



**REPORT #2**

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# **SAWTELLE JAPANTOWN**

*Asian Neighborhoods and Official Designation*

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## PREFACE

These reports represent Asian American Studies' commitment to engaged scholarship through teaching and community-oriented research that are mutually beneficial. Community partners are instrumental in identifying research needs, participating in and facilitating data collection, assisting in analyzing information, and disseminating findings to inform policy debates and program development. For community members, we hope that they will gain insights from student research. At the same time, students gain real-world understanding of Asian American issues. The class that sponsored a community project serves as a bridge for students' academic training and their life after graduation. We hope that this project enables students to acquire and apply research skills and engage in broader social justice movements.

This course, "Capstone Community-based Research: Asian American Enclaves and Community Institutions," connected students to Sawtelle Japantown Association (SJA). The class was offered through UCLA's Asian American Studies Department. This year's project examines the factors that contribute to the vitality of ethnic enclaves and community institutions to then provide recommendations to SJA. SJA has been working since 2014 to preserve the cultural and historic aspects of the Sawtelle area. They are working to mobilize and strengthen community and cultural organizations so that its members have an active, strong, and effective voice in planning their neighborhood's future. This project emerged from a joint planning effort that started during the summer of 2014. Students conducted interviews with key stakeholders around four topics:

- Background and history of Japanese settlements in California and contemporary issues that Japantowns and Japanese neighborhoods experience.
- Efforts by Los Angeles Asian enclaves in seeking official neighborhood designation.
- The role of cultural institutions in preserving and promoting Asian American neighborhoods.
- Review of community-based initiatives to engage in neighborhood planning processes, particularly in Asian neighborhoods.

Most of these interviewees were located in the Los Angeles area. Based on their interviews, each group developed evidence-based recommendations to help SJA with its efforts of community building and preservation. We believe that the analyses and findings are also useful to other neighborhoods interested in promoting their unique cultural and ethnic identity.

This project was conducted in partnership with the UCLA Asian American Studies Center and the George and Sakaye Aratani “Community Advancement Research Endowment” (C.A.R.E.), which provided funding to edit and produce the final reports. Additional funding was provided by the UCLA Office of Instructional Development mini-grants and UCLA Asian American Studies Department for guest speakers who spoke to students during the class. The Center for the Study of Inequality provided funds to cover the cost of a graduate teaching assistant. We also thank Professor Valerie Matsumoto for initiating the discussion with SJA and Alycia Cheng for her assistance with layout. Last but not least, we thank SJA, particularly Randy Sakamoto, Scott Nakaatari, Dr. Jack Fujimoto, and Randall Fujimoto, who provided our students with a wonderful educational experience.

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We are grateful for all the support and guidance we have received throughout our project.

**To SJA members**, without the partnership and consideration of the SJA members, we would not have the opportunity to conduct this unique research to enrich our understanding of ethnic neighborhood communities. We also wanted to take the time to congratulate SJA members for receiving official designation, a huge accomplishment. It was also gratifying for us to be involved in a project that continues to bring cultural awareness and significance of such preservation of an ethnic neighborhood in the United States.

**To community leaders who we interviewed**, thank you for being so welcoming and sharing your work and advice to enhance our research. We are sincerely thankful that these individuals were able to make room in their busy schedules, as their contribution was a major asset to our research and enhanced the report.

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*Sawtelle Japantown sign on Sawtelle Blvd.*  
Photo: C. Aujean Lee

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## *Asian Neighborhoods and Official Designation*



*Official Sawtelle Japantown designation event*  
Photo: Jean-Paul deGuzman

# INTRODUCTION

The goal of this report is to describe the process of official designation in Los Angeles Asian neighborhoods and their challenges and benefits from designation, including implications for historic and cultural preservation. We then interviewed 10 people from three neighborhoods: Little Bangladesh, Thai Town, and Little Tokyo. These cases provide a breadth of information on how neighborhoods of varying sizes and histories have obtained and capitalized on designation to further the community's goals.

The report found three findings from secondary sources and interviews: organizations participate in a network to help with designation; varying levels of designation can help further preservation efforts; and designation helps to promote cultural awareness and tourism. After, the report includes recommendations that can help Sawtelle Japantown Association (SJA) to use designation, including: expanding its network to help other neighborhoods become designated; obtain other levels of designation from the state and federal government to offer more protection and regulation; and leverage designation for tourism. While SJA helped Sawtelle to become an official Japantown on February 25, 2015 from the Los Angeles City Council, SJA can continue to protect its unique history. As Fujimoto (2015) described, "America's true strength comes from its diversity and a society and culture in which people are encouraged to share their differences." Officially designated neighborhoods help to promote and celebrate Los Angeles' diversity and rich history.

*Hashimoto Nursery on Sawtelle Blvd.*  
Photo: Randy Sakamoto



## BACKGROUND

To understand the purpose and importance of official designation, this section first describes the importance of neighborhoods and place to people using secondary sources. After, it provides information on different types of official designation and naming and how to obtain these actions. Finally, the background ends by describing how Los Angeles Asian neighborhoods have previously obtain designation and common themes and trends that may inform other neighborhoods seeking designation.

### *Importance of Neighborhood and Place*

Neighborhoods have historically formed as cities have grown in size. According to Lebel, Pampalon, and Villeneuve (2007), at the beginning of the 20th century, neighborhoods appeared as a way to describe the natural agglomeration of people in a local community. Neighborhoods have also been defined as a locality, district, region, or boroughs. Park (1915) describes how “private and political interests find corporate

expression” through cities (p. 578). While described in cities, neighborhoods also serve functions and different expressions based on its residents and stakeholders. Neighborhoods are thus not only living spaces, but are also a place of work and a family environment, where people interact, support, and socialize with one another. These geographic spaces are also important for people because they contain social and economic activities, even having health implications (Kubzansky & Berkman, 2006). Their study outcome shows the importance of neighbor to person health.

The concept of place is also important to understand because it relates to people’s emotional attachment, or “place attachment.” Altman and Low (1992) define place attachment as “an effective bond between people and places, including various actors, social relationships, and places of varying scale” (p. 2). Similar to neighborhoods, places have a meaning beyond its physical space. Altman and Low (1992)

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further expand on how the length of residence is an important factor to understand depth of place attachment. Additionally, Kyle and Manning (2005) found that place meaning and attachment can be used to plan and encourage the use of public spaces, such as national parks. Thus, neighborhoods and places have not only physical significance as a geographic containment of services and activities, but also extend to an emotional and personal connection with its residents.

### ***Types of Designation and Processes***

There are different types of agencies that designate neighborhoods and are largely categorized by: local, state, and national levels. Among each level, there are several programs and initiatives. However, each has a different process or formalities that interested stakeholders must complete beforehand. The following describes several examples of these programs.

#### **Local Designation: Neighborhood Signs**

Neighborhood signs are approved by the Los Angeles City Council and identify geographic boundaries of different neighborhoods and significant places (Los Angeles Department of Transportation, 2015). Furthermore, it is used to indicate special places that have retained and featured cultural and historical significance, and the signs are designated by City Council resolutions (Los Angeles Department of Transportation, 2015).

To obtain a neighborhood sign, interested stakeholders must contact the district office or City Council member's office to request a cultural/historic sign. The City Council member will first need to obtain approval from the council member (Los Angeles Department of Transportation, 2015). After, interested neighborhoods need to fill out an application that

provides the name for the community and either obtain 500 unique signatures from the community members or 20 percent of residents if there are fewer than 2,500 in the neighborhood. Signatures and the information must be valid. Additionally, there must be at least two community members who are willing to provide their contact information, the name of a neighborhood, reasons for naming, street boundaries, and funding sources needed (Lagmay, 2006). Both application and petition requirements have to be in the packets and sent to office of the City Clerk (Lagmay, 2006).

#### **Local Designation: Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZ)**

Historic Preservation Overlay Zones contain structures, landscaping, natural features, or sites that have historic or cultural significance. HPOZs are also known as historic districts and require historically significant structures to undergo additional review processes, and the Department of City Planning must approve any improvements. There are 29 designated historic districts in Los Angeles, but none are currently located in Asian neighborhoods (Office of Historic Resources [OHR], n.d.).

The City Planning Commission and City Council must approve the HPOZ. All neighboring property owners are informed of the proposal and there are public hearings to discuss it (Office of Historic Resources, n.d.). After approval, an area will have a HPOZ overlay and regulated by Section 12.20.3 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code (Office of Historic Resources, n.d.).

#### **State Designation: The California Register of Historical Resources**

The California Register of Historical Resources works on designating places and properties within the state. It assists with public



recognition and protection of archeological, architectural, historical, and cultural resources and develops state and local planning by closely examining historical resources. This office also checks the eligibility for state historic preservation funding and intensifies certain protections under the California Environment Quality Act (State of California, 2015b).

To register with the state, interested stakeholders must fill out the Nomination Packet (forms DPR 523), which are available online. The application form is then submitted to the clerk of the local government (State of California, 2015b). In 90 days, Office of Historic Preservation staff members review California Register nominations. If it is approved, the resource then becomes listed in the California Register (State of California, 2015b).

### **National Designation: National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places designates historic places on a federal level. After the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 first authorized it, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places was developed as a federal program to assist and regulate public and private achievements, which then are identified and evaluated to help preserve historic resources in the United States (National Park Service, 2015).

The National Register of Historic Places does not receive applications, but instead receives nominations by State Historic Preservation Offices (National Park Service, 2015). However, properties must meet criteria, including if it is at least 50 years old and has significant ties with events, people, or achievements (National Park Service, 2015). Upon approval from the State Historic Preservation Office, proposed

nominations are sent to the National Park Service for final approval (National Park Service, 2015).

### **National Designation: Preserve America**

Preserve America is a federal initiative that encourages and supports community efforts to preserve and enjoy priceless cultural and natural heritage (State of California, 2015c). In addition, this program designates communities, neighborhoods, and tribal governments that protect and celebrate their heritage (State of California, 2015c). Asian neighborhoods including Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and Thai Town are already designated by the program under "Asian Pacific Islander Neighborhood Cultural Heritage and Hospitality Education and Training" (State of California, 2015c).

To receive this designation, a neighborhood needs to meet the following criteria: be a municipality or county with an elected governing official, or unincorporated communities within their jurisdiction; distinct neighborhoods within large cities or city-counties with a population of 200,000 or greater; and tribal communities which are federally recognized with an elected governing official or subdivisions of such tribes (Preserve America, 2015a.).

These examples are a few of the many programs that governmental agencies provide to preserve certain places or properties and retain the United States' diversity and history.

***Los Angeles has 8 officially designated Asian neighborhoods.***

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*It can be helpful for communities to survey its residents to evaluate their needs and the significance of official designation.*

### **Official Designation in Asian neighborhoods**

Los Angeles has 8 officially designated Asian neighborhoods. Many of these neighborhoods have similar themes that relate to becoming designated by the City Council, including: bringing greater visibility through designation; surveying residents to understand their needs and perspectives; and connecting with elected officials to obtain designation. The following describes these themes in more detail.

Designation can help to bring greater visibility to neighborhoods for businesses and tourism, particularly because it can be used for marketing. For example, the Executive Director Chancee Martorell explained that when Thai Town began to seek designation, residents wanted the neighborhood to be represented as place of cultural heritage and tourism (personal communication, February 13, 2015). This collective goal helped with their campaign and unifies their efforts.

Bangladeshi American community members similarly wanted Little Bangladesh to become designated to create a location that is convenient for residents and provide services such as business development. However, before it became designated, the Bangladeshi community was invisible because of the prominence of



*Students with Majib Siddiquee from the Little Bangladesh Improvement, Inc.*

Photo: Suhyun Joy Cho

Latino and Korean businesses. After designation:

*...local Bangladeshis have been trying, with limited success so far, to open and relocate businesses to the area, both to show their presence and to provide needed services for the thousands of lower- to middle-income Bangladeshi immigrant families who live there (Abdulrahim, 2010).*

Similar to these examples, once residents understand the importance of designation and visibility for community development (e.g., tourism or business development), residents can work together to obtain official designation.

It can be helpful for communities to survey its residents to evaluate their needs and the significance of official designation. Community members can distribute surveys through the mail or in person, which a neighborhood committee could then use to develop a compiled list



of neighborhood strengths and challenges. For example, Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC) surveyed East Hollywood in order to assess resident needs and create a profile of the business community. This analysis provided evidence of ways that Thai Town would improve with official designation. The survey found that designation would provide residents and business a “greater ‘sense of place’ and it increased the potential to attract tourists to the area if needed infrastructure and design improvements are made” (personal communication, February 13, 2015). Additional neighborhood can benefit from similar efforts to help gauge resident perspectives and needs.

Lastly, neighborhoods can outreach to key stakeholders about the benefits of designation, particularly elected officials. Outreach can be accomplished through grassroots methods and hosting community event. Little Bangladesh community members used this tactic and developed partnerships with key stakeholders, including inviting the mayor to be a guest at a Little Bangladesh event (Muhammad Hussain, personal communication, February 20, 2015). SJA also strategically worked with the neighborhood council, which changed their name from the West Los Angeles Neighborhood Council to the West Los Angeles-Sawtelle Neighborhood Council (Randy Sakamoto, personal communication, January 8, 2015). SJA also worked to get the support from their councilmember Mike Bonin, who helped to push forward their designation. These political partnerships are crucial to receive designation.

### *Conclusion*

This section provided an overview of neighborhood designation and other ways to preserve the history and culture of an area. By researching the importance of neighborhood and



*Students meet with Mike Mirasu from Little Tokyo Service Center*

Photo: Abby Wang

places, variation of designation types and naming, and several ways that Asian neighborhoods have obtained official designation, this section demonstrates the benefits and impact of designation. Many of these processes require the efforts of a coalition and can be time consuming; nevertheless, they are important to help maintain the diversity and richness of Los Angeles.



Mural in Little Bangladesh  
Photo: Suhyun Joy Cho

# REPORT FINDINGS

Based on secondary research and interviews, this report found that official designation helps neighborhoods in a number of ways. Specifically, we found that community organizations oftentimes participate in a network to help them become designated. Once they obtain designation, some Asian neighborhoods have sought and successfully obtained other levels of designation, which offer additional protection for cultural and historic preservation. Lastly, neighborhoods found that designation helps to promote cultural awareness.

## **1. Community organizations participate in networks to help neighborhoods become designated**

Organizations received support from within and outside their neighborhood when seeking designation. Oftentimes, these multiple networks help to reinforce the reasons why Asian neighborhoods want to become designation.

Additionally, by having allies from within and outside the neighborhood and ethnic group, community organizations helped to gather additional signatures that are necessary for City Council designation.

For example, Little Bangladesh organizations worked to gather support from other Bangladeshi organizations. For example, Bangladesh Unity Federation of Los Angeles (BUFLA) and other Bangladeshi organizations worked together to gather signatures for designation. They also sought support from neighborhood residents to sign their petition. Majib Siddiquee from the Little Bangladesh Improvement, Inc. discussed how they worked with homeowners and business owners within the boundaries they were applying for to obtain signatures (personal communication, February 26, 2015).

A number of neighborhoods also gathered support from groups outside of their neighborhoods

and their ethnic groups. For example, Thai CDC worked with outside neighborhoods. Chancee Martorell described how their organization worked with the Little Tokyo Service Center, API Small Business Program, ROCK LA, Koreatown Service Center, the local farmer's market, Chinatown Service Center, and Latino organizations (personal communication, February 13, 2015).

Little Bangladesh also obtained designation by working with other groups, such as Filipino, Salvadorian, Mexican, Guatemalan, and Ethiopian organizations. Some of these organizations provided support because their businesses are located in the proposed Little Bangladesh boundaries. Muhammad Hussain of the Bangladesh American Democratic Party of California described how “[with] some Filipinos, we had a meeting with them, and they helped us provide supports when we went to the city hall” (personal communication, February 20, 2015).

However, they also experienced some tensions with the Korean community about boundary issues, particularly because Little Bangladesh is now located in what was previously informally called Koreatown. However, Muhammad also explained how they worked with representatives from the Korean community and decided the 5 blocks of New Hampshire, Catalina, Kenmore, and Alexandria for Little Bangladesh (personal communication, February 20, 2015). Despite their conflicts, Little Bangladesh now “has a strong partnership with Korean community” (Muhammad Hussain, personal communication, February 20, 2015).

Maminul Haque of BUFLA reiterated that to become designated, “you have to be very friendly with neighbors, good relationship with them, as well as city peoples. Also tell them benefits from the naming [to city people]” (personal

communication, February 14, 2015). When sharing about this project, members of BUFLA offered their support to Sawtelle Japantown Association and other neighborhoods that are beginning the process of designation or have recently been designation (Shiper Chowdhury, personal communication, February 11, 2015). These interviews demonstrate the importance of maintaining strong relationships with other neighborhoods and ethnic groups.

## **2. Different levels and types of designations can help with cultural and historic preservation.**

As previously described, there are several types and levels of designation that can help with preservation efforts. Based on secondary data and interviews, the following describes the overall benefits from these programs or initiatives. Higher levels of designation at times offer stronger protections, particularly for historic preservation.

Neighborhood signs are a local designation by the City Council, and its primary purpose is to guide visitors and residents to identify the geographic limitations between neighboring areas and to inform them the significance of places in cultural and historic aspects (Los Angeles Department of Transportation, 2015). After obtaining these neighborhood signs, some neighborhoods have enjoyed several benefits, such as receiving funding from a neighborhood group or business association for help maintain the neighborhoods (Majib Siddiquee, personal communication, February 26, 2015). Signs also help attract visitors and outsiders from the posting of the standardized city sign (Los Angeles Department of Transportation, 2015). For example, Majib described how after obtaining the Little Bangladesh sign, “Every single taxi driver, they know Little Bangladesh because of



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the sign. Anybody comes from airport, if they are originated from Bangladesh or if someone is interested in Bangladesh, will be driven to Little Bangladesh” (personal communication, February 26, 2015).

The California Register of Historical Resources helps with public recognition and protection of archeological, architectural, historical, and cultural resources within the state. There is a nomination packet available on the website for these who want to apply as a candidate for the nomination of Preserve America (State of California, 2015b). The designated resources benefit from possible property tax reductions and grant opportunities (State of California, 2015b). An example in Los Angeles related to Asian Americans is the Santa Anita and Pomona Assembly Center, which was a temporary detention camp for Japanese Americans after Executive Order 9066 in Arcadia and Pomona (Office of Historic Preservation, 2015). However, most of the state registry includes resources that are not related to Asian American historic and cultural preservation.

The National Register of Historic Places is a federal program that supports public and private efforts to “identify, evaluate, and protect America’s historic and archeological resources” (National Park Service, 2015a). Little Tokyo Historic District is one of the few areas that are designated in Los Angeles. There are four major designated areas in Los Angeles from this registration: the Plaza Historic District, Little Tokyo, the Spring Street Financial District, and the Broadway Theater District (National Park Service, 2015c). These resources are provided with federal preservation grants for building and restoration, federal investment tax credits, or incentives for nonprofit organizations (National Park Service, 2015b).

Preserve America is another national designation program that supports community efforts to preserve cultural and historic preservation. Asian ethnic neighborhoods such as Koreatown, Chinatown, Thai Town, and Little Tokyo were also designated by this program. (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 2009). This federal initiative assists with tourism projects and eligibility for grants from Congress

when applicable to effectively preserve their own heritages. Preserve America also provides additional benefits, including White House recognition, a Preserve America road sign, a listing on the Preserve America online directory, and permission to use the Preserve America logo on promotional materials related to the neighborhood (Preserve America, 2015b).

While not an exhaustive list of benefits, these examples demonstrate how governmental programs and initiatives can enhance community-based preservation efforts. They may take extra time to obtain, but they may also provide additional protections and support to preserve and maintain historic and cultural significant resources in Asian ethnic neighborhoods. Designation also offers other benefits that promote cultural awareness and ethnic identity.

### **3. Designated ethnic neighborhoods promote cultural awareness and ethnic identity**

Official designation additionally helps to foster cultural awareness and ethnic identity with Asian neighborhoods, both to residents inside and outside of its boundaries. For example, Muhammad Hashim mentioned that “Little Bangladesh helps us have our kids to continue our traditions” (personal communication, Feb 20, 2015). Thus, with a designated neighborhood, community members can pass cultural traditions to the next generation. One way to tangibly pass on these traditions is through landmarks and cultural institutions. After designation, Little Bangladesh can gather additional funds and support to “build a small theater or cultural center and other services [such as a] museum” (Maminul Haque, personal communication, February 26, 2015). Little Bangladesh will continue to maintain its culture by establishing more cultural-related developments.

These neighborhoods also help to support personal cultural pride. For example, Chancee Martorell explained how after designation, “Thais take great pride of where they are from and celebrate their culture” (personal communication, February 12, 2015). Official designation then helps to gather Thai Americans and celebrate their culture and ethnic identity through various festivals. Little Bangladesh also has annual cultural festivals, including Bangladesh’s Independence Day from Pakistan, which gathers community residents (Maminul Haque, personal communication, February 14, 2015). These events help persons on an individual level connect with their heritage. For example, Muhammad Hussain described how a Bangladeshi woman from Pasadena once said to him, “I miss my people and I miss my food, and [that’s why] I came all the way here from my house. I can walk with my people and talk with them” (personal communication, February 20, 2015).

Therefore, official designation is as an effective tool to increase cultural awareness and ethnic identity of a neighborhood. It not only helps to support ongoing events, but also helps individuals connect to their heritage. These benefits help to support the neighborhood overall, as designation also offers additional government support and protection for preservation.

In conclusion, this report found several important findings that elaborate on how designation not only benefits a neighborhood, but also organizations’ efforts for preservation and cultural awareness. Designation can vary in form and processes, but most of them offer tangible benefits to strengthen preservation through funding and/or government protection. The following describes recommendations to apply each of the findings.





*Mural in Little Tokyo*  
Photo: Logan Cai

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From our research, there are many strengths and positive outcomes that have occurred from receiving an official designation. The following describes recommendations that the report identifies for SJA to consider after successfully obtaining designation:

1. SJA should expand their network by using their experience and knowledge to help other neighborhoods that are seeking designation;
2. SJA members can preserve Japanese American history and cultural resources by obtaining other levels of designation;
3. And designation can be leveraged for tourism and marketing.

While only preliminary recommendations, SJA can build on these suggestions to strengthen their efforts of preservation and cultivating cultural awareness in the Sawtelle neighborhood.

**1. SJA should expand their network by using their experience and knowledge to help other neighborhoods that are seeking designation.**

Now that Sawtelle Japantown has become an officially designated neighborhood by the Los Angeles City Council, SJA can continue to build their networks to help other neighborhoods seeking designation. As with other interviewees, SJA can use their experience and knowledge of the political process to help other community groups. For example, Chancee Martorell explained that Thai CDC welcomes anyone to ask them for help navigating through the official designation process (personal communication, February 13, 2015).



*Thai Town, near Hollywood/Western Ave.*

Photo: Lennox Chaiveera

Also, by helping other prospective ethnic neighborhoods receive designation, SJA can expand its community networks, which can prove helpful in other campaigns and future preservation efforts. SJA is still a relatively new organization and could learn how to partner and apply for funding. For example, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Historic Filipinotown, Thai Town, and Koreatown have worked together as Preserve America communities through the Asian Pacific Islander Preserve America Neighborhoods project and have organized events and conferences relevant to preservation (Asian Pacific Islander Preserve America Neighborhoods, n.d.). Through this network, communities received a \$250,000 Preserve America grant for cultural heritage education and public-private partnerships (Lowe, 2012). (See “Cultural Institutions” report for more examples of how community groups utilize networks to support their services and programs in other Asian neighborhoods.)

**2. SJA members can apply for other state or federal designations because they offer additional protections and regulations for preservation efforts.**

Depending on SJA members and their goals, they can work to apply for other levels of designation. Before deciding on other designations, SJA can use the preliminary research in this report to start understanding more about each process and potential benefits. After developing resources related to designation, SJA can then decide as a group whether they want to apply for additional levels of protection and support to preserve Sawtelle’s historic and cultural resources.

After deciding, SJA can then recruit additional volunteers to help with applications and campaigns. As previously described, SJA can also work with other neighborhoods to understand their experiences with other state and federal



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levels of designation. This outreach work can be potentially beneficial, as several state or federal designations have a nomination process. Expanding their networks and public relation to state or governmental officials and community groups that already have these relationships can help SJA apply for other levels and programs of preservation and designation.

### **3. Leverage Designation for Tourism and Marketing**

Based on the secondary information and interviews conducted in Little Tokyo, Thai Town, and Little Bangladesh, we found that official designation improves and benefits the community by helping to develop and retain ethnic identity. These benefits can also contribute to tourism and marketing, which can contribute to raising awareness about the historic and cultural aspects of the neighborhood.

With Sawtelle Japantown's new designation, SJA can leverage additional resources to develop tourism around its key attractions. For example, the West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple located on the Corinth Avenue in Sawtelle is a cultural landmark similar to the red fire Yagura Tower in Japanese Plaza in Little Tokyo. Additionally, there are several other temples that are registered on the National Register.

Another recommendation that can promote tourism is for SJA to create a brochure and other marketing materials. A brochure can include a brief history of Sawtelle, its landmark buildings, SJA's mission statement, and a map. If applicable, SJA can also include information on how to donate to SJA and its preservation efforts. Other marketing materials can include a website that has posts about the history of the area, businesses, events, press releases, SJA contact information, and a calendar of events.



*Thai Town commercial plaza*

Photo: BrightVibes (Flickr)

A website can help to show SJA's short-term and long-term goals, including its larger projects and campaigns. While developing a website may take some time, SJA should continue to add interesting news articles and historic events to its Facebook page.

In conclusion, SJA can focus on expanding networks and applying for additional types of designations. Also, official designation boosts the tourism of Sawtelle with cultural awareness. However, to maintain and develop its success, Sawtelle could put more effort in tourism by promoting its historical sites, creating brochures, and creating a comprehensive webpage.



*SJA and Asian American Studies students*  
Photo: C. Aujean Lee

## CONCLUSION

After conducting 10 interviews in Little Bangladesh, Little Tokyo, and Thai Town, this project provides background information on official designation and how it impacts Asian ethnic neighborhoods. Designation can also be used to galvanize community support and develop tourism to preserve their cultural and historic resources. This report can be used not only by SJA, but other neighborhoods that are seeking neighborhood designation since it outlines the various processes related to governmental designation program. These programs are a part of larger endeavors that Asian neighborhoods can engage with to develop their communities and preserve their rich culture and histories for its residents and the broader community.

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# APPENDICES

## *Appendix A: METHODOLOGY*

A total of 10 interviews were conducted in three target neighborhoods: Thai Town, Little Bangladesh, and Little Tokyo. Organizations were identified through internet searches, while others were recommended by interviewees. One interviewee worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which provided an overview of preservation processes. All of the interviews were conducted in person at either the organization or a convenient public area, except for 1 interviewee, who responded to questions through email. A total of 13 organizations were initially contacted, but some were unavailable or did not respond to requests for interviews. A total of 9 organizations were interviewed.

The following provides more detailed information about the key research questions, each neighborhood, and the interviewed organizations. This section also includes materials used during the interviews, including the consent form, interview guide and script, and interview questions. All interviewees consented to having their name used for the report. In developing the research questions and interview protocol, 3 mock interviews were done. These interviews help to understand the challenges that Asian neighborhoods have experienced and addressed in preservation efforts and obtaining official designation.

### **Key Research Questions**

The research questions primarily targeted community leaders who are or were involved with obtaining official designation for Asian neighborhoods. The following lists the key research questions. Depending on the interviewee, some were unable to answer some of the questions.

- What were the major difficulties that your neighborhood had to face to receive designation?
- How have you worked with other groups such as organizations, ethnic groups, neighborhoods, governmental officials to obtain designation?
- How does your neighborhood use designation as the tool for your community?
- What were the major changes in the community after it became officially designated?
- Do you have any suggestions and recommendations in terms of preserving Japanese neighborhoods?

## Case Studies

The three neighborhoods were selected among all designated neighborhoods in Los Angeles. However, we focused on Little Bangladesh, Thai Town, and Little Tokyo because they have varying histories and neighborhood size. Also, Little Bangladesh is one of the more recently designated areas. (See Table 1 for the full list of interviewees and organizations.)

**Table 1. Interviewee Information and Affiliated Organizations**

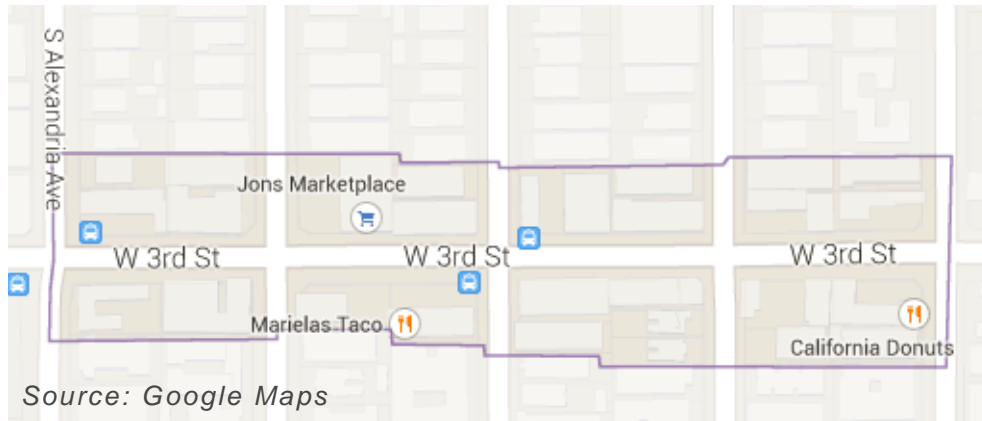
NEIGHBORHOOD	INTERVIEWEE NAME	POSITION	ORGANIZATION
Little Bangladesh	Shiper Chowdhury	President	Bangladesh Unity Federation of Los Angeles (BUFLA)
Little Bangladesh	Maminul Haque	Chairperson	Bangladesh Unity Federation of Los Angeles (BUFLA)
Little Bangladesh	Muhammad Hussain	President	Bangladesh American Democratic Party of California
Little Bangladesh	Majib Siddiquee	Executive Director	Little Bangladesh Improvement Inc
Thai Town	Chancee Martorell	Founder and Executive	Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC)
Thai Town	Nitta Gibson	Committee Information of Thai Town	Thai Town Formation Committee
Thai Town	Cecilia Ngo	Project Manager	Coalition for Responsible Community Development
Little Tokyo	Mike Mirasu	Director of Service Programs	Little Tokyo Service Center
Little Tokyo	Kevin Sanada	Field Officer	National Trust for Historic Preservation
Little Tokyo	Michael Okamura	President	Little Tokyo History Society

*Note: Compiled by authors*

### *Little Bangladesh*

Little Bangladesh is a five-block area around Third Street and Alexandria Avenue within Koreatown in Los Angeles (see Figure 1). Little Bangladesh was designated by the City Council in 2010 and has a sign hanging at the corner of 3rd Street and New Hampshire Avenue (Abdulrahim, 2010). In 2005, there were approximately 20,000 Bangladeshi Americans living in the area. Little Bangladesh has a diversity in its businesses because of its location, including Bangladeshi restaurants and stores, Korean restaurants, and stores that cater to Latino clientele from a variety of countries.

**Figure 1. Little Bangladesh**



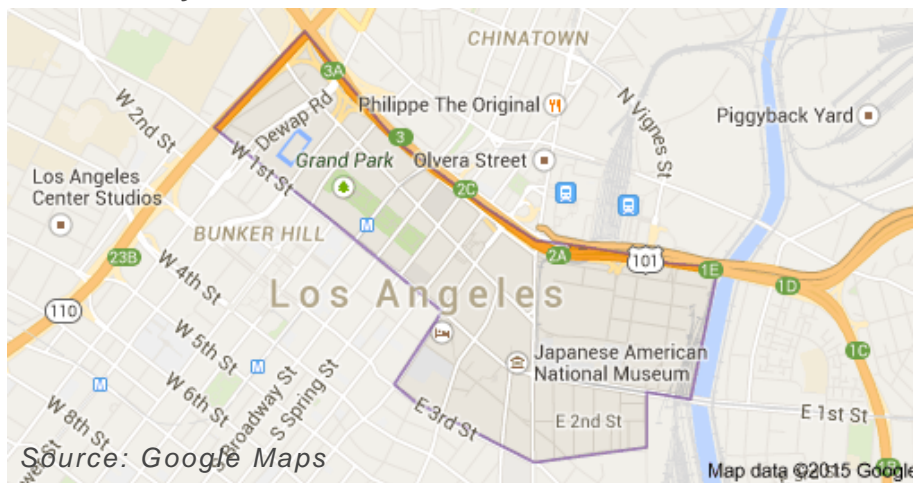
*Thai Town*

Thai Town is a 500 square miles area between Normandie and Western Avenue along Hollywood Boulevard in East Hollywood. It was officially designated in 1999 by the Los Angeles City Council, and is also the first Thai Town in the United States (Los Angeles Times, 1999). Thai Town has several historic Los Angeles structures and landmarks, including the Mayer Building on Hollywood and Western (Thai CDC, n.d.). It has improved and strengthened the community’s image and economy. The neighborhood is an important economic base to many Thai Americans who living in California. Thai Town also promotes neighborhood pride, economic development, cultural exchanges, and tourism.

*Little Tokyo*

Little Tokyo is a Japantown in downtown Los Angeles, and is one of four Japantowns in the United States. Little Tokyo has a number of Japanese businesses, shops, and cultural institutions. See “The Trajectory of Japanese Neighborhoods” report for a more detailed description of the neighborhood.) Little Tokyo can be informative for Sawtelle Japantown because it is located in Los Angeles and has developed networks for Japanese historic and cultural preservation. They also have a number of community-based organizations that can provide support and resources for for Japanese historic and cultural preservation (See Figure 2 for a map of the neighborhood).

**Figure 2. Little Tokyo**





## **Appendix B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **Participant Consent Form**

University of California, Los Angeles

#### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH INTERVIEW IMPACT OF OFFICIAL DESIGNATION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY NEIGHBORHOODS**

The Asian American Capstone Community-Based Research (AAS185) course at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research project. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your organization has helped with the official designation process for one of the following neighborhoods: Little Tokyo, Thai Town, or Little Bangladesh. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

This research project is focused on examining the importance of preserving the heritage and receiving official recognition of neighborhoods such as Sawtelle, through obtaining official designation from the city council. Through this interview, you will have an opportunity to talk about your experiences and the contributions to your community in the process of official designation. This is a student research project. Any information you provide in the interview will only be used for research purposes for this course.

#### **1. What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

Participants will be asked questions regarding their participation in community organizing, neighborhood outreach, important events that occurred during or for the neighborhoods official designation, suggestions and recommendation for Sawtelle's process of receiving official designation, and general demographic questions.

The interview is for research purposes to better understand the official designation process for a small ethnic neighborhood.

The interview will last approximately 45 - 80 minutes and will be held at a location that is convenient for you.

#### **2. How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation in an interview will take an estimated 45–80 minutes.

### **3. Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

Participants may experience minor distress discussing the neighborhood official issues and struggles during the process. Participants do not have to answer any question that may cause them distress or any other discomfort. Participation is strictly voluntary, and participants are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without consequences of any kind. We would like to audio-record the interview for our research and future references. If you feel uncomfortable being recorded at any point of the interview, please let the interviewer know.

### **4. Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

Although you will not directly benefit from your participation in the research, your input may assist other neighborhoods that seek to receive official designation. This research study will also examine the impact of community organizing in neighborhoods. The results of the research will provide an analysis regarding different processes on the history of community building, preservation of a community's historic heritage, and the impact of receiving official designation.

### **5. Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?**

All information that is obtained in regards to your connection with this research project may be disclosed upon your request. Information gathered from the interview will be kept in the group members files within their laptops. Once the research project is completed, your files may be destroyed upon your request.

### **6. Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

You are more than welcome to contact our external liaison of the "Asian Neighborhood Official Designation research team": Ching Tung Ho.

If you have any questions or need more information for participating our interview,

Please call or e-mail to: Ching Tung Ho, External Liaison

## ***Interview Guide***

University of California, Los Angeles  
Asian Neighborhoods and Official Designation in Los Angeles County

### Opening Script

Thank you for taking time out of your day to participate in conducting interview. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am accompanied with one observer and note-taker. Our group is focusing on officially designated Asian neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. And, based on teammates' interests, we have selected three Asian neighborhood, Little Bangladesh, Little Tokyo, and Thai Town. Our final goal is to help the Sawtelle Japantown Association, which is currently working on obtaining official designation from the City of Los Angeles in order to preserve Japanese American history. Please do not hesitate to ask me if you have any questions as we go through the interview.

First, we are required to have all interview participants review a consent form.

[Here is the consent form.] I will briefly read out some of the main points in the form, and you can also read the form carefully as I read out to you.

1. The participation of interview is voluntary, and we only use the information you will provide for our research project.
2. This form explains that I will ask you questions about what it is to work on obtaining official designation for a neighborhood, and how you engaged and have been involved in the designation.
3. The form also indicates that we need your permission to audio-record the interview.
4. The interview should last about 45 to 80 minutes.
5. If at any point during the interview, you feel uncomfortable or you do not want to answer a question, let me know. You do not have to answer all of the questions and may end the interview at any time without any consequences.
6. In the consent form, it discusses your rights as a study participant and persons at UCLA that you may contact if you have any questions about the study.

Please let me know if you need more time to read.

Do you consent to participating in the study?

Do you consent to being audio recorded?

[If yes:] Thank you so much.

[If no:] It is totally fine, I respect your right as a study participant. We will instead write down notes on paper.

[After verbal consent:] Now, are you ready for our interview? [If yes:]

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[If no, start recorder. Reminder: take notes on key responses and write down the time when key quotes were stated by interviewee to go back to the recording later].

### **Introduction**

(Before we go into the specific questions, I will ask you some background questions to start.)

1. What is your current position in your organization?
2. What kind of campaigns or projects does your organization do?
3. How did you start working for the organization? How long have you been working in this organization?
4. Why did you decide to work in the neighborhood?
5. What are some unique features that the neighborhood has? And why do you think that?

### **Before Officially Designated**

6. Who are the first group of people that identified the need for official designation for this neighborhood?

[If answered;] What motivated them to feel the need of designation?

[If the answer is too broad or vague;] How did your organization and others decide on the goal to obtain official designation by the Los Angeles City Council?

7. What were the major difficulties that your neighborhood had to face to receive designation?

[If answered;] How did you work to address these difficulties?



8. What events/campaigns has your organization hosted to help the neighborhood receive official designation?

[If yes;] how did they affect to get official designation?

[Additionally ask;] What events have other organizations hosted to help it receive official designation?

9. How have you worked with other groups such as organizations, ethnic groups, neighborhoods, governmental officials to get designation?

[If yes;] Who were they? And how did you develop these relationships?

10. From our research we have discovered that there have been multiple neighborhoods that have received different forms of initiated designation. For example, Koreatown has been officially designated on a local level from the Los Angeles City Council and on a federal level from Preserve America ethnic neighborhoods.

Has your neighborhood received multiple designations from the state and federal level similar to Koreatown?

11. Has any other neighborhoods provided you with helpful advice during the process of receiving official designation?

[If yes;] What were they? And how were they helpful?

12. How did the people in your neighborhood work together to obtain official designation?

### **After Officially Designated**

13. How did the people in your organization and neighborhood react when they first heard the approval of the official designation?

14. What were your goals in obtaining official designation?

15. How does your neighborhood use official designation as the tool for your community? For example, it is used for getting funding or resources, building new facilities, or drawing outsiders' attentions to the neighborhood.

16. What were the major changes in the community after it became officially designated?

17. Were there any negative outcomes that caused by receiving official designation for your neighborhood?

[If yes;] What are they?

18. Are there any events in your community that celebrates your neighborhood's official designation?

[If yes;] What are they? And could you please describe these events.

[If no;] Are you planning to have some events in the future?

19. How will the official designation(s) affect the neighborhood in the future?

### **Conclusion**

20. We are currently working on helping Sawtelle receive official designation. Do you have any suggestions and recommendations for the leaders and community organizers of Sawtelle?

21. Do you know of any other organizers or members who you can connect for further research?

[If yes;] Would you be willing to provide us with their contact?

22. Do you have any question before we conclude the interview?

### **Closing Script**

Thank you so much for sharing your time today to discuss your experiences. Your participation really means a lot for our research. [Additional question: If we come up with questions during our project, do you mind to answer them thru emails or phone calls in future?]

[Turn off recorder.]

### **Post-Interview Notes**

Date:

Location:

Interviewer's name:

Gender:

Occupation:

Who was the interviewer?

How was the interviewer?

Interviewee's name:

Observer's name:

Note-taker's name:

Atmosphere:

What went well?

What went poorly?

Unique about the interview?

Additional Comments:







*Japanese Institute of Sawtelle mural*  
Photo: C. Aujean Lee