

New York City's Chinatown, the largest Chinatown in the United States and the site of the largest concentration of Chinese in the western hemisphere. Historically, Chinatown was populated by Cantonese speakers. Today Chinese New Yorkers mainly speak Mandarin, the official language in China and Taiwan.

Before 1840, the area now known as Chinatown was part of a larger immigrant neighborhood called The 5-Points. Before the influx of Chinese immigrants it was mainly inhabited by Irish and freed African-Americans. Ah Ken, a Cantonese businessman, is claimed to be the first person to permanently immigrate to Chinatown in the 1840s where he founded a successful cigar store.

With the end of the Gold Rush and completion of the transcontinental railroad, Chinese immigrants were driven out of the West Coast. As the NYC Chinese population rose from approximately 150 in 1859 to more than 2,000 in the 1870s, Chinatown was created as a refuge for survival from the violent anti-Chinese movements and negative sentiment that stemmed from the lack of available jobs.

Barred from citizenship and its protections, a group of Chinese merchants created the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in the 1880s, which functioned as a quasi-local government in Chinatown and provided new immigrants with jobs, medical care, economic aid, social service and living arrangements (usually 5-15 people in a two room tenement apartment).

Before 1965, Chinatown's population was overwhelmingly male. Because Chinese immigrants were willing to take low-paying jobs in cigar rolling and textile manufacturing and cleaning, the competitive job market between new Chinese immigrants and local residents resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Act barred the wives and children of male laborers into the U.S. In 1900, there were 4,000 men and only 36 married women in Chinatown. The Chinese Exclusion Act was officially repealed in 1943.

Chinatown became a site of gang violence in the early 20th century. Given that Chinatown was a poor neighborhood involved in illegal trade, many business owners relied on *tongs* (secret societies often tied to criminal activity) to provide loans, legal aid, and protection from governmental intrusion. The *tongs* controlled the underground trades of gambling, prostitution, and drug dealing. Chinese gangs like the *Ghost Shadows* (鬼影) and *Flying Dragons* (飛龍) were prevalent until the 1990s and controlled certain territories of Manhattan's Chinatown.

In 1965, NYC began to officially appropriate Chinese culture into the neighborhood's infrastructure as lampposts were outfitted to resemble Chinese lanterns and in the 1970s phone booths were capped with pagoda decorations.

Religious communities in Chinatown range from Buddhist, Daoist, and Chinese popular religion, to Protestant and Catholic Christianity.

Chinatown's Lunar New Year Parade is the city's biggest and most popular celebration in Chinatown. It is based around the moon's cycle and also commemorates the beginning of Spring. There are twelve animals that represent the 12-year zodiac cycle. Each animal corresponds with a set of beliefs including: health, luck, prosperity, wealth, etc.

Today, Chinatown is a thriving community. Chinese greengrocers, fishmongers, Chinese jewelers, banks, street vendors that sell knock-off brands of perfumes, watches, and handbags, supermarkets, restaurants and tourism are the major industries in Chinatown today.