

Community-Made, Community-Led: Exploring the History of Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center

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Introduction

It was not just about pioneering services. It was about community control. It was about leadership development and providing pathways for people in the community to take leadership over our own destiny. (David Moy Interview 2016)

Standing on the corner of Ash and Oak streets in Boston Chinatown, the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) serves as an anchor for the city's Asian American community. BCNC, in its over 40 years of history, grew from a small gathering of local residents, parents, and community leaders, into the leading human social services provider for Greater Boston's Asian American community. The organization's mission, "to ensure that children, youth, and families have the resources and supports they need to achieve greater economic success and social well-being," highlights BCNC's commitment to all individuals. BCNC provides assistance and resources for community members, both immigrants and non-immigrants, to build a support system and preserve Boston Chinatown's rich culture. The majority of those served are immigrant Chinese with low family incomes and limited English ability. As a community-based organization, BCNC both serves and invests in the Chinatown community. This commitment is seen through the organization's leadership and programs.

Leading BCNC today is executive director Giles Li. Joining the organization in 2006, Giles embodies BCNC's values of community participation and empowerment. Giles oversees more than 80 staff members who manage programs that support learning and development for thousands of children, youth, and adults. Under Giles' guidance, the organization's family-centered approach underlies its eight programs, which include adult education, family childcare, recreation and fitness, and family services.

BCNC did not start as the leading service provider that it is today. Over 40 years ago, the organization found its roots in a dilapidated building borrowed temporarily from the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). At the time, BCNC did not have the vast member base it has now. It did not have direct service programs to provide to the community. It did not have a permanent home. It was not even known then as BCNC. So how did BCNC form and how did it grow into the established organization it is today? What were the original goals for the organization? Moreover, what were the organization's relationship with and role in the Boston Asian American community? How does the present state of BCNC line up with the mission of its founders and contributors, and how has its role in the Boston Asian American community transformed over the years?

These are the questions that Giles and I looked to answer in spring 2016, 47 years after the founding of BCNC. This project, which looks into the formation of BCNC and its values, started with meeting some of BCNC's original contributors. But, before I delve further into exploring BCNC's beginnings, one must understand the beginning of Boston Chinatown.

Background

As far as [whites] were concerned, they were the only ones who had history here, not Chinese for sure. For us, we didn't have that information. It was like we were trying to create it ourselves. (Stephanie Fan Interview 2016)

Boston Chinatown began in the 1870s as a community of male Chinese laborers. Originally recruited in 1870 from the west coast after the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, these 75 laborers served as strike breakers at Calvin T. Sampson's Shoe Factory in North Adams, Massachusetts. The majority of these male workers came to the U.S. from China's Guangdong Province through the flow of Chinese migrant labor under a contract system (To 2008). Sampson continued this strategy by hiring another 50 Chinese workers in 1871. Replacing the factory's union employees for cheaper wages, the Chinese workers remained at the factory for a brief period of three years, as white men later replaced the Chinese (To 2008). Of the original 75 Chinese workers, 70 made their way to Boston where they settled in the South Cove landfill area where many Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Syrian immigrants had previously established communities (To 2008).

By the end of the 1800s and the early 1900s, this small community found its niche by establishing successful laundries and restaurants (To 2008). Boston Chinatown experienced an increase from about 200 people in 1890 to around 900 people in 1910 (Chen 2014). As Chinese merchants and workers populated the area, clan associations and family organizations sprung up as bases in Chinatown for recreation, information, and support (Chen 2014).

Many years later, in the 1940s, new waves of Chinese immigrants found their way into Boston Chinatown. "In this period, Boston's Chinatown became a site of intense contestation as an increasingly large and diverse Chinese American community vied for space with an array of public and private entities" (Chen 2014). Despite Chinatown's growth during this time, Boston experienced a period of urban decline that drove city planners to map out large-scale urban renewal. Intercity highways served as a solution to connect affluent suburban areas with the then struggling urban centers; however, building highways into the central city also meant destroying residential areas that planners deemed dispensable (Chen 2014). The vision for these highways offered a promise to reactivate cities through connecting them to larger regional and national economies, not through prioritizing communities already present within the city. In the process of designing the city's future, community members were left out. Boston officials focused on reversing population loss, capital investment, downtown commerce, and drawing the white middle-class back into the city (Chen 2014). Community input received little consideration in the planning process, highlighting the backdrop of community disengagement in urban renewal.

As a result, the Central Artery highway in the 1950s and the Massachusetts Turnpike extension in 1962 tore through the heart of Boston Chinatown and destroyed a large section of the neighborhood's residential area. Residents, storeowners, restaurateurs, and others organized committees to protest the construction, but failed to halt the highway. Chinatown experienced a huge loss in residential buildings near its commercial core, with hundreds of Chinatown residents displaced (Chen 2014). Urban renewal served as a top-down approach for mapping the future of communities because of its disregard for community input. The highways reconfigured Boston and its neighborhoods, and in doing so, the future of Chinatown became uncertain.

Around this time, BCNC began to take root under the name of the Quincy School Community Council (QSCC). QSCC, and its transformation into BCNC since then, played a key role in the development of the Boston Chinatown community, though the foundation that it laid for the growth of organizations and community networks today is not widely known to either Chinatown or Boston residents. Recording this history and the growth of BCNC from QSCC served as the foundation for my project with BCNC.

As I was volunteering at BCNC, Giles proposed the idea for this project as a means to reflect on the organization's foundations while preparing for its 50th anniversary. The idea began as a process of gathering stories, and then snowballed into a larger plan of integrating the reflections of BCNC's founders into a greater timeline. It would serve to recognize and acknowledge the role that BCNC has played and the influence it has had on Chinatown and the Greater Boston Asian American community. In meeting and planning out the project, we developed key themes, which revolved around the following questions: How did BCNC form and how did it grow into the established organization it is today? What were the original goals for the organization? How was the organization's relationship with and role in the Boston Asian American community, and how has its role transformed over the years? Giles spoke often about the value of integrating all types of voices in this history project, including those of founders, board members, staff, and children and families involved in BCNC's programs. Moreover, we wanted to utilize this work as a foundation for a project that could grow and transform with the leadership of others in the future. For the purpose of this paper, which reports on the progress I made in my spring academic semester of 2016, we had to limit the extent of my involvement to three in-depth interviews with four people.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

That was our job, to push for what the community wanted. (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016)

For the structure of this project, I looked to incorporate the frameworks of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR serves as a collaborative approach to research and begins with an issue selected by a community partner. It continues with the involvement of community members and other stakeholders throughout the research process in decision-making, data gathering, and analysis (Minkler and Wallerstein 2008). Public health scholars Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein developed CBPR as an orientation to research that "emphasizes mutual respect and co-learning between partners, individual and community capacity building, systems change, and balancing research and action" (Minkler and Wallerstein 2008). Through integrating the CBPR approach, I aimed for this project to be formed in conjunction with BCNC's leadership and guidance. The CBPR approach is a research method that bases its goals, methods, and outcomes in the community partner. With this approach, the role of the researcher is to serve as a resource and facilitator for the community organization.

Giles has been the leader in establishing the direction and goals of the project. Without Giles and BCNC, my work would have lacked structure and purpose. Giles and I started the project as a pilot to explore BCNC's history chronologically with its creation in 1969. Giles urged me to contact founders and early staff to get a bearing on how BCNC started and to tie in social movements of the time that influenced BCNC's creation. In terms of what to ask in interviews, we also laid down preliminary questions, but Giles advised me that fewer set

questions could lead to more unique and organic conversations. I interviewed four members of BCNC's history in three separate meetings. Recording these meetings with the permission of the participants, I then transcribed each interview and analyzed them for specific themes and trends. I coded each interview paying attention particularly to the individual's connection to BCNC, background of BCNC and its functioning in its nascent stages, BCNC's key values, the individual's reflection on his or her involvement, and his or her view on the organization today. I tried to adhere to the tenets of CBPR in the process of this project by keeping the project's goals based in the ideas of BCNC and the participants. The following sections of this report summarize my findings and interpretations.

The Interviews

People who were involved [with QSCC] were really involved. It was almost like a full-time job. It was intense and exciting to be creating something new, and also to meet people from these different communities. (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016)

In exploring the history of BCNC, I met with four individuals, each of whom were recommended to me by Giles. This group consisted of Stephanie Fan, Sandie Fenton, Chet Fenton, and David Moy. Playing key roles in the formation of BCNC, or QSCC at the time, these members each found their way to QSCC through unique, sometimes unexpected, paths.

Stephanie lived in Chinatown when the city of Boston began planning for a new school there to serve the communities of Chinatown, Bay Village, and the South End. A recent graduate of Tufts University, Stephanie returned to her original home in Chinatown to stay with family. QSCC served as a lead in the planning of the new school, and hired Stephanie as a community organizer to act as a liaison between Tufts-New England Medical Center (T-NEMC) and community groups in the design of the school (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969).

Sandie and Chet Fenton, recently married, were new residents of a cramped apartment in Boston's Bay Village. Playing crucial roles in the creation of QSCC, Sandie and Chet found ways to involve themselves in every neighborhood they lived. "Bay Village had community meetings, and we went to one of them. They said, 'Oh, we need volunteers to be on this council that's going to help plan this new school. Anybody want to do it?' We raised our hands, and that's how it started" (Sandie Fenton Interview 2016; Chet Fenton Interview 2016).

David Moy began his relationship with QSCC during his childhood in Chinatown. "I guess my involvement in BCNC started before I realized it...I remember going there as a kid. There was a teen drop-in program. I didn't even realize it was BCNC, but I used to hang out there" (David Moy Interview 2016). David joined QSCC officially in 1981 as program developer and rose through the ranks to become the organization's executive director for 15 years.

The Beginning

You know, they're planning this school, and it's supposed to be a community school, but there's nobody from the community who's involved in the planning. (Stephanie Fan Interview 2016)

QSCC began in 1969 as a small group of community leaders to advise the creation of the new Josiah Quincy Elementary School complex. Two years prior to the formation of this council, though, T-NEMC already had begun its design of the new school through the development of the Quincy School Project in T-NEMC's Planning Office (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969). Sub-contracted by the Boston School Department to outline the new Quincy School on Tyler Street, the Planning Office formed the Advisory Council through state and city agencies with jurisdictional relationships to new schools in Boston (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969). In the following two years, the Advisory Council formulated a plan for the new school, concluding with a presentation to the communities of Chinatown, Bay Village, and South End. In this meeting, the Advisory Council encountered complete opposition (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969).

On August 15 in Castle Square, 50 to 60 residents of the three communities gathered to discuss the Quincy School Project. Collectively, community members expressed disbelief in T-NEMC's engagement, or lack thereof, with the community. "Why are you planning a community school when you have no community?" "Why had the staff taken so long to come to the community? By what right did they plan for, rather than with, the community?" Among the crowd present at the August 15 meeting, there was a widespread sentiment that the neighborhoods deserved a serious role in the school's development. As a result, the Temporary Committee formed as a means to voice community concerns (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969). The Temporary Committee, a precursor to QSCC, initiated a connection between T-NEMC and Chinatown, Bay Village, and South End. The Temporary Committee met every week thereafter to discuss each other's challenges and establish procedures for legitimizing their representation. "[We] wanted to somehow make more connections with the neighborhoods, with the people who were going to go to this school or be invested in this school in different ways. We were the representatives, but we didn't want to be this elite group and then here are these communities" (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). The Temporary Committee tasked Stephanie, along with a second community organizer, Karl Hahn, to facilitate the creation of the Committee and work with community members to build its mission and procedures.

In the late 1960s, disconnect between community and institution served as a key theme in Boston's redevelopment. Horrendous public school conditions, desegregation busing, and advancement of culturally relevant academic curriculum permeated conversations and served as the backdrop for the creation of QSCC. In Boston's schools, there was a fear of community. "You would have mostly white teachers and mostly white principals who put in their time at the poorer schools and would leave as soon as possible" (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). Most teachers not only lacked investment in improving the public school system, but also discouraged community engagement. Schools were deteriorating. Teachers were unaccountable to parents. Curriculum failed to empower students. Growing out of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teacher's strike for community control over schools in New York City, Boston communities pushed education departments for increased involvement in schools (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). Communities demanded open schools with multi-service components, which would allow neighborhoods to utilize school buildings for multiple purposes. They envisioned schools as neighborhood organizations, childcare centers, community meeting places, and recreation centers. Communities saw the future of schools as the future of the neighborhood; they wanted access, engagement, and empowerment. QSCC, in the face of crumbling school

systems and disengagement of communities, sought to bring the teacher together with the parent, to connect those creating a school with those utilizing the school.

Because the complete lack of school curriculum regarding Asian Americans failed to provide children in Chinatown with context for the racial polarization of the city, the fight for community say in city decision-making also pressed for personalized and culturally relevant curriculum. “We never had Asian American history. They never talked about it. You’re the subject, the recipient of all this anti-Asian racism...There’s recognition that something’s wrong, but there’s no political analysis of what is wrong and what can be done about it” (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). The absence of Asian American history in schools highlighted the failure of Boston’s universal curriculum. The courses, lessons, and teaching styles did not reflect the experiences of the students and underlined disconnect between schools and communities. “That model wasn’t for anybody. It was an old school, fold your hands classroom...We had long outgrown this old English model” (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). Communities were looking for a new type of school that empowered students and integrated community voices. Boston communities called for a transformation in the public schools and for Chinatown. QSCC served as that model for change.

The Formative Years

We needed to be an active participant, not just the recipient of decisions made by the city and state. (David Moy Interview 2016)

Although QSCC found itself in a new home on 34 Oak Street, its future still remained uncertain. The Council was made up of a diverse group of members including white residents from the high-income Bay Village, along with Black, Puerto Rican, and Chinese members from the modest-income Castle Square apartment, and lower-income Chinese residents from Chinatown (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969). Wealthy in terms of human resources, QSCC unfortunately lacked material resources. Through June 30, 1969, QSCC received only \$5,322 from the Boston School Department and the Quincy School Project to pay for the Council’s two coordinators, Stephanie Fan and Karl Hahn (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969).

In light of T-NEMC’s scheduled opening of the new Quincy School in 1972, the Council pushed forward plans for the multi-use school. Sub-committees sprung up to expedite planning and focused on subjects such as budget and personnel, curriculum, goals and policies, recreation, and preschool (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969). Sandie Fenton led the development of the preschool committee, which eventually formed the Acorn preschool program. Each of QSCC’s members dedicated countless volunteer hours to laying foundations for the Quincy School. All committees, through diligent planning and coordinating with community members, produced reports for eventual incorporation into an overall planning document (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969).

Under a collective goal of developing a more accessible, integrated, and community-based school, the members of QSCC presented a unified effort for the three communities. “There weren’t any territorial issues, no control issues. This was going to be a public school. People had their point of view on details, but we hashed them out. It was a pretty compatible group” (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). Finally, in September of 1969, QSCC finished its

planning document, the result of countless hours integrating the ideas and input of numerous planners, parents, community residents, and educators. It represented a consensus of planning between communities and institutions and served as an attempt to articulate holistically the needs of the community. The document put forth ideas for physical environment, programs, community objectives, and service requirements (Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex 1969). QSCC's Quincy School plan painted a picture for what the community dreamed and how to implement its wishes.

Though QSCC concluded its primary purpose with the production of the Quincy School Program Requirements and Design Specifications document, its work was not finished. With the completion of this phase of QSCC's history and the exit of Stephanie Fan, Sandie Fenton, and Chet Fenton, many questions lingered. How would QSCC continue? What would the goals of the organization be? Would its membership change? David Moy proceeded to answer these questions in his tenure with QSCC.

The Growth of an Organization

I realized that an agency like BCNC had an important role...The role is that it's not only about fighting for the community, but also [organizations] become vehicles for developing and engaging developing leadership in the community itself. (David Moy Interview 2016)

In 1974, the organization's Acorn Child Care Center had just opened and began by serving 14 children. Moreover, in 1976, QSCC launched its Recreation and Adult English as a Second Language programs. After just a few years, QSCC had incorporated and grown into an established community organization that partnered with the newly built Quincy School to provide after-school services and community programming. With strong support for staff and facilities from both the original three communities and the city, QSCC developed its base and grew its services for children and families of the Quincy School and the surrounding community. QSCC, since its beginning, showed a strong inclination for developing leaders from its own communities. When David joined QSCC officially as a program developer in 1982, he found himself in a position of growth. "I applied for that position and I was woefully inadequate... I was [previously] the youth worker. I had never written proposals. I had never done any of that stuff" (David Moy Interview 2016). Despite David's lack of experience in program supervision, QSCC proceeded to hire him and invest in his future. The organization grew through its own community members. Just as it had started, QSCC continued to maintain close ties with the community and reinvest in members of its neighborhoods.

Participation served as the foundation of QSCC's service programming. In David's career with the organization, QSCC pioneered integrated programming of family and youth. Understanding connections between services, David prioritized participation of members and staff in different services and promoted crossover of membership. Prior to QSCC, family services in Boston Chinatown came in the form of discrete programming that served only adults, only teens, or only children. For QSCC, separation of services proved to be inefficient and ineffective. "It was kind of silly because all the folks we were serving were in the same family, but split up into these things" (David Moy Interview 2016). David saw the future of family services in Chinatown as inclusive and connected, so he implemented a series of multi-year strategic plans to grow QSCC and establish the organization's holistic family-centered model.

The first multi-year strategic plan began with preserving and stabilizing programs from budget cuts during a fiscal crisis. As David started as the executive director of QSCC in 1990, Boston experienced a deep recession. In order for QSCC to survive, the organization cut programs and laid off several staff members. David reallocated resources to save the preschool and develop the organization's youth services. "Up to that point, we were just what was called 'gym and swim.' We just had a pool where the program people dropped in. You know, good luck with whatever you were struggling with" (David Moy Interview 2016). Providing opportunities for Chinatown area youth, David and QSCC looked to connect children and adolescents with mentoring and enrichment programs to build a pipeline to successful growth.

In his second multi-year strategic plan, David sought for a transformation in community principles. "I think the biggest challenge is to recognize that we're not a transient population, that we're not sojourners, that increasingly, we are here to stay" (David Moy Interview 2016). For many Chinese immigrants in Boston who came to America for opportunity, barriers to civic participation served as obstacles to community empowerment. David's push for change stemmed from the desire to promote community voices. In the community, this push created a split between older and younger generations of Chinese Americans. The contrast between generations characterized the differences between traditional Chinatown family organizations and QSCC. QSCC looked to engage its members in more inclusive and democratic ways, pushing forward a mentality that looked to Chinatown as a permanent community. At this time, in 1997, QSCC also changed its name to BCNC to better represent its mission, programming, and location.

David looked to develop an entirely new building for BCNC in his last multi-year strategic plan. In the creation of the new BCNC building, a greater struggle in the 1990s for community land grew out of control over Parcel C, a city plot in Boston Chinatown where BCNC was located. The fight for Parcel C represented a battle against institutional expansion and community control in Chinatown. In this case, T-NEMC again played the role of the institution looking to oversee the future of Parcel C. BCNC, just as it had done in its formative stages as QSCC, anchored the fight against T-NEMC. BCNC, along with other Chinatown community organizations, combatted the hospital's original proposal of an eight-story garage (Lai, Leong, and Wu 2000, 1-43). Because BCNC originally owned two parcels of land in Parcel C, Boston Chinatown successfully came together as a community and took back community land. BCNC was not just about social services. It was also about securing and building a future for Chinatown. It was about Chinatown making decisions for Chinatown. Ultimately, BCNC and other Chinatown organizations developed the land to create new organization spaces and mixed-use housing (Leong 1995, 99-119).

Developing a sound socioeconomic and political base in his 15-year tenure with BCNC, David solidified and advanced QSCC's original values of community investment, empowerment and decision-making, and social support. BCNC served and continues to serve as crucial social infrastructure that supports new immigrants and secures Chinatown as a vibrant community for Boston's Asian Americans. The construction of BCNC's new building established a permanent presence in what once was an uncertain future. "If we did not build our own home and own it, we would no longer be in Chinatown in the future" (David Moy Interview 2016).

Key Values

That was what you want to see, enough of a commitment to your constituents that you're willing to go the extra mile...That tells you that you really care about your

constituents. Your programs grow based on the needs. (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016)

BCNC's success as an organization stems from its origins as a community-based initiative and continues today through a commitment to its constituents. The creation of programs and the direction of the organization are based in the voices of its neighborhood residents. BCNC, from its very beginning, has valued the opinions of community members and provides pathways to empowerment. If Chinatown calls for a service that no organization offers, BCNC accommodates those needs. The needs drive the organization. BCNC is about "being sure that you're in tune with your constituents and continuing to work to address the needs and concerns you find there" (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). The strength of BCNC lies in the connection between the organization and the community. Originally serving as a link between Chinatown, South End, and Bay Village and T-NEMC, BCNC continues to navigate the balance between community and institution. The organization continues to grow and thrive through community participation.

BCNC not only pushes for community participation, but also community empowerment. The agency invests in the individual as a change maker; it develops skills and provides opportunities for Boston's Asian American residents to lead the future of Chinatown and the city. Serving as the foundation of BCNC, the notion of taking community leadership into the hands of community members looks to make Chinatown into a solid collective.

The strong line of leadership within the organization has grown BCNC into critical infrastructure that supports the surrounding Asian American community. Emphasizing community-based and bottom-up approaches, BCNC's internal leadership responds to and plans for community needs. "When you get bigger, you kind of get concentrated in our own problems and your own growth and your own issues. It's easy to forget what other organizations [are] doing" (Stephanie Fan Interview 2016). The ever-present obligation of BCNC to its constituents strengthens its commitment to Boston Chinatown.

Reflections

[BCNC] really has welcomed everybody and tried to deal with any issues that come up. I think that's one of the things that I appreciate most about the organization. (Stephanie Fan Interview 2016)

Looking back on their relationships and experiences with BCNC, Stephanie Fan, Sandie Fenton, Chet Fenton, and David Moy all expressed feelings of celebration and personal growth. The organization and its values served as alternatives to the norms and traditions of established Chinatown organizations. The connection between community and leadership, although commonplace today, was a novel idea that broke conventional conceptions of institutions that siloed people and services. Stephanie proudly regarded BCNC as having consistent and strong leadership. "I don't think we've ever had a leader who has compromised the ethics" (Stephanie Fan Interview 2016). According to Stephanie, the organization has stuck to its core values for almost 50 years and has grown to meet whatever its community members need.

Although Sandie and Chet Fenton were only heavily involved in the formative years, their experiences share a greater story of crossing boundaries and making connections. "For us to have this opportunity to work with people who were from different kinds of communities than

from what we were from was very enriching and enlightening” (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016). Despite not knowing whether their efforts would amount to success or not, Sandie and Chet worked tirelessly to support their community and push this neighborhood initiative. At the time, the two were new to Bay Village and jumped at the opportunity to contribute to their new home. Sandie and Chet had experience with community organizing and used their knowledge to drive home their values of participation, accessibility, and inclusion in the initial QSCC meetings. “All those values were part of the project in driving the commitment to make this happen, and to make this happen in a way to be as inclusive as we could make it to be, that could serve the needs of the community as much as possible” (Sandie Fenton and Chet Fenton Interview 2016).

For David, his 15 years with BCNC as the executive director reinforced his initial belief that BCNC created pathways for community development. “I think the piece that I’m most proud of, or most happy about, was the notion that BCNC can be the incubator of community leadership, skills development, and engagement” (David Moy Interview 2016). David saw and continues to see BCNC as a foundation for the growth of Boston Chinatown. Hoping to preserve Chinatown in his time with BCNC, David engaged in historic fights with institutions such as T-NEMC to conserve community land.

Looking to the Future

Chinatown is really not just a place. It’s really a state of mind (Stephanie Fan Interview 2016).

The future of BCNC lies in the future of Chinatown and Boston’s Asian American community. In the past 50 years, the city’s Asian American population has grown and transformed, and with the rising cost of living in Boston due to a renewed interest in the city, Boston Chinatown is experiencing major changes (White 2013). What once were pedestrian filled streets are now luxury condos and high-end real estate. Fewer and fewer Chinese Americans are able to afford living in Boston Chinatown and many are moving to the surrounding areas of Quincy and Malden.

In his final years with BCNC, David began to anticipate this population shift. “When I started, most of our folks were from Chinatown and South End or [Jamaica Plain], but as I kept looking at the numbers, I saw people becoming dispersed, but still coming to BCNC” (David Moy Interview 2016). The residents of Boston Chinatown felt economic pressure and sought new homes in the suburbs. David recognized the essential role that BCNC played not only in Boston Chinatown, but also in Greater Boston. No other social service organization in the Greater Boston area serves Asian Americans on the scale that BCNC does. Because much of BCNC’s constituent population was moving out of Boston Chinatown, David expressed the need for satellite services. The establishment of satellite services for BCNC also posed the question of redefining BCNC and Chinatown. “To me, the question becomes, is BCNC a geographic organization, meaning that we’re just located in Chinatown, so we just service Chinatown, or are we a linguistic, cultural, economic entity that serves a specific community wherever that community is” (David Moy Interview 2016). If a Chinatown is based in its Chinese population, then the shift in population outside of the city calls for a redefinition of Chinatown. Physical borders do not confine Boston Chinatown. It is not the buildings, the restaurants, and the stores

that make a Chinatown; it is the people, the continuation and transformation of culture, and the personal connections, that create the community of Chinatown.

Conclusion

How did BCNC form and how did it grow into the established social service provider it is today? What were BCNC's original goals and how has its role in the Boston Asian American community developed? How do the current values and services of BCNC compare to its original purpose? In the four months of my 2016 spring academic semester, I looked for the answers to these core questions. BCNC, as QSCC, started as a three neighborhood-wide effort to input community voices into the design of the new Quincy School. As QSCC, the organization found its strength through the collective participation of community members from Boston Chinatown, Bay Village, and South End. Throughout the formative years of QSCC, organizational values and structures formed around supporting community voices and holistically responding to community needs. After its initial accomplishment of assembling program structures and goals for the Quincy School, QSCC proceeded to establish youth programs and adult education in an effort to unify communities and create a resource base for the three neighborhoods. BCNC served the Boston Asian American community as one of its first community-based social service providers and developed into crucial infrastructure for Chinatown. Through the continued investment in its communities, QSCC grew with its constituents into the cornerstone that BCNC is today. BCNC continues its foundational values of prioritizing community needs and investing its resources into the growth and success of its constituents. Through my project interviews with BCNC's key members Stephanie Fan, Sandie Fenton, Chet Fenton, and David Moy, I had the opportunity to dive deeper into BCNC's history and understand better the purpose and goals of BCNC. Throughout its almost 50 years of history, BCNC has successfully bridged community and institution in its nascent stage as QSCC, pioneered holistic family services, invested in community development, served as a backbone in Chinatown land disputes, and is now extending its reach to support the Asian American population shifting to Boston's suburbs. BCNC has remained true to its community-based values for countless years, and will no doubt continue to do so as Boston's Asian American communities transform in the years to come.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

Introduction: This interview is to learn more about the history of Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) and to provide unique individual perspectives on the organization's role in the Boston Asian American community. Working with Giles Li, BCNC's executive director, I hope to develop a useful resource for BCNC to reflect on its work. The main research questions for this project are how was BCNC formed and what were the original goals for the organization? Moreover, how was the organization's relationship with and role in the Boston Asian American community? Finally how does the present state of BCNC line up with the mission of its founders and contributors, and what is its role in the Boston Asian American community today? All of your responses are voluntary; you do not need to answer a question if you do not feel comfortable with it. I would like to ask for your permission to voice record this interview so I can better remember what was said during this interview. If you would like me to turn the voice recorder off at any point during the interview, please do let me know. Would it be okay for me to voice record this interview? Thank you for the opportunity to interview you.

Introductory questions: *These questions are to learn more about your relationship with BCNC.*

1. Can you tell me about your relationship with BCNC? What were some ways that you were connected with the organization?
2. How are you connected to the organization today, if you are?

History of Boston: *I am looking to tie together the historical landscape of Boston into BCNC's history and am interested in hearing more about social movements happening throughout BCNC's growth.*

1. What kinds of events were going on in Boston, and particularly in Boston Chinatown, during the time of your involvement?
2. From your perspective, how and why did BCNC form?

Involvement with BCNC: *I am interested in understanding BCNC's role in the Asian American community and how your involvement informed your perspective on Chinatown.*

1. What role did BCNC play in Chinatown politics?
2. How did BCNC make its decisions? How does BCNC function specifically as a community-based organization? Has the way it functions changed?
3. In regards to the transformation that Chinatown has experienced in past years, how has BCNC adjusted with those changes, if at all?

- a. In your time with BCNC, did the membership of the organization change (staff, donors, users)? What kinds of changes did you observe?

Reflection on time with BCNC: *I am interested in hearing about your experiences with BCNC.*

1. How would you characterize BCNC during your involvement?
2. What was the biggest challenge that BCNC faced when you were there and how was it resolved?
3. Was there a lesson that you learned at BCNC that you hope BCNC does not forget?
 - a. How did you come about learning this lesson?
4. During your time with BCNC, what was the mission and role of the organization in the Boston Chinatown/Boston Asian American community and what are they today?
5. In your perspective, how has BCNC grown to be the organization that it is today (leading human service provider for Greater Boston's Asian American community)?
6. Could you please describe to me one of your fondest moments with BCNC?

Participant input for project direction: *I am trying to keep the direction of this project open and would like some guidance and feedback.*

1. What kind of things would you hope for BCNC's future?
2. What do you see as the future for Boston's Asian American communities?
3. Who would you recommend looking to next for this project?
4. What kinds of questions would you recommend asking in future interviews?

Conclusion Question: Do you have anything else you wish to add? Do you have any questions for me?

Post-interview statement: Thank you so much for taking this time to talk with me. Your opinions and stories will be very helpful for us to better understand BCNC's history and role in the Greater Boston Asian American community. Once again, if you would like to add or remove any information, please contact me. I will also make sure to update you on the project's progress and provide you with the final product.

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