

Migrants, space and place:

‘Ethnic precincts’ and neighbourhoods in urban and regional Australia

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‘Ethnic precincts’

- Chinatowns, Little Italies, Little Saigons, Thaitowns, Koreatowns, Spanish Quarters, Little Tokyos, Greektowns...
- Characterised by
 - shops, signs and symbols identified with ethnic group(s)
 - ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’
 - ethnic clubs and associations
 - ethnic, religious or multicultural festivals
- Several caveats
 - usually refers to non-hegemonic groups
 - and often belies a residential and/or entrepreneurial diversity

Multicultural neighbourhoods

- Ethnic precincts are rare outside cities
- But in regional and rural Australia ‘multicultural neighbourhoods’ are common
 - these are often centred—socially and sometimes geographically—around a particular place of worship or cultural site
- Private landscapes are often transformed, including residential dwellings (‘ethnic nostalgia’) and backyards
- Some similar concerns to the cities, eg.
 - marketing ethnicity for tourism
 - controversies around ethnic branding





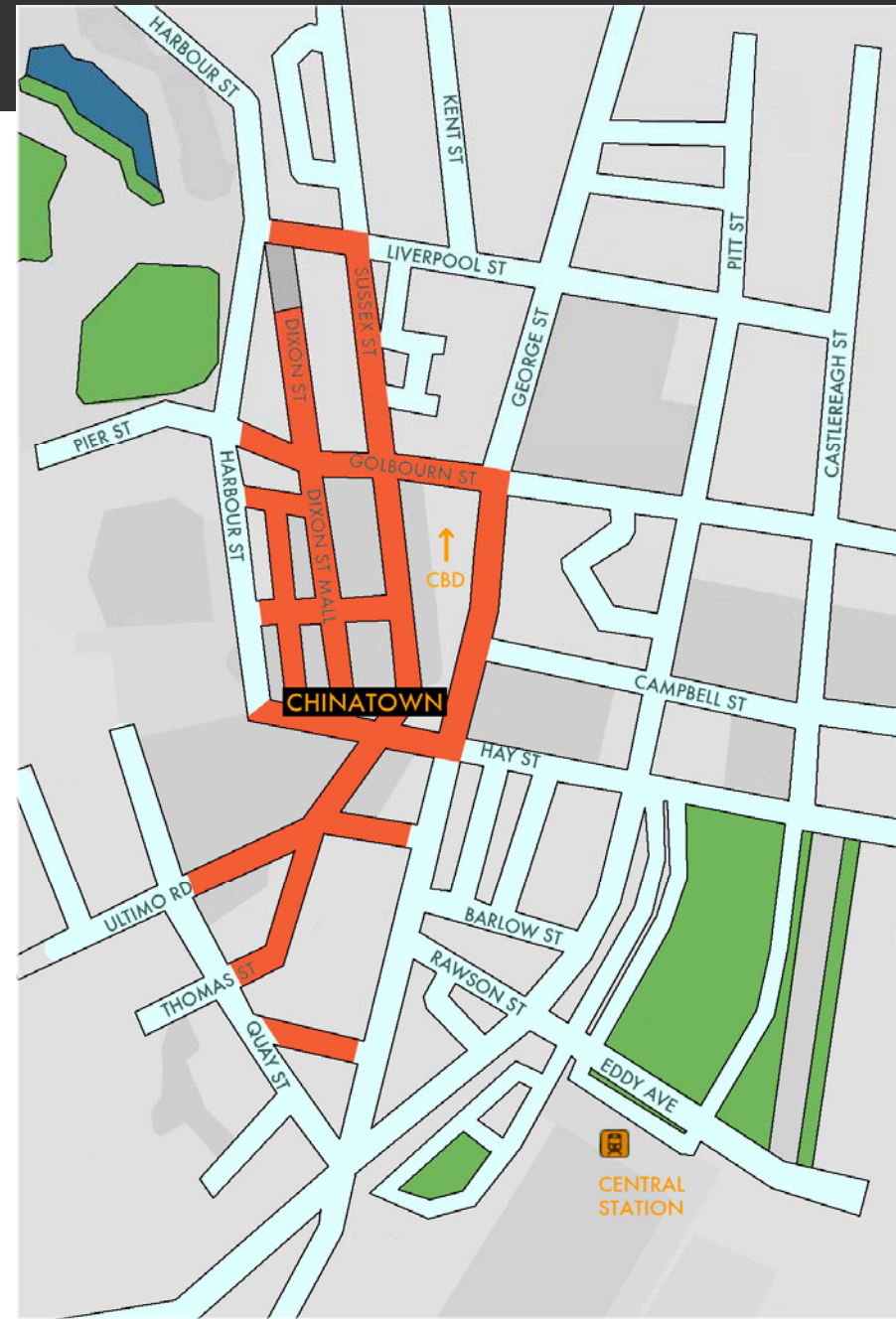
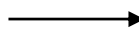
Introduction to the case studies

- A brief history of each site
- How their ethnic identities have been formed; how that's affected the social and economic life of the broader community
 - the potential for tourism
 - the possibilities for social tension or constructive cross-cultural exchange
- Implications for policy-makers

Sydney's Chinatown

Sydney CBD

Chinatown

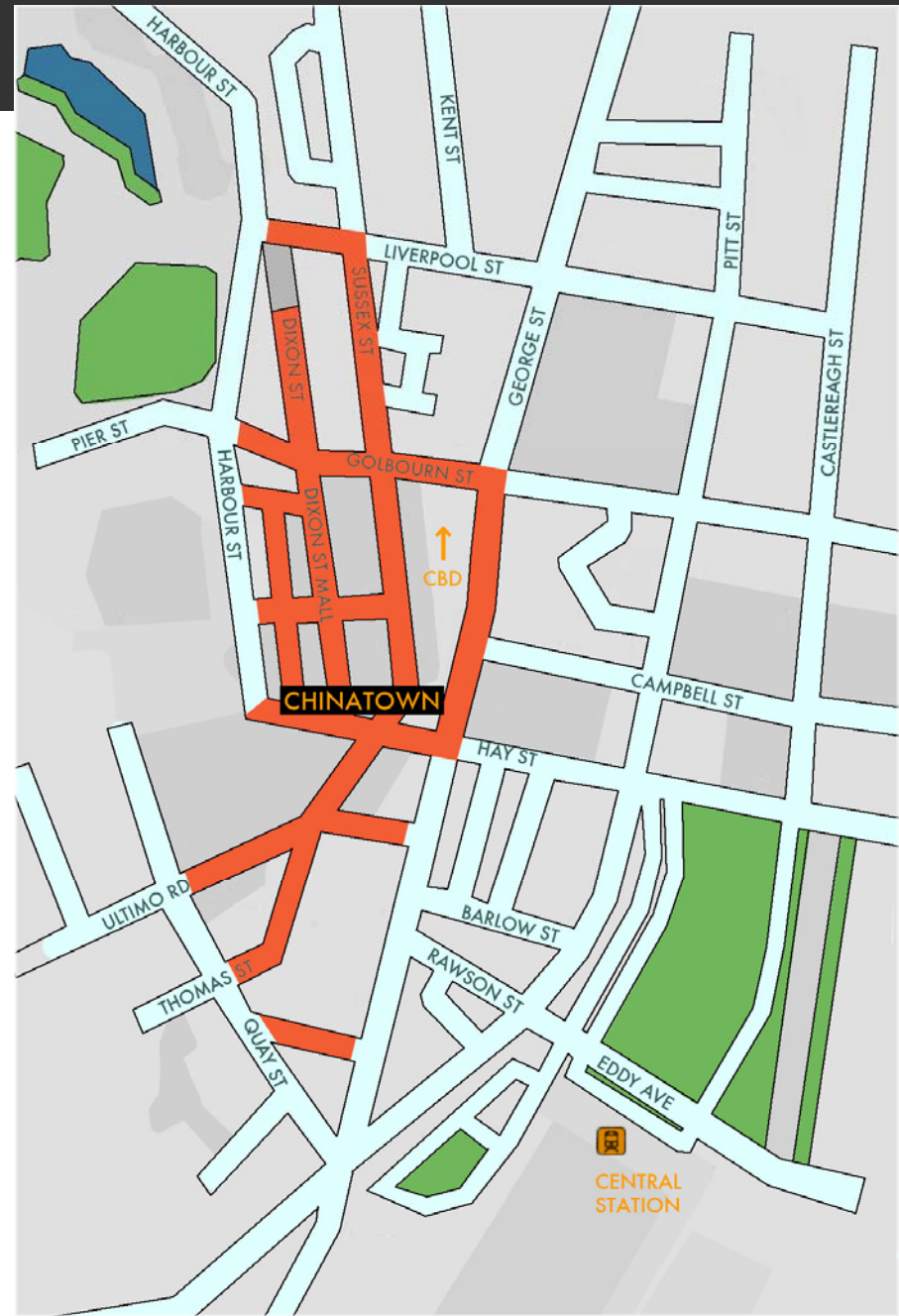
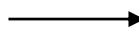




Sydney's Chinatown

Sydney CBD

Chinatown





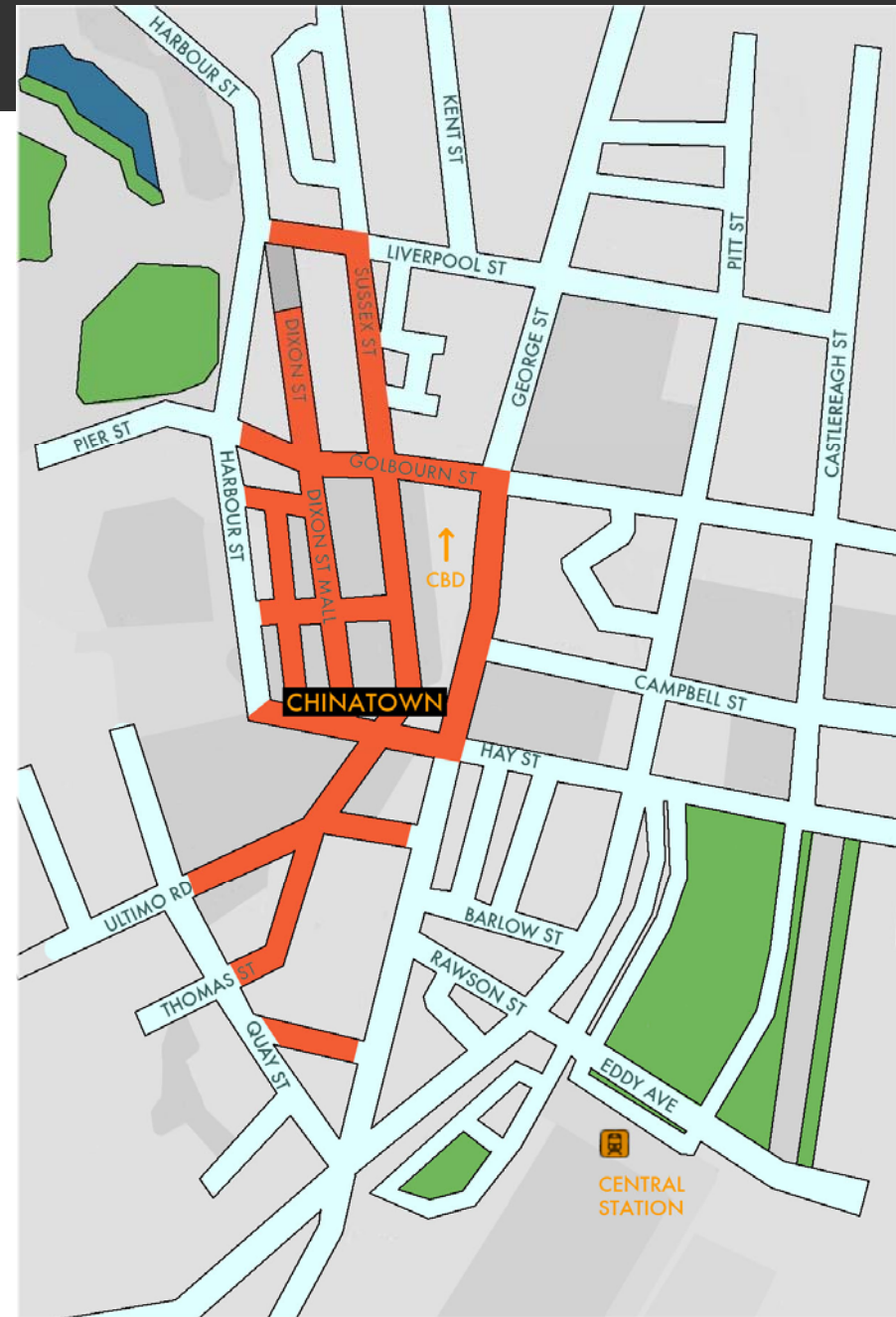
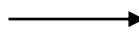


Sydney's Chinatown

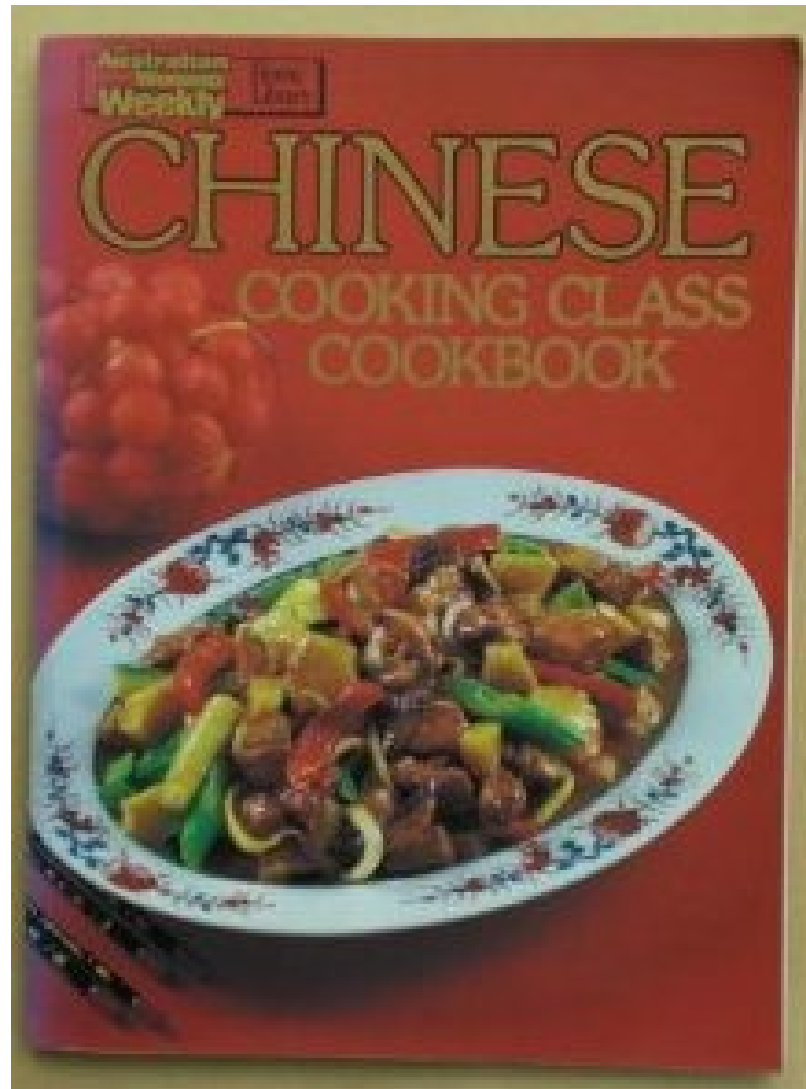
Sydney CBD



Chinatown







Redeveloping Chinatown

- Sydney council and the Dixon Street Chinese Committee planned to redevelop the site as a formal Chinatown in the 1970s
- A mixed reaction from local Chinese:
 - ‘contrived and backward looking’?
 - or an opportunity for commercial gain?
- The supporters won, and Dixon Street was redeveloped with Chinese-themed lighting, arches and even rubbish bins
- Commercially successful, but coincided with other changes like business migration and foreign investment in property



















Chinatown tourism

- International Visitor Survey 1994
 - inbound tourists ranked Sydney's Chinatown as 9th most popular destination in NSW, behind the Opera House but ahead of art galleries and museums
- Survey of 100 visitors to Chinatown
 - 25% were international tourists
 - just under 25% were tourists from regional NSW or interstate
 - 50% were locals or day visitors from greater Sydney
 - most people were there to eat, followed by shopping and sightseeing

Foreign investment and service exports

- Still attracts Asian investment in real estate developments
- May attract Asian international students to Sydney
 - it's a place where they can feel comfortable
 - they know they can get food and items they need
- Reflected in tourism promotion, with TNSW marketing Chinatown to Asian tourists as part of its 'reassurance imagery'
 - *"Some Asian markets will require familiar meals during their visit, particularly during their first visit to Australia"*

Commercial challenges

- Despite Chinatown's vibrancy it faces clear challenges
- Increased competition
 - new Chinese centres in Sydney's suburbs, eg 'New Shanghai'
 - competition with other cities that also have Chinatowns or other ethnic precincts
 - Chinatowns as a strategy to identify a city as cosmopolitan or 'global'



New marketing efforts

- The chamber of commerce and local government are seeking to address this issue
- Chamber of commerce
 - looking to make Sydney's Chinatown internationally recognisable
- City of Sydney substantial investment
 - new redevelopments to attract new visitors
 - flagship event, the Chinese New Year Festival
 - argue it's the festivals and events that 'sell' ethnicity to tourists and visitors





Social considerations

- Does marketing ethnicity have unintended and perverse social consequences?
- Issues of ‘authenticity’: ethnic precincts as ‘racialised spectacles’
 - reinforcing stereotypes and notions of ‘Chineseness’ that originate in the Western imagination
 - casting ‘Chineseness’ as an Oriental Other
 - commodifying ethnicity
- The ‘critical Chinatown literature’
 - Sydney’s Chinatown as nothing more than a simulacrum and groundless copy of Chinatowns overseas
- Issues of legitimacy: who has the power to decide how ethnicity is represented?

Understanding authenticity

- Visitor survey: how do they experience and relate to Chinatown?
- What do they think about the architecture and iconography?
 - ‘I’ve never noticed’ (QNO12)
 - ‘I don’t know – I’m so busy looking in shop windows!’ (QNO24)
 - ‘I don’t think about it because they’re just old buildings and facade, but it is the people and activities and ambience that are important’ (QNO3)
- At least as important in identifying it as Chinatown was the people
 - “It’s full of Asians!” (QNO12; QNO13)
 - “It’s just a feeling... the Chinese characters, people speak Chinese all through the street” (QNO5)

Country of birth, Haymarket 2006, top ten countries

Country of birth	Persons
China ¹	665
Indonesia	560
South Korea	435
Thailand	387
Australia	349
Malaysia	156
Hong Kong	154
Japan	87
Taiwan	81
Vietnam	46
Total	4,309

Note: 1. Excludes Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan

Selected ancestries, Haymarket 2006

Ancestry	Responses
Chinese	1,608
Korean	421
Thai	348
Indonesian	225
English	193
Australian	109
Japanese	88
Irish	73
Malay	38
Indian	36
Total responses	4,594

Note: This question in the Census is multi-response so total responses may exceed total persons

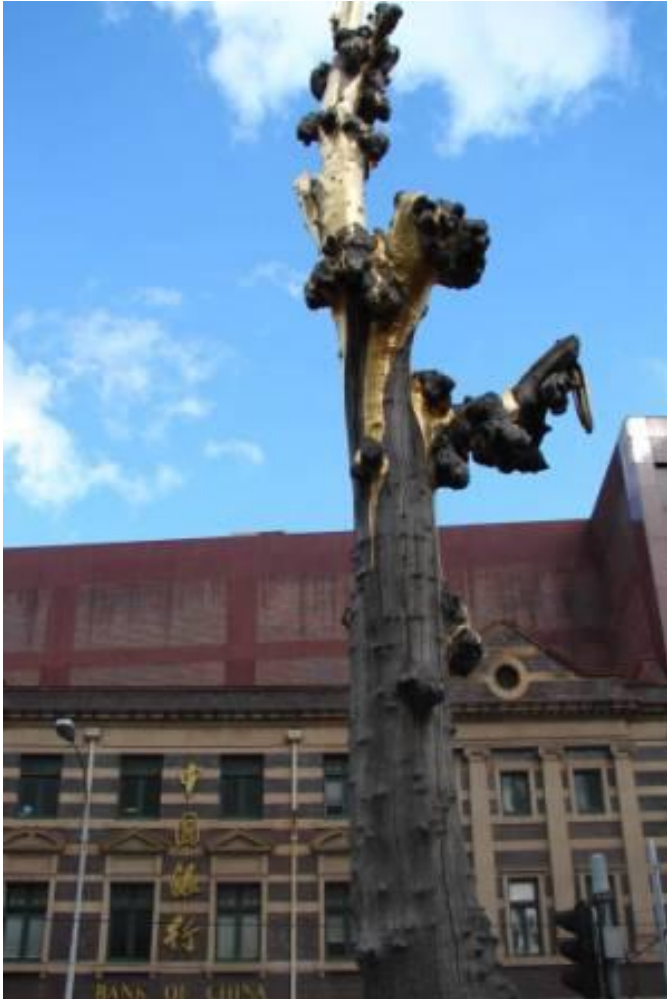
Understanding authenticity (2)

- Do people (especially those of Chinese heritage) experience the ethnic theming as artificial?
- Views were diverse and not correlated to ethnicity. Many Chinese respondents like the theming because it was homely or familiar:
 - ‘It’s pretty Chinese. It’s a familiar feel’ (QNO5).
 - ‘there are so many Chinese and I’m Chinese too—I can feel like I’m in China’ (QNO16).
 - ‘I feel at home’ (QNO2)
 - ‘It’s a place where I don’t feel like an outsider. At times it’s difficult to mingle with other cultural groups, so you tend to yearn for something familiar’ (QNO53)

- Among respondents from non-Chinese backgrounds
 - some thought the theming was ‘kitsch’
 - others seemed to adopt what could be Orientalist views, liking the ‘exoticism’
 - or felt out of place, it’s ‘too Asian sometimes, I feel a bit alien’ (QNO41)
 - still others simply saw it as a commercial centre, ‘just a buy and sell deal’ (QNO18)
- Interestingly, others had reflected more deeply
 - ‘It’s good I feel like a cultural minority in Chinatown, it’s a reminder I live in a very broad culture, it relativises me and my cultural experiences’ (QNO42)
 - ‘It breeds tolerance in an intolerant society. That’s important because there’s a reaction against multiculturalism in favour of integration, and areas like Chinatown go against that alarming development’ (QNO28)
 - ‘Chinatown points out some of the cultural differences, but hopefully it shows in essence that we’re not so different’ (QNO11)
 - ‘It shows Australia is an Asian country too’ (QNO20)

Legitimacy

- Who has the authority to decide what kinds of signs and symbols should be used?
- What processes does the local authority use to engage with them?
- Original redevelopment substantially Chinese driven
 - but influence was bought not elected
 - a clear class interest
- More recently an appointed consultative group
 - cut traditional forums tend to be dominated by elderly Anglo residents
 - council processes can unintentionally exclude others



Golden Water Mouth

Lin Li

*The gum tree survived flood, fire and drought
Witnessing dreams and destinies
Cockatoo calling from the shade across the river
It was a hot, still day
Lin, 9.9.99*

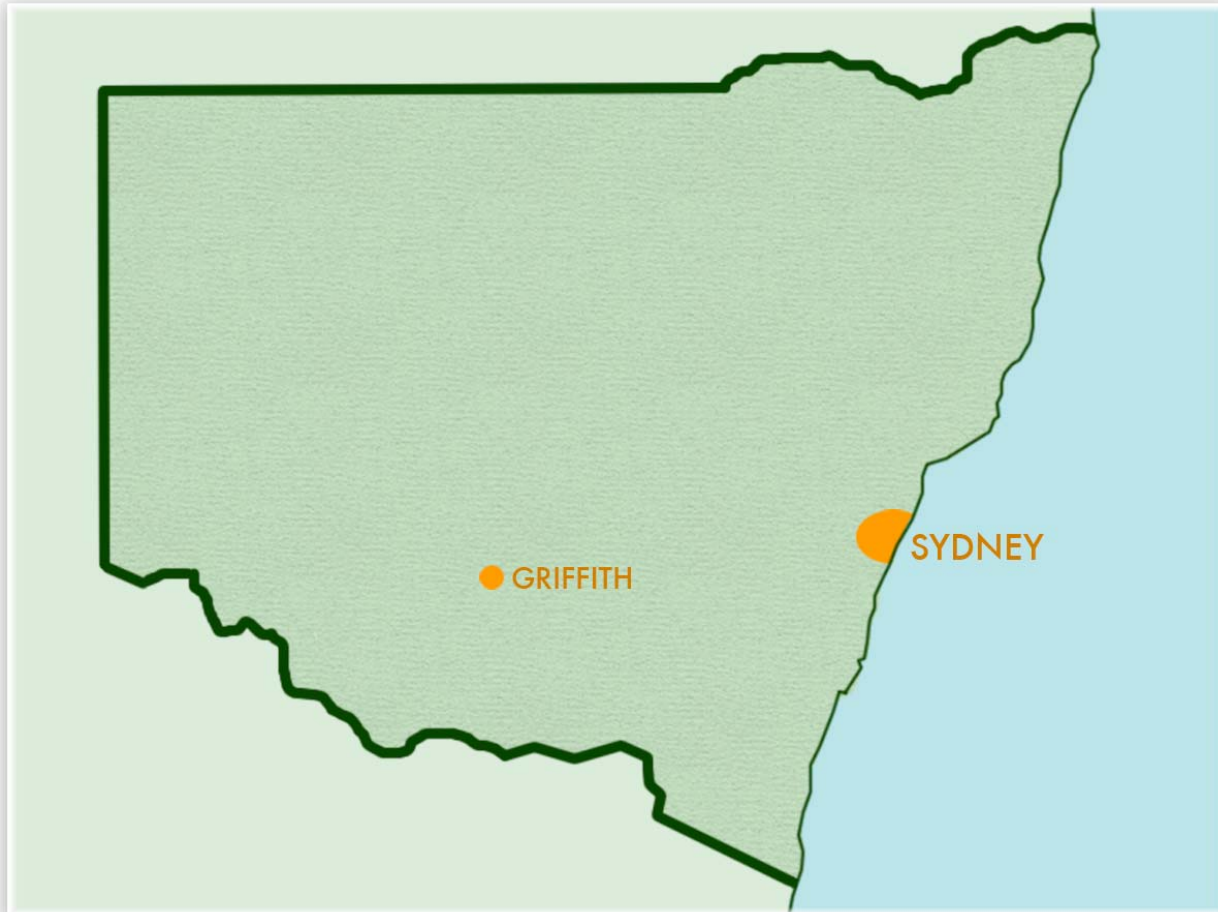


Golden Water Mouth celebrates contemporary life and the historic character of Chinatown. Australian and Chinese cultures are signified in the combination of materials creating a Yin-Yang harmony using traditional Chinese principles of Feng Shui.

The five Natural Elements of gold, wood, water, fire and earth have been incorporated in the design in order to encourage positive energy and good fortune.

The artist found this two centuries old *Eucalyptus Melliodora* (Yellow Box) in Condobolin near the Lachlan River in NSW. Many Chinese went to Condobolin during the Gold Rush and later settled alongside the river and grew vegetables for trade.

Griffith, NSW

















Griffith as multicultural neighbourhood

- The main streets look like any other Australian regional centre, but these sites are distinctive
- Place-making as important for immigrant belonging
 - ‘If it wasn’t for those places there, I would not stay here in Australia, no, I would go back to Italy... So, when we came we started to build things, and then we could build up a good community’ (IG5)
- Physical sites bind a community socially and geographically
 - Place-making means identities become spatially situated

Country of birth, Griffith 2006, top ten countries

Country of birth	Persons
Australia	18,199
Italy	1,414
India	457
New Zealand	359
United Kingdom	291
Afghanistan	183
Turkey	103
Fiji	88
Samoa	87
Philippines	82
Total residents	23,801

Selected ancestries, Griffith 2006

Ancestry ¹	Responses
Australian	8,354
Italian	6,357
English	6,002
Irish	1,746
Indian	501
Samoa	168
Australian Aboriginal	155
Tongan	151
Fijian	123
Maori	102
Total responses	29,921

Note: This question in the Census is multi-response so total responses may exceed total persons



Mayor offers vision for Kooyoo Street

'Head on down to Chinatown'



GRIFFITH mayor John dal Broi has floated the idea of transforming Kooyoo street into a Chinese-themed area. This graphic shows what the area could look like.

By JULIAN DRAPE

GRIFFITH could have its own Chinatown in the heart of the CBD if mayor John Dal Broi can convince council to adopt his vision for Kooyoo Street.

Cr Dal Broi wants the planned redevelopment of the area to have a strong Chinese theme.

"It would be a nice idea and different if the design could include Chinese-style gardens depicting peace and harmony," Cr Dal Broi said.

"We have a strong Italian influence in Griffith and an Aussie influence, why not encourage a Chinese influence?"

"Council could do our part with the Chinese gardens and lighting, and businesses could come on board," he said.

"In the future the Chinese restaurants could move there too."

Chamber of commerce chief Peter Fussell said any plan to beautify the city and increase tourism should be examined.



ONE of the design ideas put forward by local businessman Pat Barbaro.

Radical street art proposal for mall

By JULIAN DRAPE

A LOCAL businessman has waded into the debate over what should be done with Kooyoo Street, putting forward a radical street art proposal for the community mall.

Pat Barbaro said mayor John Dal Broi had started the ball rolling with a Chinese garden plan but he didn't agree with the theme.

He suggested a public sculpture was needed like that of his favourite artist, Barrie Tucker, who had designs at the Brisbane Expo in 1988.

"I've been fortunate enough to move away and see things average people don't get to see," Mr Barbaro said.

"At the moment you wouldn't know you are in Griffith. The city hasn't spent a cent on branding and Kooyoo Street could be a start.

"We need something that is bright and colourful so people know where they are."

Mr Barbaro said it was ratepayer's money being spent so the community should have a say on the design.

He said if a theme was chosen it should focus on Griffith being the food and wine capital of NSW.

"There aren't even any 'Welcome to Griffith' signs," he said.

"We need to increase our branding ... driving through you wouldn't know we have five large wineries."

Mr Barbaro said while he agreed the city needed beautification the Kooyoo Street mall shouldn't be Chinese-style.

"You can count the number of Chinese here on one hand," Mr Barbaro said.

"So why dedicate an entire area to them?"

Mr Barbaro said he left Griffith 30 years ago and on returning in 1998 noticed "nothing had changed".

He said good public art and design would enliven the CBD.

"With all the money from new developments applications and the like council can't argue they don't have the money," Mr Barbaro said.

"They can't cry poor."



ANOTHER unusual design idea which could suit Kooyoo Street, according to Pat Barbaro.



FRONT page from The Area News on November 23.

Policy issues

- Many policy decisions shape the emergence of ethnic precincts and neighbourhoods
 - Immigration and settlement policies, and how these are ‘sold’ to the public
 - Local decisions like zoning, development approvals processes, the location of migrant services
- Ethnic theming needs to be approached with great care
 - Always contested by multiple stakeholders. Even immigrants from the same host country can be divided by class, regionalism, ethnic factionalism, generation, language, gender, period of arrival and religious differences
 - Consider stakeholders carefully and engage them creatively. No planning process is value neutral
 - When done well, participatory planning creates the best prospects for a double dividend: sustainable economic gain and social cohesion