

The Role of the Press in Placemaking: Seattle's *International Examiner* and the Construction of the International District in the 1970s

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In 1979, a small Asian American newspaper published in Seattle published a satirical essay describing a not-distant day when development, tourism and greed would have finally destroyed that city's main Asian American neighborhood. The essay, written by *International Examiner* staff writer Gary Iwamoto, was titled "The last resident dies." It begins:

The last living resident of the International District died yesterday. The District, once the home for many of Seattle's elderly Asian population, is a popular tourist attraction, showcasing Seattle's finest Asian restaurants. The District also has museums which feature mementos and artifacts of what used to be Seattle's Asian American community. (*International Examiner*, November 1979, 4).

Iwamoto noted that the International District, "once a neighborhood of low-income residents in run-down hotels and apartments," had been beautified and improved by developers. Trees lined the streets, offices displaced low-income housing, fast food restaurants served Kingdome sports fans. A new "Union Station Convention Center" and a cluster of new luxury hotels brought conventions (such as the National Association of Hog Callers) to Seattle. Seattle leaders pronounced the changes "good" for business.

What happened to the people living in the International District? One government official responded, "Who cares? The District is now a place that all of Seattle can be proud of. People will look at the District as a place where they can park their car, eat some Chinese food, take in a ballgame at the Kingdome, without having to look at some poor unfortunate slob who can't speak English too well." (*International Examiner*, November 1979, 4).

This essay --- prominently displayed on top of the paper's "Opinion Page" -- reflects the *International Examiner's* profound connection to the International District. Throughout the *The Role of the Press in Placemaking*

1970s, the *International Examiner* was an important voice for the Asian American activists and their allies who worked to restore the district and prevent it from destructive development. In hundreds of articles, editorials and essays, the *International Examiner* constantly reminded its readers that the International District was a special place – one steeped in historical importance and a vital part of the identity of Seattle’s Asian American community.

Literature Review

This research paper explores the *International Examiner*’s work in the 1970s in helping to revitalize and protect the International District – both as a physical neighborhood and as a symbol of Asian American identity. This work draws upon earlier research on place and on ethnic media; this earlier work provides a basis for understanding the *International Examiner*’s contributions to the revitalization and protection of Seattle’s International District.

The notion of “place” has attracted the attention of many authors, and the ensuing literature is fairly broad. In this work, we think of “place” primarily within the context of social and cultural geography; “place” is both a location as well as an environment to which meanings are attached. (Frazier, 8).

One way to think about place is to envision an enclave which is both a geographic location (such as a specific district or area) and at the same time an area for which its residents have a specific and oftentimes strong affinity. As Abrahamson writes, “....areas acquire symbolic qualities that include their place names and social histories. Each place, both as a geographic entity and as a space with social meaning, also tends to be an object of residents’ attachment and an important component of their identities.” (Abrahamson, 1).

These special attachments to a location, the acquisition of symbolic qualities, and the merging of identity with place derive from many things. Attachments and identity can grow from a sense of common activities and interests; African Americans in Detroit in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries created a neighborhood that provided a central focus to their daily lives – with businesses, churches, clubs, stores, and homes. (Abrahamson, 10, 61). Similarly, the particular affinity by lesbians and gays for San Francisco’s Castro District derived from a sense of common activities and interests; “Its residents,” writes Abrahamson, “share an identity that is linked to the place, and that place offers them a full range of distinctive commercial and cultural services” (Abrahamson, 155).

Such affinities can arise quickly, as a physical place provides some particular social meaning or meets a particular need. A group might be drawn, at first, to a district simply because of its availability and because no one else wanted it (such as San Francisco’s Chinatown or the Castro District); soon, however, with growing group presence and support services, the area takes on symbolic quality. As Abrahamson writes, San Francisco’s Castro District in the 1960s was a run down, working class Irish neighborhood; as housing prices fell, gays and lesbians began to move in. Soon, that district took on important symbolic value. “What they [gays and lesbians] all had in common was a belief that the Castro was their refuge, a place to start life over without having to hide or deny their sexual preference.” (Abrahamson, 163).

External pressures often strengthened that sense of bonding; those same African Americans faced great discrimination outside the enclave; it was a safe place and the only place where blacks were not subordinate to whites. (Abrahamson, 61). Chinese in San Francisco’s Chinatown in the 19th and early 20th centuries could not count on safety outside that district and restrictions on land ownership deterred outward migration. Laws or social practice, aided by real estate agents and vigilantes, did much to maintain borders. (Frazier, 174) As Abrahamson writes, “What today is sometimes presented as an example of Chinese unity and choice was, in fact, place dictated by law.” (Abrahamson, 173).

Some of this work – notably some of Abrahamson’s enclaves – emphasizes the link between ethnicity and place; for many Chinese or African Americans, their affinity to their neighborhood was part of a broader ethnic identity and sense of community. The emergence and richness of this identity and community derived from a series of factors, including the establishment of an ethnic press.

For many ethnic minorities, the ethnic press has played an important role historically, particularly given the racist orientation of most mainstream daily U.S. media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With virtually all-white staffs, these daily newspapers ignored persons of color except to portray them in stereotypical fashion (primarily in terms of crime) and ignored or justified racial injustice. Within this context, the ethnic press was an important alternative; the ethnic press portrayed the day-to-day life of its community, celebrated achievements, supported community institutions (e.g., churches and businesses), advocated social progress and civil rights, and adamantly resisted racism. In this process, the ethnic press regularly framed news, events, and issues differently from mainstream media and provided substantive advocacy for racial justice. (Folkerts and Teeter 2002; Drake and Cayton 1970; Waters 1987)

Farrar, echoing the experiences of many blacks, recalls how, as a youth, the Baltimore *Afro-American* gave him a sense of identity and community and was a “window into the world of black Baltimore.” The newspaper, he said, “provided visibility for a people rendered invisible by centuries of racial oppression. It voiced the concerns and desires of a people who would have been voiceless ... the importance of the press in creating, maintaining and changing the social order of an urban community cannot be overemphasized.” (1998, xvi)

Methods

Drawing on this research, this paper focuses on the role of an ethnic newspaper, the *International Examiner*, in the struggle to re-vitalize and defend Seattle’s International District

as an Asian American neighborhood. Many activists were engaged in this effort, and the *International Examiner* was just part of a broader effort. But it contributed much, serving as a public voice for the International District and, most of all, for those who wanted to improve it. Housed in, focused on, and dedicated to the International District, the *Examiner* publicized those who worked in the neighborhood, advocated for their programs and urged the community to come together in common work.

This research draws on several sources, including general contextual histories (on Seattle, Asian Americans in the Pacific Northwest, ethnic media, etc.), the first five years of *International Examiner's* publications, and interviews with key *International Examiner* staff members active during those early years. The first five years were selected because they cover the key years in the movement to restore and defend the International District. All available monthly issues published 1975–1979 were studied (fifty-six total). Each issue was examined to ascertain the topic of articles, evidence of advocacy, relationship to Asian American activists and to the International District. Interviews of key staff members included both one-on-one interviews and question-and-answer presentations.

Historical Context: The International District as a home for Asian Americans

Asian immigrants to the United States faced great challenges in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Welcomed first primarily as cheap manual laborers, they faced discrimination and violence as their numbers grew and as they established businesses and acquired homes. Violence against Chinese residents in Washington State was common in the 1880s, when economic depression led to charges that the Chinese were taking jobs from whites. Consequently, many Chinese fled the region. (Chin 2001, 17, 23)

As the economy improved in the 1890s, active hostility lessened and the area's Asian population grew. By the early 1900s, a series of settlements clustered fairly closely together—for

Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos—emerged in an area west of Pioneer Square in what is now Seattle’s International District. (Chin, 27–3, 39) This emerging “international” district was the home of restaurants, hotels, export-import business, steamship line agents, and Chinese family associations. As Chin writes, it was a community “where different Asian immigrants settled, lived, worked and established businesses and institutions side by side.” (Chin, 10) He notes that these early settlers served to draw others. “For the new Filipino immigrants and migrants, their destination in Seattle was the International District, where they could find some solace, familiar faces, and diversion from the laborious journey ahead.” (Chin, 48)

In the 1920s and 1930s, this ethnic enclave was a vibrant neighborhood with a great array of restaurants, businesses, restaurants, and nightclubs. It housed cultural festivals, newspapers, family associations, schools, and churches. While there was much in the district to draw Asian American residents to the area, overt hostility from whites also was at work—serving to discourage settlement elsewhere in the area. (Chin, 63) Starting in the 1940s, the district began a slow decline, which was prompted first by the forced evacuation of Japanese Americans during World War II and second by the population dispersal after the war. By the 1960s, the district’s population had declined and many of the residents that remained in the area were elderly and poor. (Chin, 77) Housing was often substandard and some storefronts were vacant.

In the 1970s, the district began to rebound—but only in response to very substantive threats to the neighborhood’s existence. The construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s had destroyed part of the district and separated it from Beacon Hill, an adjacent neighborhood to which many Asian Americans had moved. In 1968, King County voters included a \$40 million multipurpose stadium for major league football and baseball in its bond program that financed several public improvement projects. By 1972, the county announced it would close five of the district’s hotels due to their poor conditions. District activists linked the closures to the need for

stadium parking, which they feared would not only displace their housing but would also literally overwhelm the district. The community did not unanimously oppose the dome (several business leaders saw opportunity), but many resisted what was to become the King Dome, saying it would increase traffic and crime, displace the single-occupancy residents in the area's hotels, and harm neighborhood property values. (Santos 2002, 69–72; Chin 2001)

These threats inspired local activists to work to improve and defend the International District. They established a variety of organizations—including the Chinese Community Service Organization, the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce and the International District Improvement Association (Inter*Im) to improve economic conditions in the area. The battle to defend and improve the District attracted a number of local college students—including Mayumi Tsutakawa, Elaine Ko, Al and Dick Sugiyama, Frank Irion, Silver and Nemesio Domingo, and others. (Chin, 2001, 81) This “‘Asian Movement’ was not only a struggle for civil rights and equality, but also a search for ethnic identity and pride,” said Bob Santos, a longtime International District resident and Inter*Im leader. (*International Examiner* 2002, 71)

By the middle 1970s, several young Asian American activists—working with support from young African American and Latino leaders—engaged in a broad campaign to revitalize the neighborhood and protect it from outside development. They used the King Dome project to leverage city funds for a community center; they organized to increase and improve housing and social services such as health care, nutritional support, counseling, and legal advice for area residents. It was a far-reaching effort. The campaign involved protests and demonstrations, cleaning and repair work in old buildings, creating a community garden, and the developing a host of organizations that then served as the infrastructure of the neighborhood.

One organization that played a central role in the revitalization of the International District was a newspaper, the *International Examiner*. Established by two businessmen in 1974,

the paper was sold for a dollar in 1975 to the Alaska Cannery Workers' Association—at which point the newspaper became deeply involved in the broader district political movement. The newspaper's leaders were primarily University of Washington journalism students and graduates—Larry Iwamoto, Ron Chew, Rita Fujiki, Elaine Ko, and others—who brought a mix of classroom learning and passion to their work. “We wanted to boost the community,” said Mayumi Tsutakawa, who became the first editor in the ACWA era and said she and others saw the newspaper as part of a broader social movement. She continued, “We wanted to document our own history. We did not want to trust the mainstream media—run by big corporations—to do that.” (Tsutakawa 2006)

The *International Examiner* and the International District

The *International Examiner* served as an important voice for the activists who wanted to revitalize and defend the International District. The paper embraced their agenda. Its very name of *International Examiner* linked it to the pan-Asian International District movement; the newspaper proudly heralded itself first as “the heartbeat” and later as “the journal” of the International District. The *Examiner*'s staff members were dedicated to the preservation of the district and saw the paper as their contribution to the movement. Editor Tsutakawa said she believed it was “very important for those of us with education and professional training to get down there and be involved.” The *International Examiner* “was our way to start to address the needs of the community.” (Tsutakawa 2006) Chew, who wrote for the *Examiner* during its early years and later served as an editor (1977–81, 1983–89), echoed her thoughts. He said the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s had a profound influence on him and his peers. “There was danger of the International District being taken over and being overrun by parking lots, vehicles. We wanted to be the voice for the community.” (Chew 2006)

The newspaper was housed and distributed for free in the district and focused almost entirely on the district's concerns. Through articles and editorials, the newspaper tied itself closely to the district, consistently evoking the sense of a place that held particular importance for Asian Americans. The *Examiner's* sense of place was twofold—of common purpose and of external threat. The district was treated as a home for Asian Americans and a neighborhood where Asian American businesses, services, and homes would flourish. It supported community action that advanced that sense of common purpose. At the same time, the paper reminded the community repeatedly that there were many external forces that could undermine or destroy the district.

Working together: Evoking a sense of common purpose and bond.

In the 1970s, the International District clearly was not only a physical space where people lived, but also a symbolic place that grew out of social meanings or fulfilling particular needs. The *International Examiner* saw the district as place where community organizations and businesses supported the district, community members supported these institutions, and both advocated on behalf of community concerns. Through all of these activities and actions that advanced that sense of common purpose emerged a broader ethnic identity. The International District was seen as a home for Asian Americans with a common purpose reinforced through these common endeavors.

This sense of common purpose and bond was reflected in *International Examiner's* description of its position as a newspaper. A common purpose and bond was also reflected in the rest of the newspaper content, the articles and editorials that identified the actions and identity of the International District. In a November 1976 article, the *International Examiner* was identified by its publisher and staff as “the publication most widely read by a cross section of Seattle’s Asian American community.” They wrote: “there persists an identification association made

between the I D and the greater Asian community. The I D is the community's historical base. It remains an integral, active part of the community for a number of cultural, social and commercial reasons." (Nemesio Domingo and the Examiner Staff, "The Examiner: what is it," November 1976, 5)

Two years later, in 1978, the *International Examiner* placed itself among the businesses in the district that served the district. It celebrated its survival saying it was "extraordinary because the paper continues to be distributed throughout the International District free of charge" and said it was the International District community's support—including advertisers and subscribers—that allowed the newspaper to make it through a year of "madness." The *Examiner* acknowledged those who work for the newspaper, making it clear the reporters, artists, and photographers who put it together are both "dedicated" and "unpaid." The article recalled the paper's start – "about the same time the International District started to unite into a distinct ethnic community of dedicated, caring, young and old, residents, workers and business people..." ("We look forward to another year of madness," December 1978, 4)

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The *Examiner* focused on the common purpose of the District’s residents in several ways --- by supporting District organizations and businesses, encouraging community members to support those organizations and businesses, by advocating on behalf of the community, and by invoking a broader ethnic identity integrally linked to the International District.

1. Supporting International District organizations and businesses

Propelling the resurgence of the International District in the 1970s were several key organizations that formed to address key community needs of housing, health, economic development, planning, governmental representation, preservation, art, social services, elderly and youth care, and language issues. Although each had its own specific goals and missions, together they served a common purpose and common cause of improving what had become known as the International District.

The *International Examiner* paid close attention to this broad array of International District organizations. Among the most visible of these were: the International District Improvement Association (Inter*Im), established in 1968 to facilitate community development in the district and larger Asian/Pacific community, as well as encourage community-based revitalization; the International District Emergency Center, established in 1968 to patrol streets and respond to medical, emotional, and personal traumas; the International District Economic Association (IDEA), a group of concerned business owners, led by Tomio Moriguchi (chief executive officer of the Uwajimaya store); the International Special Review District Board, established in 1973 to promote, preserve, and perpetuate the cultural, economic, historical and other beneficial qualities of the area (the board was first conceived to mitigate the Kingdome's impact and soon moved into broader areas of preservation and rehabilitation in the district); the Alaska Cannery Workers Association, founded in 1973 with ties to Filipino American fishing industry workers who protested their exploitation, including lawsuits; the Seattle Chinatown-International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDPPA or Public Development Authority), established in 1974 and founded in 1975 as a city-chartered community development agency (the authority was involved in many projects, including the purchase and renovation of a garage for the Northwest Asian American Theater and the Wing Luke Asian

Museum, and purchase and renovation of the New Central Hotel for housing, office space and the Denise Louie Child Care Center); and Washington's Department of Social and Health Services, which funded an Asian Health Clinic and a multi-Asian-language project to locate and enroll residents for financial and elderly service programs. Other active organizations were the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), founded in 1929 and more active in this era around issues such as World War II reparations; the Filipino Community Council of Seattle; the Asian Community Center; the Asian Multi-media Center; the Wing Luke Asian Museum; the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce; the Chong Wa Benevolent Association; the International District Youth Council; and the Asian Planners Association.

Every *International Examiner* newspaper issue published in the 1970s mentioned the work of one or more of these organizations. In April 1975, for example, the *Examiner* reported on the Special District Review Board (which was drafting key guidelines for the district), federal funding for the Asian Health Clinic and the Emergency Center, the Public Authority's work to create a district community center, the Special Review District Board review of Union Station development plans, and Interim's efforts to raise funds for community services. In September 1976, the paper reported on the Economic Association's parking program, the Special District Review Board's elections, an IDEA-sponsored mural, Wing Luke Museum's activities, the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, the Asian multi-media center, the Asian Planners' Association housing rehabilitation efforts, the Health Community Center's hiring of a health planner, The Chinese Information Center's nutrition program for elderly residents, and information about a new Asian legal aid service.

2. Encouraging community members to support these institutions

The *International Examiner* urged district residents to participate in the community through these groups and others. For example, in its October 1976 issue, an article in the

International Examiner urged residents to volunteer for the community garden that Inter*im was developing. (“Terrace Garden Near Completion,” 6) In September 1976, another article called on readers to volunteer to work in the new nutrition program for elderly Chinese. (“Chinese nutrition program begins,” September 1976, 7). Another article in the June 1976 issue of the *Examiner* urged Asian women to serve on an ad hoc task force to create an Asian women’s health clinic. (“Asian women examine health,” 7)

The newspaper’s September 1976 issue urged International District residents to vote in an upcoming election for members of the International Special District Review Board and noted the board’s importance in overseeing physical development and construction in the district. In that editorial, it told residents to make sure the board reflected the broad interests of the district: “The Examiner feels all types of people should be represented on the Board. In particular, residents, younger people, women and community activists have not been well represented on the Board since its inception.” (“Don’t overlook Review Board elections,” 5)

Community members were encouraged to be politically involved around a common political purpose. The *Examiner* supported such efforts through its newspaper content. For example, in its July 1978 issue it reported that Dolores Sibonga was “active in several International District community organizations and present chairperson of Inter*im,” and that she “is seeking support form community organizations and individuals for her candidacy to Seattle City Council.” (“District Notes,” 8)

Community members were also encouraged to remain united on their efforts to support common institutions. A May 1978 article provides an example of how the *International Examiner* encouraged a common front in its discussion of a change in Chong Wah Benevolent Association’s leadership. This association led early efforts to resist a broadly defined International District and advocated for a narrower physical boundary that centered on

Chinatown. The *Examiner* noted that the new leadership “says it is eager and willing to work with the larger Asian community, which has not been the case for several years. An example is the participation of Chong with Inter*Im on a petition to eliminate hazardous traffic and develop four-way stop signs in the core of the International District.” The article quotes the Inter*Im’s director, Bob Santos, saying “This shows a positive change for Chong Wah,” But, it also describes the association as “cautious” about proceeding and says it “still views the area as ‘Chinatown,’ and not the International District...” (“Chong Wah: a changing of the guard,” 1)

One way that community members could show their support for International District institutions was financial, according to the newspaper. In a July 1978 issue the *Examiner* told its readers that “To help provide income for the [Chinese Information] Center, the board of directors has set up a task force to raise a target \$5,000. Possible fundraising activities include: benefit dance, raffle, film, street fairs, private donation campaign and bingo. Hopefully other permanent sources can be tapped as well.” It reported that the June Street Fair, which was held in the district, raised \$150, noting that elderly people helped by making dim sum. The article continues, “However, that still leaves the Center far from its target of \$5,000.” It continues its appeal, making the connection between community members support and the institutions that serve the community: “To maintain services for the elderly and new immigrants, CISC needs all the financial support it can get. CISC serves both District and non-District residents.” (“Chinese Information Center needs money to stay open, 2)

In addition to encouraging active participation from its readers, the *International Examiner*’s staff members were also participants, supporters, and activists. Staff reporter Gary Iwamoto was one of the corps of volunteers who worked to save the Milwaukee Hotel; he also wrote the *Examiner*’s article on the volunteers. Donnie Chin, head of the International District Emergency Center, wrote about the center for the paper (“Story of the ID Emergency Center,”

November, 1975, 4). Elaine Ko—who worked at Inter*Im—was part of a group of district activists who pressed King County Council members to provide more funding for housing; she also wrote the *Examiner*'s article on the meeting. (“Action group hosts tour of District; Takes Council members to task for inaction,” June 1975, 3)

3. Advocating on behalf of community concerns: housing, health, and more

The International District's institutions—its organizations and businesses, including the *International Examiner*—and its residents worked together toward several issues that became a part of a broader common purpose. These included housing, health planning, and more.

The newspaper's impatience with a lack of progress in the community was evident when debates delayed what it saw as worthy projects. For example, in October 1976, when the Public Authority finally chose the old Bush Hotel for the site of the new International District Community Center, the *Examiner* rejoiced and called it the best choice for the center. But that celebration came with criticism of those who had delayed a decision through “bureaucratic game playing, vote fixing and strategic delaying actions.” It called upon these foes of the Bush site to let the project go forward quickly. (“Community Center: Games are over,” 5). In August 1976, the newspaper urged that federal funds allocated for a new District park be used soon, lest they be lost. (“Mini-park funding: Use it or lose it,” 5)

The newspaper urged all district residents to remain focused on the important issues of community building—and readily criticized those who were not working in that direction. For example, in a June 1975 editorial, the *Examiner* objected when district funds were diverted to fund a pet project for Ruby Chow, the County Council's sole Asian American member. Although the funds had been spent for a laudable project—to hire two Chinese dancers to teach in the Seattle public schools—the newspaper said the funds would have been better used for more

pressing needs in the district such as “housing, nutrition programs, health care.” (“Federal Funds: Boon or Boondoogle?” 4).

Housing was one of the common purposes the *International Examiner* identified—bringing institutions and residents together through newspaper content. The newspaper outlined the key issue in November 1976:

Housing for the elderly and low-income residents of the District must be of paramount concern. Their housing supply has been rapidly diminishing and deteriorating... Will the District continue to be a residential neighborhood, as well as an eating and shopping place? If so, a more diverse residential community will be required, particularly to help the economic development of the District. We should consider the needs of the immigrant family, and the moderate and middle income people...” (“Analysis: Housing,” November 1976, 11)

The newspaper documented the efforts by Inter*Im and other district groups to secure funding to create or rehabilitate housing in the district. The newspaper was particularly critical of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), arguing that the department was inexcusably slow in providing funds for low income housing. And when the funds were available, they were often unusable due to a host of restrictions based on operations, construction, eligibility, etc. (“Federal Housing Programs explored,” September 1976, 6) A November 1975 editorial charged HUD with “neglect” but vowing to fight on behalf of the district:

Asian workers in this country have traditionally had to fight for everything they should have by rights. The struggle now continues to provide the elderly workers of our community with decent living conditions. The people living and working in this district are trying to improve what they have as a community... If we are successful in securing the housing, it will be an initial victory for our entire community. But the challenge now is to maintain this struggle and continue to support the residents by reminding the government of our need for housing subsidies—over and over again—for, as we have seen, too easily do they forget any commitments to the people. (“HUD Neglects ID Housing Needs,” 2)

Activism about housing was encouraged at the institutional and individual level. These two came together in February 1977, when citizens pressured business owners to work together to preserve the Milwaukee Hotel. Hotel tenants and other district residents gathered more than 300 signatures urging the owners to upgrade heat, electrical wiring and sanitation systems. (“International District residents call for Milwaukee Hotel repairs,” 3) In May/June 1977, Inter*im tried to lease the hotel from its owners. (“Inter*im to lease Milwaukee Hotel,” 2). In August 1977, the *Examiner* reported that Inter*im and the International District Housing Alliance put pressure on the owners to prevent closure and also tried to find funding to defray maintenance and repair costs (“These conditions the Milwaukee Hotel tenants must endure,” 5) When the city ordered the immediate closure of the hotel in September 1977, community activists—led by Inter*im and the International District Housing Alliance—organized nearly 75 volunteers to clean up the hotel and do required repairs. The *Examiner*—in an October 1977 story written by staff reporter Gary Iwamoto, who was one of the volunteers—reported on volunteers’ success and resulting praise from the Seattle Fire Department for “superior effort at what had to be a most impossible task.” (“Community volunteers keep Milwaukee Hotel open,” 1) A year later, in its September 1978 issue, the so-called “fire watch volunteers” were praised for working 24 hours a day to keep the Milwaukee Hotel open and preventing “another hotel closing in the housing-scarce International District.” (Chew, Ron, “Applauding fire watch volunteers,” 4)

In addition to the issue of housing, the *International Examiner* reminded its readers that district social services needed to reflect the particular needs of the community. This required planning. For example, in September 1975, when the planning process began to create a district health clinic, the newspaper supported the idea strongly,

describing some health problems for some district residents as “critical,” pointing to causes of poverty, poor diets, and the district’s high density living and unsanitary housing conditions. The paper urged planners, however, to think substantively about residents’ needs:

“Studies have pointed out that the structure of ‘traditional’ medical clinics are neither set up to reach diverse multi-ethnic groups nor to meet the needs of the poor. Other serious considerations include traditional residents’ fear of health centers and the prevailing attitudes of ‘not valuing health treatment.’” (“New ID Health Clinic: Will It Meet Needs of Residents?” September, 1975, 1).

4. Invoking ethnic identity

It was through the common purpose and common endeavors demonstrated through the community institutional and individual activity that a broader ethnic identity—one of Asian American within the International District—emerged. The International District became a place where people with a common purpose came together. The *International Examiner* showed them how. Through its newspaper content, the newspaper demonstrated what it was to be Asian American. This included language, accomplishments, home country, food, and art, as well as at times an assumption that Asian was simply understood by the newspaper’s readers.

While the *Examiner* primarily published its pages in English, many references to non-English languages appeared in the newspaper. A July 1978 article addressed the need for police officers to improve their ability to communicate with district residents. (“Community recommends bilingual police,” 12) A June 1976 issue reported that the National Labor Relations Board was investigating the United Garment Workers Union after reports the union denied its Chinese-speaking members the opportunity to participate in union meetings by voting down an amendment to have translators available. (Ron Chew, “NLRB investigates garment union,” 1) That same issue also reported that Asian women seeking health care encountered “problems such as language and cultural barriers.” (“Asian women examine health,” 7) and that an “Asian

attorney” said that a proposed Seattle Public School bilingual education plan fails to meet all of the requirements set forth by a court decision on special instruction for non-English speaking students.” (“Seattle bilingual education inadequate,” 8) On July 1976, several stories written in different languages appear in the paper, along with a reference to an Asa Mercer Junior High School publication of short stories and poetry with work in five languages. (7)

The *Examiner* also celebrated Asian American accomplishments, including the first people to break barriers. In August 1976, the newspaper announced, “The state’s first Asian woman delegate to the Democratic Convention, Arlene Oki is one example of what Asian Americans can accomplish by working through the system.” (“At the Convention with Arlene Oki,” 6)

Being Asian American also meant for some Asians an association with a home country. For example, a June 1976 one-page spread of photographs celebrated the dedication of Kobe Park and the celebration of Philippine National day, June 12, in Hing Hay Park. The latter included speeches, music and traditional dance groups, and marked the date in 1898 when the Philippines gained independence from Spain. (4) In that same issue, Diana Bower—who the county hired in 1973 to study how the stadium might affect people in the area—talked about how people in the district responded to feeling pushed by the stadium debate:

“‘Small people, even poor people, can create an economic base,’ Bower said. She pointed to China as a good example of small units of individuals working together and joining to make a large movement.

“‘We have a tremendous asset in the smallness of the I.D.,’ she said. ‘If we want to, we can communicate with each other three times a day, in person.’” (Tsutakawa, Mayumi, “The Stadium Impact Story,” 5)

Advertisements and articles associated food with Asian American identity. An August 1976 article included several advertisements that described food: “Filipino Dishes,” “Authentic Japanese Cuisine,” and “Cantonese Cuisine [sic.]” (6) And a September 1976 article described a

new cook's preparation of Dim Sum, Chinese tea pastries. Restaurant managers said at weekday lunches, "an equal number of Chinese and Caucasians enjoy Dim Sum, but on weekends, the restaurant is filled with Chinese families at lunch time." ("Hong Kong Restaurant has Dim Sum," 2)

Asians as artists was another integral part of Asian American identity in the International District. A June 1976 announcement of the First Pacific Northwest Asian American Writers Conference at the University of Washington brings together U.S. authors, poets and playwrights provides one example. ("Conference to bring together Asian writers," 6)

Finally, the expression of what it was to be Asian was assumed throughout the newspaper issues. An August 1976 article reported that the International District Mural Project announced competitions for a mural design that, "should reflect Asian culture, relate to the International District in some way, and be compatible with the color scheme and design of the park." No specific description of "Asian culture" was provided. ("Mural competition for artists," 8)

Throughout these general content areas --- focusing on district organizations, seeking community support for them, providing advocacy for district revitalization, and invoking an ethnic identity that was integrally tied to the International District --- the Examiner articulated a sense of common purpose for district residents (as well as outsiders). The paper's message was a simple one: the International District was an important historic and cultural home for Seattle's Americans, and all should promptly and energetically join in the work of revitalization and preservation.

Defending the District and its inhabitants

While the *International Examiner* articulated a vision of a neighborhood joined primarily through the common interests and activities of its residents, the paper also was quick to remind its readers that the District faced substantive external threats – through development, traffic and

related projects hatched by local officials (city, county, port) or downtown business interests. These threats required vigilance on the part of the District's leaders and residents; the *Examiner* exposed and opposed projects that it feared would destroy the geographic and cultural integrity of the District.

In the early 1970s, the International District was truly a neighborhood under siege; freeway construction, the Kingdome, a transportation/bus center and several other projects truly threatened to overwhelm the District. As Inter*im leader Bob Santos noted, "You have the Domed Stadium on one side, the I-5 (freeway) on another side, the industrial area to the south, the downtown business district on the north. And now we have this transportation center. Everything is dumped on us." ("Port of Seattle pursues \$17 million transportation center," August 1978, 1) . The activists working to revitalize and protect the International District had to devote a good deal of energy just to stopping further encroachment on their neighborhood – and the *International Examiner* readily joined this battle.

The Kingdome was the first major threat the District faced in the 1970s. More than anything, the Kingdome came to represent the city of Seattle's callous disregard for the International District; consultation over the siting of the new stadium had not involved the District – even though the stadium was along its western border and the influx of tens of thousands of Seattleites to the stadium for games would inevitably create traffic jams and a great demand for parking.

Throughout 1975-76, articles on the Kingdome appeared regularly in the *International Examiner* – focusing on disputes over hiring practices among construction crews, concessionaires, efforts to address traffic and parking problems, limited increase in business from Kingdome crowds, Editorials portrayed the Kingdome as a menace to the District, and political cartoons portrayed the stadium as a giant colossus, ready to swallow up the International

District (*International Examiner*, April 1975, 1; September 1975, 4; October 1975, 1; December 1975, 2; July 1976, 5; September 1976, 1, 4;).

In June, 1976, editor Mayumi Tsutakawa wrote a key story entitled “The Stadium Impact Story.” The article focused on Diana Bower, “a long time International District supporter” who had worked for three years (at a half time position) for the city of Seattle to address the stadium’s potential threats to the district and other adjacent neighborhoods (such as the Pioneer Square area). Bower was decidedly pessimistic about the Kingdome and the city’s ability to address its impact on the community.

Calling the stadium “a big mistake,” Bower said:

“This big mistake is the cause of a lot of problems, a lot of bad things flowed from that,” she said. “District people have been forced into a situation for which there is no fair or equitable solution. People have been pushed into a situation opposing each other or trying to decide who is expendable – the residents, the businesses, and so on. The parking problem is a good example of this. We are trying to decide whether Kokusai theatre-goers or residents who own cars are more important, and the answer is that everyone is important. *International Examiner*, June 1976, 5.

The article noted Bower’s sense that the negative impacts of the Kingdome had not been addressed, and that critical problems in housing in particular had been ignored. She decried what she saw as a serious erosion in the quality of life in the International District – brought about by the Kingdome project. (June 1976, 5).

In February 1977, a year after the Kingdome opened, an article by Julia Laranang reported that the Kingdome had provided little economic value to the International District, had cost twice its original estimate and benefited not the community generally but a few wealthy individuals. “Since the events in the stadium are put on by private interests, most of the profit, except for a tax on admissions, goes to these private interest, not to the people who paid twice as much as originally planned to build it, with interest.

(*International Examiner*, February 1977, 9). It represented a real threat to the District, she wrote:

It's easy to see that, unless something is done to prevent it, the I.D. will become an Asian version of Pioneer Square, where rather than deal with the problems of the residents, most of them will be thrown out so profitable businesses can be built with no consideration for residents' wishes or provisions made for alternative housing. (*International Examiner*, February 1977, 9).

The District lost its battle against the Kingdome – but the stadium itself served as an important symbol for the city's disregard for the International District and as a catalyst to protests. The coalition that first came together to fight the Kingdome continued to work together to protect the International District from other encroachments – and the *International Examiner* was part of that broad coalition.

The next battles came over city and county plans to use the old Union Train station – also on the very edge of the District – as a transportation center and another city proposal to create a “bus barn” on the south edge of the District. Community leaders attacked both proposals, contending that they would bring additional traffic, noise, parking congestion and pollution to the District without any offsetting contribution to the community. (*International Examiner*, June 1975, 1; November 1979, 1).

The Union Station proposal first surfaced in 1975, and the *International Examiner* quickly assailed it as yet another threat to the International District. (*International Examiner*, April 1975, 4; June 1975, 1). The project stalled, due to community protests and a lack of funding, but city officials revived it in 1978. Again, the *International Examiner* warned that the Union Station development plan for a combined train, bus, taxi and train center would hurt the District and its residents. An article by Ron Chew (“The fall and rise of Union Station redevelopment proposal”) linked the project to the

Kingdome. Chew quoted a local resident who contended that Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman's plan might well help Seattle businesses but it would invariably displace International District residents forced out by rising rents:

Of course, it will benefit business. But if the terminal will be built here again - - and I say again because I opposed the Dome Stadium. When the Domed Stadium was built, everything went up. The rent was 20 or 25 dollars before the Stadium, but afterwards it went up to double....(*International Examiner*, June 1978, 1).

The article also quoted other community leaders and residents who charged that the proposal would "strangle" the District in traffic. Both projects were abandoned – in part due to protests from the Asian American community and partly due to inadequate funding.

Defending the International District also entailed efforts to prevent city actions that limited or closed housing units in the neighborhood. When the city of Seattle embarked on a rigorous zoning standards campaign in the middle 1970s, many dilapidated International District residential hotels faced closure --- which would have forced elderly residents to move. (*International Examiner*, July 1976, 2, 3; August 1976, 98; November 1976, 1).

Through its articles, opinion essays and editorials, the *International Examiner* presented a sharp critique of development plans popular with city officials, many local business people and the mainstream media. The *Examiner's* criticism of these development projects (such as the Kingdome, bus barns and transportation centers) consistently represented these projects as threats to the neighborhood that was the International District. The paper detailed the ways in which these projects would hurt the district – through pollution, traffic, demand for parking, rising rents that would hurt District businesses and displace residents. The *Examiner* framed these issues from the distinct perspective of Asian Americans in the International District, and

thus presented a view that was not to be found in the mainstream daily press. It consistently provided a voice both to community leaders and to residents who wanted to protect the District. It was also a valuable contributor to the broader public debate on the future of the International District, helping to convince even Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman that some projects—such as the Union Station redevelopment plan—were not necessarily good for the International District or the city of Seattle (Uhlman, 2006).

Conclusion

In his preface to Doug Chin’s book *Seattle’s International District: The Making of a Pan-Asian American Community*, long-time International Examiner editor Ron Chew recalls the efforts by student activists in the 1970s to rename Seattle’s historic Chinatown as the International District:

This conscious renaming was an attempt to promote a new identity for a community that had always served as home for residents, shopkeepers and workers of many nationalities. In this era, the assertive clamor of activists and elderly residents unleashed new public dollars to construct low-income housing, restore old hotels, establish bilingual social services and refurbish the streets (Chin, 2001, 6).

As Chew notes, the *Examiner* was part of this “assertive clamor,” as it “chronicled the tumultuous evolution of the neighborhood, the transformation of Chinatown from a seemingly random assemblage of neglected buildings into a unified district where, block by block, individual projects began to take shape and illuminate a larger vision.” (Chin, 2001, 6).

The paper did more than just chronicle that evolution, however. It played a part, both by encouraging a sense of common purpose and reminding the community of very substantive threats to survival. It was not the only voice for the community, but it was a leading and very public one. It was closely tied to the district (in production, focus, distribution, advocacy and activism). Its articles and editorials reminded readers of the district’s history and unique cultural

importance; it showed challenges but also documented progress and successes. It gave prominent space to International District leaders --- publicizing and supporting a wide variety of efforts aimed at creating the neighborhood anew. In its own words, it was “the journal of the International District.”

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