marginality, acculturation-assimilation, and culturally-based spatial behavior — is likely to be operating.

### *Potential Use*

*Activity preferences and barriers.* Participants in the face-to-face interviews were also asked a closed-ended question about the activities they would prefer to do if given the option. Preferences for "picnic/passive activities" was highest (71.9%), followed by "ball games/active activities" (52.7%), "swimming/water-related" (50.2%), "daily exercises/running, etc." (37.4%), and "traditional Chinese exercises/taiji, qigong" (13.8%). In most cases, desired use far exceeded current levels as previously described. Although some disparity is often found in recreation needs assessments, these differences seemed unusually large. Data from a pre-defined set of participation barriers provided some insights into these disparities. Barriers rated as a "big problem" were topped by "availability of nearby open space," mentioned by 91.6 percent of respondents, and "availability of facilities," mentioned by 70.4 percent. These data reinforce community feelings about the lack of open space and facilities in Chinatown and suggest that a major barrier to participation might be reduced by new park development.

Although the proposed park development by the Chicago Park District could address a significant barrier to participation, additional barriers mentioned by participants could inhibit participation even when the new park is built. In order of their frequency of mention as a "big problem," these barriers include "lack of free time" (31%), "quality of the natural environment" (24.1%), "safety" (18.2%), "maintenance of facilities" (16.7%), and "discrimination" (7.9%). Of these concerns, three deserve elaboration. Although less than one-quarter of respondents mentioned "quality of the natural environment" as a big problem, it is important to note that nearly another half of the entire sample (47.8%) mentioned it as "somewhat of a problem." The quality of the natural environment is an important issue in this part of Chicago as abandoned industrial "brownfields" sites are being reclaimed for other uses, including open space. Some residents of Chinatown are concerned that land for future open space development, as well as the river itself, might be too polluted to be safely used for recreation. Moreover, the Chinese culture views a sound natural environment as an extension of a decent human life, and if a new park is developed on a river still perceived as seriously polluted, how well will residents accept the park as a part of their community? This was a significant issue in the Chicago-Rivers focus group:

[Brian #2:] *I think they plan to put a park there near the river, that space I think was planned to be used as a park, but I think it's too contaminated or something.*

[Gene:] *It's dirty, it's like a pollution dump for the factories. And there isn't much use for it.*

[Brian #1:] *It's got to be cleaned up first [before the river can be used for recreation].*

Personal safety was also an important issue, mentioned by 18.2 percent of interview respondents as a "big problem" and by another 35.5 percent as "somewhat of a problem." Proximity of the proposed park to a large public housing development was a major reason for people's concern for safety, and past incidents (e.g., assaults) incurred by Chinatown residents were attributed to African Americans who lived in public housing. These incidents were well known within the community, although the number of occurrences was relatively low. This problem ties in with discrimination, mentioned by 7.9 percent of respondents as a "big problem" and another 24.1 percent as "somewhat of a problem." While Chinese Americans feel quite comfortable within the homogenous Chinatown core area, several participants mentioned feeling uneasy visiting parks outside the area due to tensions with Anglo and African American groups there, and they feared these tensions might carry over when the new park is built in Chinatown.

Safety was also a prominent discussion topic in the ChicagoRivers focus group, helping clarify the challenges facing future park development:

[Brian #2:] *[Other than taiji] there's really not much else that [older residents] do. They mostly stay in because the elderly apartments are sorta semi-surrounded by the projects so it's kinda dangerous in that area. I've been away at school for a while and [in coming back I see] there's a lot of crime — broken windows, purse snatching; even my mom is afraid for my younger brothers to stay out late because of the crime.*

[Facilitator:] *Let's talk some more about safety in the neighborhood — how have things been or changed in recent years?*

[Adrienne:] *There used to be a [pedestrian] tunnel [under the expressway] that they closed down. It was dangerous because somebody could come and get a purse and just go through the tunnel.*

[Brian #1:] *There is another project on the other side of the tunnel. Before, they closed it up at nighttime but now they closed it completely.*

[Adrienne:] *My landlord, she was mugged. I don't know if it's getting worse or better, but after that happened I just try not going out at night. I'm just being more careful, but actually that's true everywhere, especially in the evening.*

Language was one final barrier that surfaced in the Lincoln Park focus group that could potentially inhibit use of the new Chinatown park:

[Male #1:] *It is necessary to have more strict management of the park. Nobody speaks our language. We can't talk to anyone if we have problems.*

[Male #2:] *Many times when something happens, if you don't have someone who can communicate, you just feel afraid. You don't feel comfortable. You don't know.*

[Interviewer:] *If there were Asian workers in the park, would more Chinese, Cambodians, Vietnamese go there?*

[Male #1:] *Of course, of course.*

[Male #2:] *If there are Asian workers, we surely will go more often.*

*Park development preferences.* Despite these concerns, Chinatown residents were overwhelmingly positive about the prospects of new park development in their community. When asked in an open-ended question what kinds of things they would like to see incorporated into the new park, the most frequent responses described natural and built amenities related to passive use and appreciation (47.8%). These amenities included landscaping (trees and flowers), seating areas, walking paths, and an attractive river edge treatment. The second most often mentioned amenity was a swimming facility (42.9%). The remaining responses dealt primarily with facilities for various ball games, including basketball (21.2%), volleyball (17.2%), and tennis (12.7%).

The need for natural amenities in the Chinatown area was discussed in the ChicagoRivers focus group in an exercise about the "ideal park setting":

[Adrienne:] *In terms of exercise, recreation, I jog every day but during the weekdays I just go to the University because I work there and I use the gym and then jog outside. But during the weekend I jog around where I live and it is a totally different experience. The air I smell is not grass, not tree, it's restaurant [laughter]. I feel more hungry after I jog. So if there could be more trees, some grass, more space, I think it would be much better.*

[Anson:] *Fresher air.*

[Gene:] *Cleaner.*

In the children's focus groups, each child drew a picture showing his/her visions of an ideal park. The drawings most often showed facilities for playgrounds (e.g., seesaws, slides, swings) and picnic activities (e.g., picnic tables). Secondly, the children's drawings frequently included elements of nature — trees, flowers, grass, rivers, pools, red suns, white clouds, blue skies, and birds — in their images of an "ideal park."

As a final note on park preferences, in one exercise in the ChicagoRivers focus group, participants were asked to react to photographs of different types of river edge development for open space, particularly for how they saw different alternatives fitting into their community. Responses to two of the photographs illustrate participants' perceptions of how river development might fit the cultural/leisure needs of Chinatown residents.

Responses to a photo of a highly developed downtown riverwalk with river edge cafe:

[Gene:] *It just looks good. It's something for our neighborhood, the trees and everything.*

[Brian #2:] *It looks clean.*

[Adrienne:] *Looks like there are restaurants, it looks clean and well arranged.*

[Anson:] *Very pretty.*

[Ken:] *I think it's peaceful and quiet, more a setting for recreation.*

[Brian #2:] *They can have boats there or docks where they have boat rides, or restaurants where they could have boats.*

[Facilitator:] *Is there potential in your neighborhood for this kind of development?*

[Brian #1:] *None that I see.*

[Ken:] *No, not in my neighborhood. At least not on my street. Right now at China Square some could afford it but you have to consider if most people can afford that type of thing.*

Responses to a small river edge plaza enclosed by vegetation, with a man sitting on a bench:

[Adrienne:] *There is not a lot of space in this picture. But it seems to be very nice and comfortable, and very nice just sitting there.*

[Ken:] *This one in terms of Chinese people would be better than the other one. This is more like a setting for Chinese people. The other [photo described above] is for American people.*

[Brian #2:] *I liked it, but it's really not a park setting that I sort of envisioned.*

As with the findings on activity participation, these comments suggest that both marginality and ethnicity factors may influence the potential for Chinatown river development for recreation. Hall's (1969) discussion about "ethnic scale" is particularly pertinent here, suggesting that traditional spatial patterns and preferences might be investigated before park development.

### ***Variations in Preference***

Up to this point the bulk of the findings from the interviews has been reported as aggregate data. Some of the most illuminating findings, however, concern variations within the sample. This analysis is summarized in Table 5 and in the points below.

**Age.** The biggest differences in activity preferences were by age. Young people (13-18 years) were much more likely to prefer active and water-related activities. Adults (19-60 years) and seniors (over 60 years) had higher preferences for passive activities. Preferences for traditional Chinese exercise were highest for seniors, but low for other adults and not found among young people. These results

TABLE 5. Variations in activity preferences by demographic characteristics, face-to-face interviews.

Variables (n)	Picnic/ Passive (%)	Ball/ Active (%)	Swim/ Water (%)	Exercise/ Run-Bike (%)	Traditional Exercise (%)
<b>Age</b>					
13-18 years (25)	40.0	92.0	88.0	52.0	0.0
19-60 years (137)	69.0	58.5	55.9	43.4	8.8
60 years (41)	95.1	9.8	9.8	9.8	39.0
<b>Gender</b>					
Female (103)	84.4	41.7	46.6	32.0	15.5
Male (100)	59.0	64.0	54.0	43.0	12.0
<b>Children &lt; 12 years</b>					
None (132)	71.2	53.8	53.0	38.6	14.1
One (35)	65.7	60.0	60.0	37.1	11.4
Two or more (26)	77.1	42.9	31.4	34.2	14.3
<b>Birthplace</b>					
U.S. (21)	57.1	85.7	76.2	47.6	0.0
Mainland China (153)	73.2	49.7	41.8	34.0	18.3
Hong Kong (19)	63.2	68.4	89.5	47.4	0.0
Other (9)	88.9	0.0	55.6	55.6	0.0
<b>Years in U.S.</b>					
0-5 (75)	60.0	60.0	60.0	50.7	8.0
6-10 (45)	82.2	51.1	48.9	24.4	20.0
10 (82)	75.6	47.6	42.7	32.9	15.9
<b>Education</b>					
Primary school (38)	78.9	36.6	34.2	28.9	23.7
High school (105)	76.2	51.4	43.8	34.3	11.4
College/Grad School (55)	56.0	69.0	76.0	51.0	9.0
<b>Occupation</b>					
Student (54)	50.0	90.7	77.8	51.9	1.9
Owner/manager (19)	78.9	31.5	36.8	21.0	10.5
Labor (55)	70.9	50.9	49.1	38.2	14.5
Professional (24)	66.7	58.3	75.0	58.3	12.5
Not in labor force (50)	0.0	20.0	16.0	18.0	28.8
<b>Household income</b>					
< 20,000 (93)	73.1	50.5	46.2	36.6	19.4
\$20,000-50,000 (68)	69.2	48.5	58.8	44.2	10.3
> \$50,000 (21)	81.0	47.6	28.6	19.1	14.3

parallel findings discussed in the ChicagoRivers focus group presented earlier. Findings on age should be interpreted with caution, for age is closely related to other factors such as place of birth and number of years in the U.S. (see below).

*Gender.* There were few large differences in activity preference by gender. Males were more inclined to prefer active activities, and women were more inclined to prefer passive activities. Gender-based differences for swimming and regular and traditional Chinese exercise were small.

*Family size.* No big or consistent differences in activity preferences were found according to the number of children under 12 years of age that were in the household. These findings could be confounded by age, since those classified as having "no children" included most seniors (60 years) and young people (18 years). The biggest differences were between those who had no children or one child and those who had two or more children; the latter group showed lower preferences for active and water-related activities.

*Place of birth.* There were some big differences in activity preferences as a function of birthplace. Those born in the U.S. (second or third generation) were more likely to prefer more active activities and swimming than those born in mainland China. Activity preferences of the small sample of Hong Kong born respondents more closely resembled those of U.S. born respondents than mainland China born respondents. The influence of birthplace as shown by these findings must be interpreted with caution because of the close relationship with age.

*Number of years in the U.S.* Those living in the U.S. for more than 5 years tended to prefer passive activities and traditional exercise more than those living in the U.S. for 5 years or less. "Newcomers" (in the U.S. 5 years or less) preferred active and water-related activities. These findings seem to contradict ideas about the association between recency of arrival and the maintenance of cultural activities. However, because newcomers are younger in most cases, this association might also be influenced by age differences.

*Education.* Education and activity preference were strongly related; those with more education (college and higher) preferred active and water-related activities, and those with less education preferred more passive and traditional activities. But again, since older Chinese people and teenagers had less education, the high percentage of less educated groups preferring passive and traditional activities may be due to age differences.

*Other demographic factors.* Income and occupation had variable influences on activity preferences. Students tended to prefer active activities, while those not in the labor force (primarily homemakers and retirees) tended to prefer passive and traditional activities. There were no definite preference patterns as a function of income. One interesting difference in preferred activities was the low preference for active activities among those who were self-employed or managers, as compared to those in labor and professional groups. The economy of Chinatown focuses strongly on small business; restaurants and stores are often run by families, with the male head of household working most of the day and evening. Thus, available leisure time is rare, and when the opportunity does arise, relaxation and passive activity may be preferred over active pursuits. As the older male in our ChicagoRivers focus group explained:

[Ken:] *Well, I don't believe there's much need for open space opportunity for the people in middle age, because the middle people go to work and there's no time for them to stay around. Around ten in the morning they are going to business, restaurant business, and come back late at night around 10:00-11:00 p.m.*

## CONCLUSIONS

To build upon past comparative research on leisure and ethnicity, this paper examined the leisure preferences and open space needs within one ethnically homogeneous urban community concentrated within a particular area. Through a representative sample and multiple methods of investigation, outdoor recreation activity was found to have strong cultural meaning and significance for many Chinese Americans living in Chicago's Chinatown. These cultural ties are evident in participation and preferences for traditional activities such as taiji, but for the most part underlie activities that are also popular within mainstream Anglo American culture. "Relaxing" was one popular activity in this respect; engaged in on a daily basis, participants in face-to-face interviews found it hard to define relaxing in terms of discrete leisure activities or to separate it from the non-leisure part of their daily lives.

This finding coincides with Hall and Hall's (1990) idea of polychronic time, and corroborates leisure research by Allison and Geiger (1993) and Hutchison (1993) that some leisure activities carry multiple meanings and are not differentiated from non-leisure within the Asian American groups they studied. Thus for some groups, traditional measures of activity participation may mask important concepts of leisure and its place in everyday life. In future leisure research, more comprehensive evaluations of preferences may need to become the rule rather than the exception. This may be especially true for Asian groups, but may also be so for other racial and ethnic groups as well as for those who are at different life cycle stages such as retired adults and families with young children. Qualitative, "depth" research methods might be particularly productive, such as open-ended personal interviews or small group discussions focusing on the meaning and significance of everyday activities. Quantitative studies employing time diaries and other procedures might also prove useful here, especially when used along with other information to help interpret their meaning.

The meaning and significance of culturally-based environmental preferences must be further explored. Findings in this paper only scratch the surface of the kinds of features preferred for the new Chinatown park development. Future research should identify how designs and facilities can be made more appropriate, safe, and attractive for those who will use them. Crime and discrimination, whether real or perceived, are social problems that cannot be solved solely through physical design and management. Such problems may be especially acute in homogeneous, insular communities such as the Chicago's Chinatown, where residents may be less able to choose alternatives other than those provided within their own boundaries. When integrated with other social and community service programs such as community policing, new park facility development may have a greater chance of succeeding than when such development occurs in isolation.

Findings about activity and environmental preferences can also aid in park and recreation planning and design. Although planners and designers are often concerned about providing the right facilities and settings for different groups, the real issue may not be so much one of providing *different* facilities and settings, but of understanding how ordinary facilities and settings will be used. This is not always evident from activity and preference surveys. If the social and cultural meaning and significance of activities and spaces are understood, better decisions can be made about what facilities should be provided and how they are designed and located. Again, a thoughtful research design can help discover important temporal and spatial dimensions underlying the more overt expressions of leisure preference and behavior.

Finally, the results showed some important variations in activity preferences within the Chinese American community. These differences are likely due to age, though gender, generational status, family structure, and social class may also play important roles. Further study of these variables and their interactions can help clarify theories of leisure and culture. In planning for communities such as Chinatown, such questions will be increasingly important in helping people preserve and maintain the traditional cultural ties that are valued, meet increasingly diverse needs within the community, and interact with those outside the community.

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