

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

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Cultural Heritage Education workshop

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Summary Recommendations:

1. Identify LTCC or another group to follow-up and strategize cultural heritage education.
2. Use technology e.g. central gateway to LT info via internet, Podcasting, etc.
3. Archive existing resources physically and/or digitally.
4. Promote a preservation ethic and connection to LT so people will care about preserving it.
5. Share LT information, best practices and responsibilities for educating people.

Little Tokyo is rich in resources when you consider the number of temples, churches and nonprofit groups. The big question is: Who are we preserving LT for? We talk about future generations, and we think we know what kids need, but it's also important to understand what kids want. We need to think about preservation through cultural heritage education in its broadest sense. Education includes the formal system of K-12, and informal learning through lectures, trying new foods, etc.

Some aspects of preservation are beyond our control, like socio-economic factors. But we can have integrity and vitality as we educate people about of LT history and heritage through authenticity.

- keep learning “in place” – providing context is important.
- but it's not realistic for everyone to physically visit a site.
- use technology to tell stories and overcome limitations of place – even if you can't get to my place, you get the value of the story, which helps you relate to my place
 - there are some projects already in place such as DISKovery Center seniors doing digital oral histories of LT, and the Prop 40 kiosks
 - “Discover Nikkei” website has a lot of info, but there is no central place online for LT specifically
 - new technologies and options such as downloadable Podcasts

There are many existing resources, but they have not been compiled. History is happening in institutional life, but the institutions lack the means to document institutional memory.

- Hiroshima Kenjinkai has a building in LT. The group is rich in documentation, but it's not organized. Sansei come to the group and ask about its background—they get a stack of photos, etc. but no narrative.
- How can we assist groups with compiling, archiving and interpreting their materials?
- set-up digital archives somewhere
 - JANM is one option
 - But people need to understand that a museum is not an attic where you leave your junk, then get to access it whenever and however you want—there are costs involved in maintaining an archive.

Even if we could compile resources and build a museum, we'd still have the problem of getting people to come. How do we get people to participate?

- need to promote a preservation ethic—people have to appreciate the work that goes into preserving material and story archives
- instill LT appreciation by providing young people with good memories and connections in LT

- young people are the key, e.g. Santa Anita—internees didn't want to be involved in preserving a place of bad memories, but their kids stepped forward to talk about its importance
- Hiroshima Kenjinkai is trying to attract younger people with things like the “HiroKen Picnic”—marketing based on current trends

Another big issue in Little Tokyo is ownership.

- all of the questions and conflicts about development arise because we don't have ownership
- LTCC can organize, and Bill can have a fan club in the fields of historic preservation and community development, but in the end we're at someone else's mercy

If we really want to preserve LT, we actually have to work at it, and we have to do it together. Otherwise, JANM does its thing, LTSC does its thing, LTCC does its thing, and then one day, everyone wakes up surprised.

There are dynamics and questions we need to explore:

- Do we want to preserve LT-the-place (physical) or LT-what-it-means-to-us (affective)?
 - We need both for LT. If we only preserve the place, it'll be like Olvera Street. LT is also different from the Harada House, where history basically ends with the death of Sumi Harada. LT is still alive.
- Who is LT for?
 - Japanese Americans and the generations with historic ties?
 - Japanese newcomers who need an anchor?
 - others?
- What are the stories we think the general public needs to know?
- How can we market Little Tokyo?
 - Should we mainstream a bit, like Tofu Festival inviting Ozomatli to perform, to draw people, then teach them about LT while they're here?
 - But does this really work in the long term?

We need to share best practices. Through experience, we know that exposure to Japanese culture, like leadership exchanges to Japan and community-based internships, makes JAs proud of their heritage. What is being done?

- youth are already leaders (e.g. UCLA NSU draws large crowds for annual Culture Night) but exist in a parallel community—programs like the Nikkei Community Internship builds bridges
- need to let other groups and students know about existing service learning opportunities
 - build relationships with schools
 - take into account the skill level of certain age groups, and type of supervision
- some of the old ways of doing community, activities like picnics and movie nights, would still work for today's youth, but we're not even doing that
- there is an active core of Japanese newcomers who are actually thinking about LT
 - Samurai Parade attracted the newcomer community
- Japanese-language school are now catering to adults
 - traditionally, there was a J-school in LT, but not now
 - not realistic to recreate the thriving J-school of the 30's but there's a new market
 - adults want to learn the language for business, travel or because they once lived there

Need to identify who should be following-up with this issue.

- requires sustained effort and collaboration
- better to have a group charged with responsibility for initiating things
- TTB or a committee under LTCC?
 - probably LTCC has the best claim or most authority for LT specific programs