

# Ties That Bind 3: Strategies for the Preservation of Little Tokyo as an Historic Heritage Community

September 17, 2005

## Arts & Preservation workshop

**Moderator:** Chris Aihara, Consultant  
*Japanese American Cultural & Community Center*

**Panelists:** Pauline Kamiyama, Public Art Administrator  
*City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department*  
Glenn Matsui, Landscape Architect  
*Glenn Matsui & Associates*  
Ted Tanaka, FAIA  
*Ted Tokio Tanaka Architects*

### Summary Recommendations:

1. Little Tokyo can be more pedestrian-friendly: pleasant walking environment, green spaces, connecting pathways, buildings compatible with human scale, increase social and gathering places.
2. Address issues of continuity that can be achieved through landscaping and streetscapes, e.g. lighting, signage, walkways, paving and trees
3. Create and emphasize gateways to provide a sense of entry into a specific community.
4. Public art can be an important enhancement, and can communicate the history, experience and culture of a community.

Ted Tanaka's presentation included images of Little Tokyo, highlighting the major streets, intersections and gateways, as well as places of historic and cultural interest. He noted the limited amount of green/open spaces, and recommended the widening of the historic 1<sup>st</sup> Street to support additional landscaping to create a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly environment. Tanaka designed the Little Tokyo Light Rail station, and showed drawings and indicated the high potential of more visitors to Little Tokyo because of the new station. He pointed out possible sites for public art, suggesting a mural highlighting accomplishments of individual Japanese Americans.

Pauline Kamiyama provided images of public art projects which enhance the community environment, communicating a cultural message as well as beautifying an area. She distributed materials regarding the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department and provided information as to the procedures and criteria for developing and acquiring public art in the community.

Glenn Matsui illustrated the elements of landscape, including architecture, pedestrian links, spaces and vehicular transit. He discussed Little Tokyo in its relationship to the rest of downtown, close to the Civic Center. He pointed out the community's distinguishing characteristics. The hardscape defines key or important areas, and softscaping, i.e. planting, provides shade and aesthetic definition. Art makes artistic connections and cohesive ties to heritage. There was a question of how to reflect Japanese American versus just Japanese, especially considering what is viable and practical in this environment. Matsui emphasized that the sociological elements – the social programs, cultural activities and community activities – are foremost to the vitality of the community and activation of the physical spaces of the community.