



# CONNECTING WITH CARE

Design for psychological space that provide meaningful connections for seniors



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Yuxin (Rotina) Tian



Chicago Chinatown

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the biggest and still growing Chinatown in the US, Chicago Chinatown has a great history that celebrates the collective community efforts in defeating unequal land acquisitions and other discriminative actions. However, it also has its own unique set problem, within which the biggest concern is the constant threat of gentrification.

For the ever-growing low-income senior population, this underlying concern adds to other psychological issues, such as past traumatic experience, loneliness and safety and health concerns, increase their vulnerability to social conflicts.

The project targets on the more vulnerable senior population to forge greater resilience within entire community, by providing an urban design solution that focus on psychological care for the senior group to heal their past trauma and create new meaningful connections, and to forge a more resilient community.

## CONTEXT

Chicago Chinatown has experienced three critical crisis in the history: 1. forced to relocate from downtown area; 2. displacement caused by the highway construction; 3. fight over riverfront development that potentially would destroy the stability of the community fabric. Even until today, the battle continues when the huge development District 78 is proposed just north of the community and south of downtown.

While Chinatowns in the other American cities face greater issues, the influx of seniors kept growing each year. Many of the population live by themselves and need a lot of care in daily life. Many within the group came to the country in the mid-90s, worked mostly as labor throughout decades, while has low income and little English skills.

## ISSUES

In the 2013 Community Survey, the senior population takes 18% of the entire population, comparing to 10.3% city wide.<sup>1</sup> Within the Chinatown core area, the existing services can barely satisfy the needs of the older generation Chinese Americans.

While the group of seniors face many issues such as lack of housing and lack of access to public service, this project primarily focus on mitigating the psychological ones, including:

- Lost of social connections
- Past trauma that caused by racial discrimination
- Fear of loneliness and health issues
- Lack of validation of past experiences

One perspective to take from the above issues is that the neighborhood is in need of public space and social opportunities that can create various ways for the seniors to share experience with each other, connect people with similar background, validate each other's concern, create mutual aids community and forge community resiliency.

<sup>1</sup> Chinatown Community Vision Plan 2013, Existing Condition Report.

Currently, there are several active community groups providing senior services and classes. The most popular programs are group classes that new skills and provide platform for new connections. However, the Chinatown are is lack of outdoor open space, diminishing the opportunity for a broader connection between the community members. It is suggested that more open spaces can be added to facilitate community events and informal social activities.

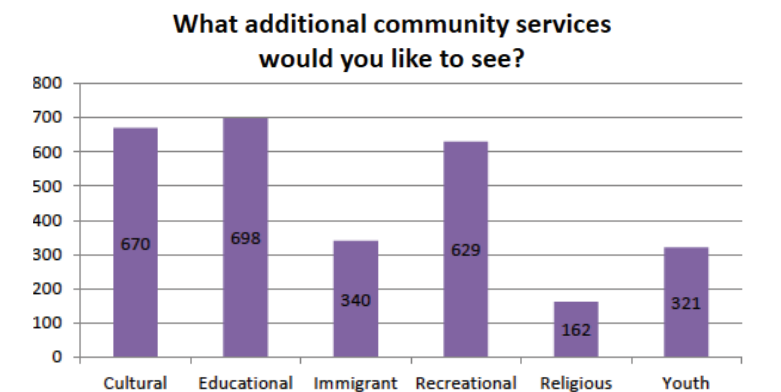
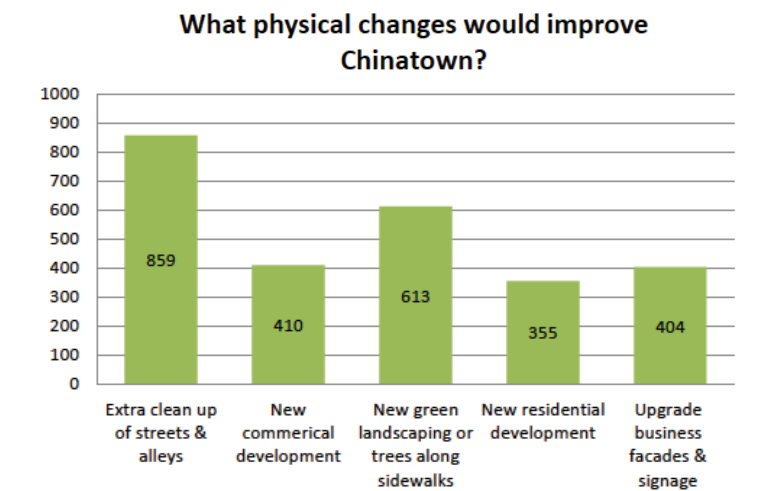
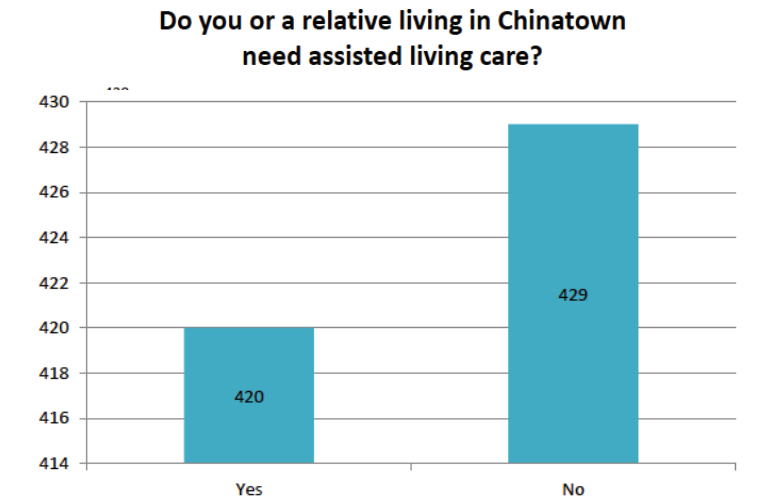


Image 1,2,3 2013 community survey



There is also a present of local interest groups formed by seniors looking, but the available spaces are very limited

## DESIGN

The context map picked out the relevant facilities within the Chinatown core area.

Among the senior housings and community centers, there is a great opportunity for place-making between the CASL community center, CASL senior housing and Ping Tom Memorial Park.

Based on the research, the design is developed from two scales:

- A. Personal scale architectural pod that can be install indoor/outdoor on demand;
- B. An outdoor space and connecting route for senior activities and multi generational connections

The architectural pods provide multiple ways to forge new connections as well as providing psychological comforts in a more intimate setting.

The outdoor space is consisted of a bigger event place, sensory garden, and storyground which is an integrated outdoor version of the pods, aiming to provide multiple options for social connections.

## OUTCOMES

The design provide psychological spaces from two scales and is aimed to generate foreseeable social impact to the core Chinatown community.

## CONCLUSION

Care for the seniors on the scale of psychology provide unique healing function to the individual level, and enhance the connection within the community. With potential gentrification happening in the future, the community will possess greater power to pursue the developments needed by local residents.



1. Dancing class provided by Community Organization.  
Source: CCBA website: <http://www.ccbachicago.org/Services.html>
2. Mandarin class for the seniors  
Source: CCBA website: <http://www.ccbachicago.org/Services.html>
3. Local opera group practice indoor  
Source: Youtube



CHINA SQUARE AREA IN 1972 AND IN 2021

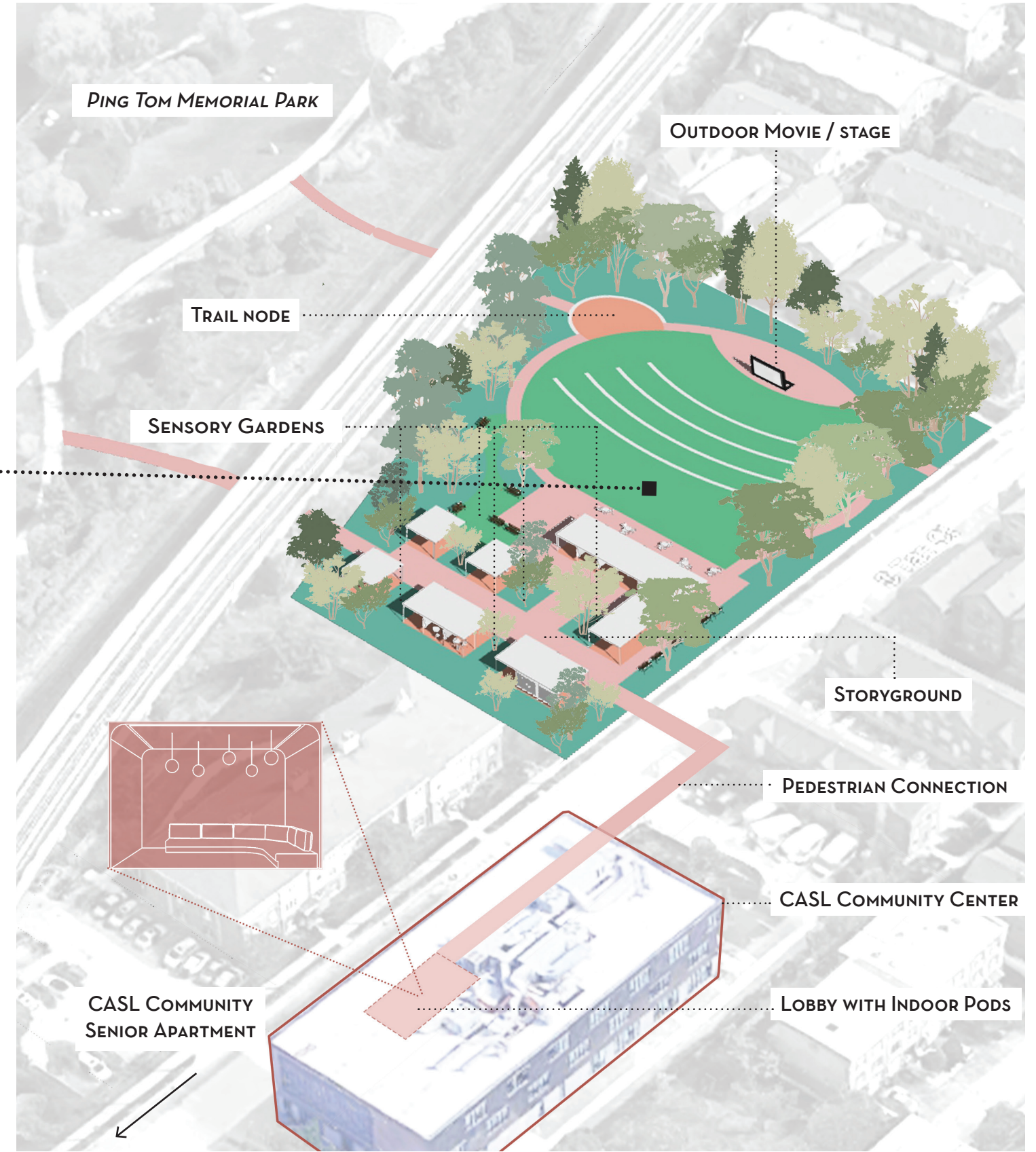


**LEGEND**

- Senior Apartment
- Public Institution
- Park



LOCATION MAP



PROPOSED SENIOR PARK AND CONNECTIONS



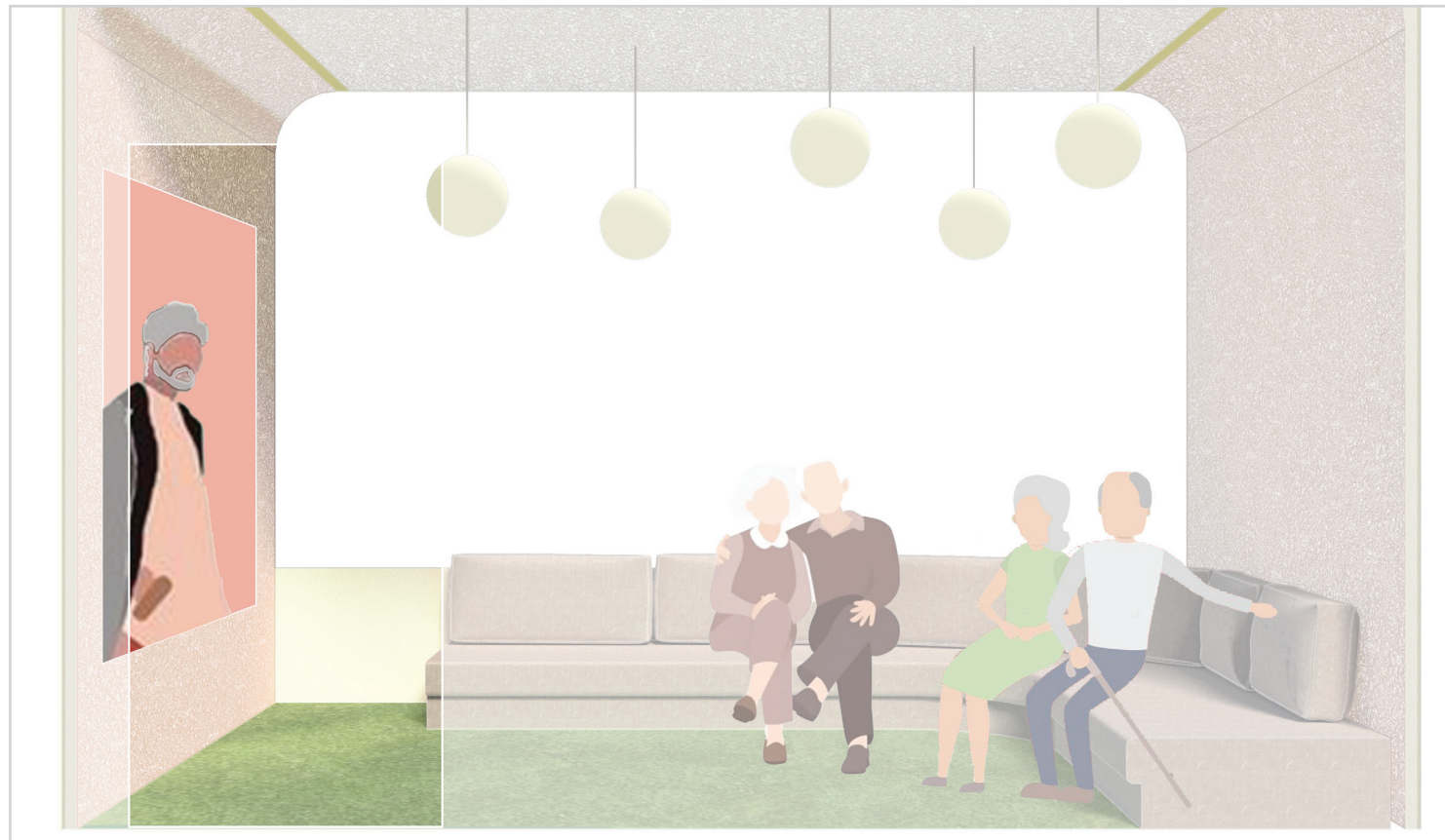
MULTI-FUNCTION POD DESIGN



Video Call  
Connecting with family members and old friend in a private and spacious setting.



Personal story sharing  
Pre-recorded personal stories of other seniors from different communities around the US.



Live-cam  
People watching and meeting friends from live cameras in the parks and other connected devices.



Old movie watching  
Watch old movies and hometown operas together.



**CASL COMMUNITY CENTER LOBBY**

The portal can be placed inside the lobby area of community center, creating virtual connections for visitors.







**STORYGROUND**

A portion of the open space is devoted for media display and sharing on personal stories and playing old movies. The goal is for the community members to learn other people's life stories to understand the community as a whole, as well as forging deeper connections.