

## San Francisco Japantown Traditional Cultural Property Evaluation

### Traditional Cultural Property Synopsis

This report distills and synthesizes information contained in official guidelines for Traditional Cultural Property evaluation provided by the National Park Service and applies it to the case of San Francisco's Japantown. By recommending methods of identifying and documenting traditional cultural significance, this report advises the recognition and preservation of Japanese American culture in the San Francisco Japantown community.

A Traditional Cultural Property, as defined in Bulletin #38, is a property "that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register because of its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community's history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community." The designation of a TCP is a way to recognize the cultural heritage of a property or area based on its "living" history, or those elements of the culture that are still practiced and valued in the present day and that maintain the vitality of a cultural community. A TCP must be rooted in the physical environment, however; and therefore, is concerned with the way in which extant properties play a part in a community's historically based, but continuing, beliefs, customs, and practices. Because TCP designation is a function of the National Register of Historic Places, which is concerned with the preservation of extant physical properties, a TCP must have tangible aspects to be preserved, thus fulfilling the purpose of the National Register.

A TCP is documented in the same way as any other historic property being nominated to the National Register, though the statement of significance and related evaluative information should focus strongly on the traditional cultural significance that is ascribed to the property by the subject cultural community. As with any property listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a property nominated and listed as a TCP bears official designation status at the national level (and subsequently the state level according to California Register of Historical Resources guidelines.) No differentiation exists to set TCP properties apart from more typical National Register properties and, once designated, TCPs are subject to the same controls and benefits that apply to any property listed on the National Register.

In order to fully understand the intricacies of TCPs, reference should be made to official guidelines and standards presented by the National Park Service in *National Register Bulletin #38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* (referred to hereafter as Bulletin #38). For this evaluation, further information was also taken from the book *Places That Count* by Thomas F. King. Though King acted as coauthor of Bulletin #38, *Places That Count* is an independent document unrelated to official National Park Service methodology; however, it does provide applicable discussion of TCP concepts and case studies. Together, these two reference sources can provide a relatively thorough understanding of TCPs and methods for their evaluation.

Though TCPs can be studied, understood and documented by individuals outside of the subject cultural group, they are defined and validated by the cultural group that interacts with the property in a traditional manner and ascribes cultural value to it. A trained historian,

ethnographer, anthropologist or other professional applies a filter to the community input to verify that a property possesses community-wide significance; however, the elements of a TCP do not need to have significance outside of the cultural group in order to be eligible for designation. As will be discussed, criteria for evaluating a TCP are concerned with events, people, artistic expression, and information potential as they relate to the values of the cultural community and not necessarily to society as a whole. Because of this, it is important that the cultural group in question, or representative members thereof, be integrally involved in the identification and documentation of the significant property.

The evaluation of a property to determine if a TCP is present can be undertaken without input from the cultural community, but cannot be validated without the community's verification that the property is indeed important to their traditional cultural lifeways. The evaluating party is capable of assessing the historic significance of the property using National Register guidelines and criteria. Groundwork for evaluating the cultural significance of the property can be established through the ethnographic and sociological study of the cultural group; identifying values and practices that have the potential to be considered traditional cultural ways by the group itself. Consultation with members of the cultural group should then take place in order to ascertain the veracity of those assumptions. The evaluating party can then apply a final assessing filter, using TCP significance criteria and guidelines, to synthesize historical, ethnographic and sociological findings with the values of the cultural group.

The majority of recognized and designated TCPs in the United States are Native American sites that are, by their nature, rural, natural, and often indistinguishable from the landscape to those not familiar with their cultural significance. To date, it is somewhat unusual for a TCP to be located in an urban setting and associated with a well developed built environment. Bulletin #38 does state, however, that a TCP can take the form of an urban neighborhood that is the home of a cultural group; that reflects its traditional beliefs and practices (traditions, beliefs, practices, lifeways, arts, crafts, and social institutions that have been passed down through the generations, usually orally or through practice); and/or is the location where economic, artistic, and cultural practices important to maintaining the group's identity take place. This clearly applies to the case of San Francisco's Japantown, which has hosted a Japanese American cultural community for approximately 100 years, despite major periods of disruption and displacement. According to Bulletin #38, however, these periods of interruption are of no account as long as traditional cultural activities, beliefs, and customs have been resumed and can be considered both historic and contemporary practices, as is the case in Japantown.

#### Purpose of a Japantown TCP

In a purely scholarly sense, the establishment of a TCP serves the purpose of identifying and documenting culturally significant properties that exemplify the living history of a cultural community. More practically, however, the establishment of a TCP, like the designation of any historic resource, aids in the preservation of the property by facilitating management options and planning decisions; establishing documentation and determinations that will trigger protective measures should the property be threatened by a proposed project; and providing the potential for the economic incentives, like grants and tax credits, which could fund rehabilitation, maintenance, interpretation or other preservation projects.

Urban design and other development projects currently being addressed by the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) indicate that changes may occur in the neighborhood in the near future and it will be pertinent that thorough documentation of the cultural community, as well as the built environment, be undertaken to ensure that the traditions and practices unique and important to the Japanese American community in the neighborhood are maintained and fostered.

#### Documentation of a Japantown TCP

Identification of a TCP and its constituent elements begins with consultation with the cultural group that defines the property. It is the value that this group ascribes to the property, and the activities they carry out within it, that validates the area or property as a TCP. As Bulletin #38 states, “the need for community participation in planning identification, as in other forms of preservation planning, cannot be overemphasized.” This first hand information gathering ensures that significant properties are accurately and thoroughly identified based on the knowledge and values of the subject cultural group and without outside bias and misinterpretation.

Consultation with knowledgeable outside parties is also advised; including scholars, ethnographers, historians, and folklorists. Though this secondary information may come from individuals who are not members of the cultural group, it can still be valuable from a scholarly and contextual standpoint. This sort of information can balance any personal and potentially ethnocentric perspectives of the cultural group, with external references. Though the former is, of course, the most important element in validating the existence of a TCP, the latter provides scholarly support to the beliefs and views of the cultural group.

In terms of TCP evaluation, consultation and information gathering with both primary and secondary parties as part of the Japantown BNP has only been incidental. Some cursory insight into community values and opinions about important cultural and physical elements of the neighborhood has been revealed by BNP activities that have involved the Japanese American community that either lives in Japantown, or comes to the neighborhood regularly. The Japantown BNP Steering Committee represents a core group of members from the Japantown Task Force, which is a community organization focused on preserving and developing Japantown as a culturally rich and livable community. Their guidance has been a consistent factor in the development of the BNP. Other groups, such as the random samplings of community members that gathered during Community Meetings and Focus Groups, allowed a wider range of community members to express what they value in Japantown and which aspects of the community they would like to see maintained and promoted as the area develops. These insights can be considered expressions of community and cultural values; however, the gathering of such information has not been standardized or conducted with the specific intent of using it for TCP evaluation and so cannot be considered sufficient to support the documentation of a TCP. The community groups established as participating parties in the BNP process may also be useful participants in TCP evaluation; consisting of prominent and invested community members. A TCP-specific methodology for further consultation and information gathering should be developed, however, and be separate from any processes or goals of the Japantown BNP.

TCP documentation also includes recordation of the physical environment, specifically those sites and properties identified as significant by members of the cultural community. As noted in

Bulletin #38, this can be accomplished in tandem with a broader historic neighborhood survey; however, special attention should be given to evaluating the ethnographic significance of properties in addition to historic significance.

Official documentation of a TCP takes the form of a National Register of Historic Places nomination record and utilizes the National Register Criteria for Evaluation and Seven Aspects of Integrity to assess the significance of the property and its retention of character-defining features. Following this methodology, there are four steps to determining the eligibility of a TCP:

- 1) Ensure that the entity under consideration is a property
- 2) Consider the property's integrity
- 3) Evaluate the property with reference to the National Register Criteria
- 4) Determine whether any of the National Register Criteria Considerations make the property ineligible.

The following sections attempt a preliminary evaluation of Japantown based on the above steps and the information on cultural significance that has been gathered to date:

#### Is Japantown a Property?

Though a TCP is concerned with the intangible elements of cultural value and practice, these aspects must be anchored to physical sites or properties. The National Register of Historic Places does not recognize intangibles and, therefore, it is necessary for some district, site, building, structure, or object to exist that represents the cultural value, even though it is the cultural value that gives that site significance when more typical characteristics do not.

In light of this, it seems reasonable to state that the cultural significance of San Francisco's Japanese American community is firmly rooted in the geographic area and built environment known as Japantown. Traditional religious practices of Buddhism and Christianity, both long practiced by the Japanese American community, are still observed in Japantown churches such as the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, the Nichiren Buddhist Church, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Christ United Presbyterian Church, Konko-kyo Church, and the Sokoji Soto Zen Temple. Cultural activities like kendo, ikebana, and taiko are practiced in community buildings throughout Japantown, annual events such as Bon Odori take place in Japantown streets and plazas, and a multitude of Japanese American-owned businesses dealing in traditional Japanese goods, services and cuisine line the commercial corridors of the neighborhood.

One factor to take into account, however, is the integrity of the physical properties that represent the cultural beliefs and practices of the Japanese American community. In San Francisco's Japantown, which underwent drastic physical changes during SFRA projects in the 1960s and 1970s, this is a major factor to consider. However, such changes to the physical environment should not automatically be assumed to disqualify properties or areas as TCPs.

#### Does Japantown have Integrity?

The existence of a TCP in Japantown presents a relatively unique case due to the heavily altered nature of much of what originally functioned as the commercial, residential, and community center of San Francisco's Japanese American community. Bulletin #38 states that a property that

has held traditional cultural significance can lose that significance through physical alteration of its location, setting, design, or materials. In the case of Japantown, urban renewal activities resulted in drastic changes to the setting, design, and materials of the core area, which traditionally centered on the intersection of Buchanan Street with Geary and Post streets. Though integrity of setting remains generally intact, today, almost every property located south of Sutter Street was redeveloped. Only a handful of historic properties remain and the rest would not normally be considered age-eligible under the guideline that “the National Register Criteria for Evaluation exclude properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years.”<sup>1</sup>

However, National Register Criteria Consideration G allows for the eligibility of properties newer than fifty years provided they are of exceptional importance and Bulletin #38 states that “the integrity of a possible traditional cultural property must be considered with reference to the views of traditional practitioners; if its integrity has not been lost in their eyes, it probably has sufficient integrity to justify further evaluation.” Despite widespread redevelopment, the Japanese American community remained vital, eventually returning to the geographic neighborhood they had inhabited previously. It is likely that many Japanese Americans would acknowledge the neighborhood’s major loss of physical integrity, however; this factor seems to have increased the value that they now ascribe to remaining historic sites, as well as surviving cultural practices and institutions, even though those aspects might be housed in non-historic buildings. In accord with the quotation above, the possibility that properties affected by redevelopment may be ascribed traditional cultural value by the Japanese American community seems great.

As stated previously, it is the opinion and values of the cultural group that validates the existence of a TCP. From information gathered by the Japantown BNP and previous efforts it seems that the cultural group continues to feel that Japantown is the geographic center of their cultural community and ethnic identity. Even for those who do not live in Japantown, but return regularly to participate in community life, the activities and services provided within the neighborhood help the cultural group continue a Japanese American way of life and connect them to their heritage. If this is indeed the case, then those historic properties within the neighborhood that play host to cultural practices may be considered as elements of a TCP. It may also be possible, that despite a lack of age-eligibility, certain non-historic properties may contribute to the TCP based on exceptional significance and their role in continuing cultural practices (discussed later in more detail under Criteria Consideration G).

#### Does Japantown Meet the NRHP Criteria?

A TCP is evaluated according to the four National Register Criteria for Evaluation. The criteria, however, must be adapted slightly in order to appropriately address a property’s significance as it is ascribed by a specific cultural group. Below are explanations of the adaptation each criterion must be given and how example elements in Japantown might contribute to the neighborhood’s significance as a TCP.

**Criterion A: Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of *our* history.** The use of the word “our” in the above statement differentiates

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<sup>1</sup> Parker, Patricia L. and Thomas F. King. “National Register Bulletin #38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties.” National Park Service, 1998.

Criterion A as it applies to TCPs from typical National Register evaluative methods by specifying that the significance must apply to the specific history of the cultural group in question. Significant events under this criterion can be specific moments in history or a series of events reflecting a broad historical pattern or theme. In the case of the latter, Bulletin #38 states that even the “ongoing participation of an ethnic or social group in an area’s history, reflected in a neighborhood’s buildings, streetscapes, or patterns of social activity, constitute a series of such events.”

In Japantown, continuous and evolving patterns of social activity are exhibited in commercial buildings (particularly long-time family-owned establishments), events hosted by Japantown cultural organizations, and even in the way that Japanese American residents of the neighborhood perform daily personal activities – the food they eat, the places they shop, goods they purchase - should any of those activities be influenced by their Japanese heritage. Similarly, the various buildings exhibiting Japanese-inspired architecture and the Japanese aesthetics found in landscaping and gardens, monuments, and street furniture can all be considered evidence of the Japanese American community’s involvement and a series of cultural events and trends that have shaped the neighborhood. Sites such as streetscapes or outdoor settings where annual festivals like *obon* (a summer festival to honor the deceased), *Tango no Sekku* (Boys Day), or *mochitsuki* (New Years rice pounding event) take place might also be considered significant under Criterion A.

Examples of two specific sites in Japantown that seem to have strong significance under Criterion A for their association with both a continuing theme and a specific moment in history are the Kinmon Gakuen building at 2031 Bush Street and the Japanese/Buchanan YMCA building at 1530 Buchanan Street. Each building was developed by Japantown elders to serve Nikkei youth, a continuing concern in Japantown, as with all communities. Both of these buildings also served as registration sites where the Japanese American population of Japantown was required to report for processing in April of 1942, when Evacuation Order 9066 evacuated all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. From these sites, Japanese Americans were sent to the assembly center at Tanforan in San Bruno and then on to various internment camps where most stayed for up to four years. The event of evacuation and the subsequent years of internment during World War II were elemental in Japanese American history and have become a benchmark in the Japanese American community’s collective memory. Though the events of World War II are significant to world history, the effects of registration, evacuation and internment are specific to the experience of the Japanese American community. Sites like Kinmon Gakuen and the Buchanan YMCA, serve as memory touchstones that represent the internment experience that shaped Japantown’s community.

It should be noted that the registration location at Kinmon Gakuen was marked by a placard as part of the recent Japantown History Walk installation designed by members of the Japanese American community. In the concept of collective memory, this interpretation and memorialization is a strong indicator of an event and place that is extremely significant to the community, both for those who experienced the event personally, and for latter generations who will value secondarily obtained “memories” about the event as part of their heritage and ties to their cultural and ethnic identity.

**Criterion B: Association with the lives of persons significant in *our* past.** As with Criterion A, use of the word “our” customizes this criterion to the evaluation of a TCP by specifying that the person should hold particular significance to the cultural group in question. Bulletin #38 notes that in the traditional cultural realm the significant person does not necessarily have to be a human being, but could also refer to deities or other spiritual or non-material figures that are held as significant in the cultural groups’ traditional religion or lore.

At this point, historical survey and study of Japantown has not identified any properties associated with persons significant to the Japanese American community within Japantown. This might change, however, based on further historical research that could potentially identify community members who have had leadership roles or other influential effects on the Japanese American community, in addition to any properties – such as residences or commercial establishments – that are associated with such people.

It is assumed that the instance of significant deities or spiritual figures (as occurs in Native American cultures) is relatively moot, since the Japanese American community in Japantown generally subscribes to mainstream religions, like Christianity and Buddhism (as evidenced in the churches located in the neighborhood). Though these religions venerate iconic figures, neither the religious denominations, nor the spiritual figures are specific or significant to Japantown’s Japanese American community alone. The fact that different groups within the community practice different religions also dilutes the potential for the significance of specific religious or mythological figures.

**Criterion C:**

Bulletin #38 separates Criterion C into a series of subcriteria to better illustrate the various elements of significance that might be embodied within the physical sites, structures and objects that are valued by a traditional cultural group. These subcriteria are addressed in kind by this evaluation:

**Criterion C1: Embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.** This subcriteria refers to buildings, structures, or built objects that embody distinct cultural values or aesthetics belonging to the cultural group.

Examples of such buildings in Japantown are relatively rare. Reasons for this include the fact that, like many working-class urban residents, members of the Japantown community did not typically design and build their own homes and businesses. An example of a historic property that exhibits significance for the embodiment of distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction is St. Francis Xavier Church at 1801 Octavia Street. The church building, constructed in 1939 and designed by H.A. Minton, is a product of the Japanese American congregation’s desire to display their mixed cultural identity, both Japanese and American, in the architecture of their church building.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the church exhibits the formal organization of a traditional Euro-American Christian church (bell tower, nave and aisle plan, etc.) with the decorative elements (flared eaves, shaped beam ends, etc.) of Japanese architecture. Similarly, the YWCA building at 1830 Sutter Street, built in 1932, exhibits Japanese stylistic elements in

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<sup>2</sup> Willard, Ruth Hendricks. *Sacred Places of San Francisco*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985. p. 185.

its design as interpreted by architect Julia Morgan at the request of the Japanese American community group who commissioned the building.

Japanese-influenced architecture is also prevalent in the redeveloped areas of Japantown and represents the cultural character of the Japanese American community that inhabits and utilizes the area. Despite the fact that redevelopment was instituted by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and the Japanese American community looked unfavorably upon many of the Agency's development practices (particularly during the A-1 phase, which generally disregarded community interests and input), redeveloped properties may have value to the traditional cultural community and may be significant under Criterion C.

The Japanese style buildings are a product of a purposeful plan to create a branded identity for the neighborhood, which was influenced by the presence of the cultural community that historically inhabited the area. Though the Redevelopment Agency cannot claim membership to the Japanese American community, it enlisted the efforts of Minoru Yamasaki, a Japanese American architect, to design Japan Center. Though an element of the A-1 phase of redevelopment, it is notable that Japan Center was designed and constructed by a Japanese American architect and exhibits his trademark fusion of traditional Asian and European/American styles, with modern design. Despite the negative impacts of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's A-1 redevelopment phase, Yamasaki's design of Japan Center may be considered sensitive and appropriate to the surrounding Japanese American community. The design of the Peace Pagoda, contributed by a Japanese Architect and donated by San Francisco's Japanese sister city, Osaka, is also indicative of Japantown's ties with Japan itself and a reference to traditions and cultural origins. Financing for much of the Japan Center development came from Japanese and Hawaiian sources, which, though outside the Japantown sphere, had close cultural ties to community.

Similarly, during the later A-2 phase, when community input and involvement was more readily considered by the Redevelopment Agency, Rai Okamoto and Ruth Asawa created the Buchanan Mall, an urban open space with strong Japanese American aesthetics and symbolism incorporated into its landscape elements. Buchanan Mall is perhaps the best example of how the A-2 phase of redevelopment in the Western Addition differed from the A-1 phase and resulted in a more sensitive design scheme that incorporated community opinion into design efforts. As a 1963 urban design plan states, "the only sure way for residents [and businesses] to remain in the area is to be connected in some way with its development." This philosophy resulted in a redevelopment scheme that better served the community and was more widely accepted and appreciated, because it recognized the neighborhood's history, culture, and existing physical traits. Buchanan Mall, as a product of the later A-2 phase, may be considered a design that is sensitive and appropriate to the surrounding Japanese American community. More than just a reactionary product of conflict between the community and the Redevelopment Agency, Buchanan Mall can be considered a positive result of the Japanese American community's unity and activism. It is notable that Buchanan Mall was designed by a Japanese American architect and planner, with collaboration from a Japanese American artist, and subsequently expresses their ethnic heritage in the physical environment.

Other properties within the Japantown that were constructed during or after redevelopment may also have cultural significance. The JCCCNC, Konko-kyo Church and Soto Zen Temple are examples of buildings that had greater community involvement in their design and are perhaps more significant culturally than the commercial establishments of Japan Center and Buchanan Mall. They too exhibit Japanese-influenced architecture, indicating that modern design in Japantown was not entirely a marketing strategy employed by the Redevelopment Agency to caricaturize the neighborhood and some buildings that are products of redevelopment may nevertheless have significance as traditional cultural properties for their expression of Japanese American aesthetics, connection to community values and role in housing and supporting historic cultural organizations and institutions.

**Criterion C2: Representative of the work of a master.** This subcriteria refers to properties that are identified by cultural tradition or factual research to be the work of a artisan, craftsman, or builder significant to the cultural group. The exact identity of the master does not necessarily have to be known, as long as cultural tradition regards the property as the work of an important person.

Examples in Japantown that can be considered the work of a master might include the screen of the *noh* stage at the Japanese YWCA building. This decorative piece, known as a *ranma*, is generally attributed to artist Chiura Obata, who is known both within and outside of the Japanese American community. Not only is it a traditional type of artwork, associated with traditional *noh* theater, it is the work of a known artist who is considered significant within the Japanese American community. Obata is also known to have created numerous artworks and poems during his incarceration at the Topaz internment camp, which have proven his importance in the documentation of the Japanese American experience during that period. Similarly, George Shimamoto, designer of the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, may also be considered a master architect and cultural influence important to the Japanese American community. He designed many buildings related to his Japanese heritage, including Japan House in New York, home of the Japan Society; three San Francisco Bay Area Buddhist churches; and a tea house for Laurance S. Rockefeller.

As discussed previously, Redevelopment Agency designs might be considered significant for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction (subcriteria C1). In addition, some might be considered the works of master architects and artists as well (if evaluated under Criteria Consideration G, which is discussed in more detail later.) For instance, Japan Center, constructed between 1965 and 1968, was designed by Japanese-American architect Minoru Yamasaki. As a second-generation Japanese American, Yamasaki can claim membership to the cultural group in question and is internationally recognized as an important 20<sup>th</sup> century architect. He has been described as one of the two master practitioners of “romanticized modernism” and was elected as a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects in 1960. He was also recognized three times with the AIA’s First Honor Award. Among his significant works are the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis (1955); the World Trade Center in New York (1972); and numerous international airport, government, and educational buildings. He also designed the United States Consulate building in Kobe, Japan and the Founders Hall for the Shinji Shumeikai church in Japan’s Shiga Prefecture. Yamasaki is noted for his love of traditional Japanese design and references to Gothic architecture, combined with a stark, modernist idiom.

Similarly, the origami fountains and river of cobblestones that are located on Buchanan Mall can be attributed to artist Ruth Asawa and landscape architect Rai Okamoto, respectively. Though this public art installation dates to 1976 and is a product of redevelopment, it was created by two members of the local Japanese American cultural group and reflects aesthetics and values important to the heritage and continuation of Japanese American culture. The collaboration of these two Japanese Americans in designing Buchanan Mall was also significant due to the fact that the Redevelopment Agency allowed the local property owners and merchants to hire their own architect/planner for the project, and they subsequently selected members of their own community. Asawa is a nationally recognized artist whose public commissions – primarily sculpture and fountains - can be found throughout San Francisco and Northern California. Much of her work is inspired by her experience as a Japanese American, while some clearly depicts aspects of Japanese American history and culture in the form of monuments and memorials. Likewise, Rai Okamoto is a well-known San Francisco architect and urban designer, who was honored with such recognition as the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. His design work in Japantown envisioned a “village-scale” environment that would function as a community center for the neighborhood.

Due to the close personal relationships each of the above architects and artists had with the Japanese American community, as well as the way that their work was inspired by the Japanese American cultural experience, the properties they created in Japantown may be eligible as contributing properties to a TCP under Criterion C.

**Criterion C3: Possession of high artistic values.** This includes properties made up of or containing artwork valued by the cultural group for traditional cultural reasons and is viewed as having outstanding artistic value from the perspective of the group.

Aspects of the preceding sub-criteria can also be integrated into sub-criteria C3, based on the likelihood that the cultural group places aesthetic value in those properties that represent characteristics of a period or style, or were created by a master artist or architect significant to the cultural group. For instance, it seems likely that the Japanese American community would place value on those buildings that exhibit Japanese-influenced or designed architecture, like that by George Shimamoto or even modern buildings like Japan Center by Minoru Yamasaki. The artworks of Chiura Obata (especially since his *noh* stage screen is also related to a traditional theatrical art) and Ruth Asawa’s origami fountains could also be considered culturally significant under Criterion C3.

It may also be true that the cultural group values certain properties or property types or styles that are not associated with Japanese American culture; however, these cannot be considered TCPs simply because the cultural group appreciates their aesthetics. For example, the many Victorian row houses located throughout the neighborhood are not characteristic of Japanese-inspired design, but have nevertheless characterized the Japantown neighborhood since its earliest days. Many members of the Japanese American community may value these Victorian-era structures because their architecture represents the original fabric of pre-Japantown and is a reminder of the built environment as it appeared before redevelopment. However, the aesthetics of Victorian architecture have a significance that reaches beyond the Japanese American

community and claims widespread appeal to Japanese Americans and non-Japanese Americans alike. Therefore, Victorian architecture, though appreciated and valued by the Japanese American community, is not valued by that group alone and is not valued by them for traditional cultural reasons, disqualifying such properties as TCPs under Criterion C3.

**Criterion C4: Representative of a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.** This sub-criterion can apply to significant elements of a larger whole, which may not appear significant as individual properties, but contribute to a larger tangible or intangible tradition. It is a concept perhaps best illustrated by an example presented in Bulletin #38:

...certain locations along the Russian River in California are highly valued by the Pomo Indians, and have been for centuries, as sources of high quality sedge roots needed in the construction of the Pomo's world famous basketry. Although the sedge fields themselves are virtually indistinguishable... from other sedge fields that produce lower quality roots, they are representative of, and vital to, the larger entity of Pomo basket making.

Though this is a natural, rural property significant to a Native American tradition, the concept might be adapted to an urban Japanese American TCP. It seems perhaps most applicable to properties that house cultural and community organizations. Many such organizations are present in Japantown and highly valued by the Japanese American community; however, they are also organizations that have a wider influence and a presence that extends beyond the boundaries of the Japantown neighborhood. An example might be the Young Men's Christian Association building located in Japantown. The YMCA is a nation-wide community organization that serves people of every gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and class. However, in Japantown the Y has particular significance, because it was originally founded to serve the Japanese American cultural group specifically. The Japanese YMCA was financed by local Nikkei and supporters from Japan. Though the Y now serves all residents of the area, it is still highly valued by the Japanese American community that it was originally established for and is an important element in the daily life of many Japantown residents. In this way, it is an individual part of the nation-wide YMCA organization, but individually, an integral element of the Japantown community.

Similarly, other organizations like the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) are tied to larger organizations that serve Japanese Americans throughout the state or country; however, their local San Francisco chapters have played critical roles in the establishment and maintenance of the Japanese American community in Japantown. It is possible that some religious congregations could be seen in the same way. For instance, though Presbyterianism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and other religions are practiced world-wide, the churches and congregations in Japantown have taken on the character of the community that surrounds them. Though St. Francis Xavier church houses just one congregation that practices Catholicism as it is practiced the world over, that particular church was founded as a Japanese mission in Japantown and continues to serve the spiritual needs of Catholic Japanese Americans in the area. Similarly, Buddhist Churches of America is the largest branch of Japanese American Buddhism nationwide, but is specifically represented in its national headquarters, which exist in San

Francisco's Japantown and the adjacent Buddhist Church of San Francisco, which houses the oldest congregation within the Buddhist Churches of America organization. It, and other organizations named, may therefore qualify as a TCPs under Criterion C4.

A caveat of TCP evaluation is that traditional cultural value must be embodied in a physical building, structure, site, object, or district. For this reason the cultural organizations and institutions like those named above should have direct links to a physical property and it is the property that is designated as a TCP, rather than the intangible organization. The presence and activity of the cultural organization is what gives the property its significance, however, and qualifies it as a TCP. Should a traditional cultural organization or institution be housed in a non-historic building, Criterion Consideration G can be used to establish the importance of the modern property based on its association with the historic organization that has recognized significance.

Criterion C4 has the potential to be a rather transitory qualifier of TCPs, because it relies on active use by a significant cultural organization, and should be assessed with care. Though not addressed in Bulletin #38, it is reasonable to assume that if the cultural organization that qualified a property as a TCP were to cease occupation or use of the property the property would no longer qualify as a TCP under Criterion C4, because its connection to ongoing traditional cultural values, practices and lifeways would be lost. For this reason, a property like the former Japantown YWCA cannot be considered a TCP under Criterion C4, because it is no longer owned or used by the YWCA organization and lacks any remaining connections to the historic significance that tied it to the Japanese American community (its complex early history that involved the greater YWCA organization founding the Japantown chapter in trust for, and with funds raised by, Japanese American women who were not legally allowed to own property). Though it now houses a bi-lingual child care organization with strong ties to the Japanese American community, that use is neither historically significant, nor used and valued exclusively by the Japanese American community.

**Criterion D: History of yielding, or potential to yield, information important in prehistory or history.** A TCP, by nature of being a traditional and long-used site, may have the potential to yield archeological deposits related to the use of the property by the cultural group and thus provide information related to traditional cultural practices that have taken place there. Bulletin #38 notes, however, that a site's potential to yield information, if relevant to its significance at all, is secondary to its association with the traditional history and culture of the group that ascribes significance to it.

As Japantown is an urban cultural community, the likelihood of such information yield – specifically archeological deposits - seems relatively small, particularly in light of the fact that so much of the neighborhood has been disturbed by development efforts over the years. It seems most likely that any such deposits would be associated with residential or perhaps commercial properties where Japanese Americans have carried out activities of day-to-day life. Though such activities may typically be considered mundane, their physical traces could be indicative of activities particular to the Japanese American community, which could be considered traditional practices. For example, the discovery of an *usu*, or rice pounding mortar, in the yard of a Japantown property would be considered significant under Criterion D and might yield

information about cultural customs and traditions like the annual observance of *motchitsuki* within the community. The site might then qualify as a TCP based on its historic use for traditional cultural practices. A knowledgeable archeologist would be best able to make an evaluation of the potential for various sites in Japantown to yield such information.

#### Do Any Criteria Considerations Apply to Japantown?

The National Register generally precludes any properties that fall into seven categories that make a property ineligible for historic designation. The categories are:

- A. Religious properties
- B. Moved properties
- C. Birthplaces or graves
- D. Cemeteries
- E. Reconstructed properties
- F. Commemorative properties
- G. Properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years

In some cases, however, properties can still be deemed eligible if they meet special requirements, known as Criteria Considerations, that grant exemption from ineligibility that is based on the above categories. In the evaluation of a TCP, the Criteria Considerations are particularly applicable, since unique cultural values may contribute to overriding the restrictions. The restrictions are typically meant to apply to properties that are valued by a wide range of the population (not a single cultural group) for their historic significance alone and therefore, Criteria Considerations are especially important in identifying and justifying the significance of a property for traditional cultural reasons.

In the case of Japantown, the Criteria Considerations apply to various elements of the neighborhood, though not all of those elements would necessarily contribute to a TCP. As Bulletin #38 states, the fact that non-contributing properties, or properties that are excluded by the seven categories listed above, are present within TCP boundaries does not preclude the significance or eligibility of a TCP. The following discussion points out how the Criteria Considerations would apply to various properties within Japantown.

#### *A. Owned by a Religious Institution or Used for Religious Purposes*

The National Register typically excludes religious properties in an attempt to avoid significance that is based on religious doctrine. Religious properties nominated for their aesthetic merits, or associations with historic events or people that have scholarly, secular recognition, are still eligible, however. TCP evaluation is similar and allows religious properties to contribute based on their role in cultural beliefs and practices, which are not always viewed as strictly religious by the cultural group. In the case of Japantown, a number of churches and temples are located within the neighborhood and represent a variety of religions and denominations. Potentially most significant are the Buddhist churches and the Konko-Kyo church, which represent strong ties between the Japanese American community and traditional Asian religions. The Christian churches are also important, however; representing the meeting point between Asian and Euro-American traditions, which is characteristic of Japanese American culture. In all cases, the churches in Japantown seem to

be valued by members of the cultural group as focal points of the community in part because they provided a range of social and cultural activities that Nikkei were barred from outside of the community. The sheer concentration and diversity of such properties is also testament to the importance of spirituality and religion within the cultural group. The churches can be seen as having significance beyond merely their religious functions, too, as they also act as meeting places for various Japantown community organizations, such as martial arts clubs and scout troops, which all promote the continuation of Japanese American culture in the neighborhood. Some have strong aesthetic significance, while all contribute to the historic development of Japantown beyond the extent of their religious doctrine.

#### *B. Relocated Properties*

It does not appear that any potentially contributing TCP properties within the Japantown neighborhood have been relocated. Though redevelopment projects of the 1960s and 1970s did include the relocation of several buildings from Post Street to “Victorian Square” on Fillmore Street, research thus far has not revealed that any of these buildings had associations with the traditional cultural practices or values of the Japanese American community. It is recommended, however, that further research be undertaken to confirm that fact before any such properties are included or excluded from a TCP nomination.

#### *C. Birthplaces and Graves*

This Criteria Consideration does not appear to apply to Japantown. Though specific community figures may have been significant in Japantown at points in the neighborhood’s history, none have yet been identified and no properties have been recognized as associated birthplaces. Additionally, there are no known cemeteries or burial places located within the neighborhood.

#### *D. Cemeteries*

This Criteria Consideration does not appear to apply to Japantown, as there are no known cemeteries or burial places located within the neighborhood.

#### *E. Reconstructed Properties*

This Criteria Consideration does not appear to apply to Japantown, as there are no known reconstructed properties located within the neighborhood.

The general maintenance and repair of properties and subsequent replacement or reconstruction of constituent elements should not disqualify a TCP property under Criteria Consideration E. For instance, Ruth Asawa’s origami fountains on Buchanan Mall were originally fabricated in corten steel, but replaced in 1995 due to corrosion. The current fountains are identical, but made of bronze. They can likely still qualify as a TCP, however, because they are one feature in the larger cultural site of Buchanan Mall. Their replacement can be considered as maintenance of the larger property, their design and materials did not change drastically, and their replacement was encouraged and overseen by Ruth Asawa herself.

#### *F. Commemorative Properties*

A few commemorative properties exist within Japantown, but have not been pointed out previously in this report as potential contributors to a TCP. These include objects such as the three-sided Japantown landmark at the intersection of Post and Buchanan Streets, and the recently installed interpretive placards that make up the Japantown History Walk. These properties depict Japantown's history rather than being a part of it themselves. According to Bulletin #38, a commemorative property might prove exempt from Criteria Consideration F if it aesthetically contributes to cultural traditions. However, the commemorative monuments named above do not appear to claim this characteristic.

*G. Properties that Have Only Achieved Significance Within the Last 50 Years.*

The National Register typically excludes properties that are less than 50 years old, on the basis that not enough time has passed for their significance to be fully understood. However, if the property possesses exceptional significance, such that its historic importance is obvious, this exclusionary guideline can be overridden. In the case of Japantown, the National Register guidelines that limit eligibility to properties older than 50 years would seem to exclude any properties affected by Redevelopment Agency projects from contributing to a TCP. However, it can be argued that redevelopment played an obvious and major role in the history of Japantown; one that, even less than 50 years later is understood as an event that significantly altered the physical and demographic make-up of the neighborhood.

As discussed under Criterion C4, a property might be eligible as a TCP based on its association with a historic, culturally significant organization or institution. In many cases in Japantown, organizations that have been influential to the Japanese American community throughout history are located in modern buildings as a result of redevelopment. Examples include the Konko-kyo church, the Soto Zen Temple, Christ United Presbyterian church, the JACL offices, and the JCCCNC, which are all located in buildings that are less than 50 years old, but have a definite role in supporting and encouraging the continuation of Japanese American heritage and identity. The buildings' status as products of redevelopment, which can be understood as a significant event, and their support of historic, culturally significant organizations provides a strong argument for eligibility under Criteria Consideration G.

Bulletin #38 also indicates that traditional uses that were discontinued and then resumed can still be contributing properties to a TCP. This may mean that the Japanese American community, particularly businesses and community organizations that were present in Japantown historically, but interrupted by events like World War II internment and redevelopment evictions, might still be considered significant though they are currently housed in buildings that are less than 50 years old. Examples of this are many, but include business like the Benkyo-do Candy Co., which has operated in Japantown for over 100 years, but is located in a building on Buchanan Mall that was constructed in 1959.

Defining a Japantown TCP

As noted earlier, the formal documentation of a TCP should take place on National Register nomination forms. However, the approach is somewhat different than the straightforward physical and historical descriptions and evaluations normally performed during the nomination

process. The following are a few notes on the intricacies of certain aspects of TCP documentation, which are important in capturing the less tangible elements of a property.

1. *Characteristics:*

All visible and non-visible characteristics of the TCP should be identified on National Register nomination forms. This includes the historic and current appearance of the property. In many traditional cultural beliefs, this might also include the description of properties that represent elements pertinent to traditional lore or mythology. In Japantown, none of the latter has been identified by research up to this point. It would be important however to thoroughly describe the physical evolutions that the neighborhood has experienced over time, particularly in light of drastic changes like Redevelopment Agency projects.

2. *Period of Significance:*

Though TCPs allow for non-temporal periods of significance as defined by the lore of the traditional cultural group, Japantown is a cultural community formed relatively recently, that bases its history in concrete time periods, which correspond to those used in typical historical evaluation. Therefore, the period of significance established for a Japantown TCP might be the same as that established for a historic district. Most likely it would begin at the time of Japanese American's initial settlement in the current Japantown neighborhood (around 1906) and continue to the present day. The open ended period of significance is characteristic of a TCP, which is concerned with "living" history and the present-day continuation of traditional cultural practices.

3. *Boundaries:*

Due to the somewhat intangible nature of TCPs, the question of boundaries is complex. TCPs are anchored by physical properties and sites, but include more expansive areas and levels of meaning not necessarily based in the built environment, which may be considered significant by the cultural group for their historic use or place in cultural lore. For this reason, it is prefaced in *Places That Count* that establishing distinct boundaries is not critical to the scholarly documentation of a TCP and that boundaries are essentially arbitrary and can be justified in any number of ways. However, practically speaking, boundaries are often necessary to the management and protection of a TCP, so that impacts and mitigations can be concretely addressed in planning processes. For this reason boundaries need to be established and, when this is the case, it is recommended that they make sense both in terms of cultural significance and resource management. Boundaries for a TCP can contain a single resource or encompass a district-like collection of properties and the cultural landscape that unites them.

The boundaries of an urban TCP are relatively easy to establish in comparison to those of a rural property where factors like significant view sheds, topography, and even auditory effects can be an issue. Bulletin #38 notes that urban TCP boundaries might be determined by the limits of residence or use by the subject cultural group, or where the group's cultural identity is no longer expressed in the built environment. In the course of assessing property types as part of the Japantown BNP, it was determined that residences do not generally qualify as properties with historic significance based on the latter stipulation, which would also seem to apply to the establishment of TCP boundaries in Japantown. Since the majority

of the residential structures in the neighborhood were constructed prior to 1906 - the date of initial settlement of Japanese Americans in the neighborhood - they were not constructed by the subject cultural group and do not typically express physical aesthetics or other outward indications of the cultural identity of Japanese American inhabitants. Though such residences may have been inhabited by Japanese Americans at some point in their history, they are not representative of cultural character as occurs with more public property types such as commercial, institutional or community properties, which are the points of interface between members of the community as well as the culture and society at large. Most residences inhabited by Japanese Americans in Japantown are indistinguishable from others in San Francisco that were occupied by any number of other cultural or ethnic groups over time.

For Japantown, historic maps, city directory information, and census records can be used to establish the extent of the area dominated by Japanese American business and cultural organizations and institutions at certain points in history. This information can then be compared to properties that are still extant today. It is noted that changes in such boundaries over time should be taken into consideration. For instance, past locations where cultural practices took place should be considered in reference to where the same practices take place today; whether in a more expansive area, a smaller area, or even a different location entirely. The reasons for such changes should be thoroughly documented and should contribute to the rationale for establishing boundaries at certain points.

#### 4. *Setting:*

It is important to document the setting of a TCP in order to capture the context within which the property is located as well as any elements outside the established boundaries that might have an effect on the integrity of the TCP. This is particularly pertinent when changes to the setting might have an adverse effect on the character of the TCP itself. These include any visual, auditory, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the TCP. In the case of an urban TCP, like Japantown, changes to the setting of a TCP are less likely to have drastic effects upon the property's overall character, due to the fact that the setting has been changing and evolving throughout Japantown's history and is a naturally complex environment. The effects of redevelopment are a case in point, illustrating that drastic changes to the contextual environment of a TCP did not destroy the property's ability to host traditional cultural activities and be valued by the Japanese American community.

#### Recommendations for Establishing and Promoting a Japantown TCP

- Complete National Register nomination forms necessary to document TCP – include any tape recordings, field notes, photos, and primary written records.
  
- Establish useful and effective systems/methods for consulting with Japanese American community members regarding traditional cultural places/practices that should be taken into consideration during planning activities and project review. (Proper TCP evaluation requires consultation with community members and others who are knowledgeable about the Japanese American community and their valued cultural places/practices.)

- Planning for construction or land-use projects should evaluate, on the small-scale, whether the project will affect all or any part of the TCP identified by documentation efforts. (ie: TCP evaluation should be done on a project by project basis, as part of environmental review, though focused specifically on the property or area being affected by the specific project.)

## ***References***

Graves, Donna. San Francisco Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Draft Historic Context Statement. 2008.

King, Thomas F. *Places That Count: Traditional Cultural Properties in Cultural Resource Management*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press. 2003.

Parker, Patricia L. and Thomas F. King. "National Register Bulletin #38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties." National Park Service, 1998.

### Potential TCP Properties in San Francisco's Japantown

*Potential Traditional Cultural Properties in San Francisco's Japantown may include the following. Additional properties that are eligible for recognition as TCPs may also exist and can be identified through consultation with the Japanese American community.*

Address	Resource Name	Notes	Applicable Criteria
1759 Sutter Street	Hokka Nichi Bei Kai	Established in late 1800s to enable immigrants to practice cultural heritage, adjust to American life, etc. Authentic tea room from Japan located in modern building.	A, C1, g
2031 Bush Street	Kinmon Gakuen/ Golden Gate Institute	One of oldest structures and cultural organizations in Japantown. Language school founded in late 1800s, opened as formal school in 1911, moved to current building in 1926. WWII relocation registration location in 1942. School reopened 1949.	A
1801 Octavia Street	St. Francis Xavier Church	Congregation founded in 1913 as 2 <sup>nd</sup> Catholic Japanese mission in California. Current building constructed 1935 and has functioned as Japanese mission since.	C1, C2, C4, a
1830 Sutter Street	Japanese YWCA	Japanese American YWCA established in 1912. Current building built 1932. Traditional <i>nob</i> stage inside – only one in western US. Decorative <i>ranma</i> panels above stage by Churia Obata. Also, <i>tokonoma</i> alcove for tea ceremonies.	C1
1698 Post Street	Soko Hardware	Business established in 1925. Current location since 1975. Store still run by members of Ashizawa family and sells Japanese house wares.	A, g
1656 Post Street	Uokai Sakai/Uokai Fish Market	Business established 1906. Still in original location, though current building dates to 1975. Oldest grocery store in Japantown. Still run by members of Sakai family.	A, g
1747 Buchanan Mall	Benkyo-do	Business established in 1906. One of oldest businesses in Japantown, and last remaining manufacturer of mochi and manju, uses traditional methods with dedicated facilities in building. Still operated by Okamura family. Current location since 1959. Building modern, though not a product of redevelopment.	A, C1, g
1840 Sutter Street	JCCCNC	Organization established in 1971. Current location since 1973. Building exhibits Japanese styling. Organization supports Japanese American culture and identity.	C1, C4, g
1765 Sutter Street	National JAACL Headquarters/ Nihon Gakuen	JAACL established in 1929 to address discrimination, now largest Asian American civil rights organization in US. Current location since 1975, property given to JAACL by SFRDA.	C4, g

Address	Resource Name	Notes	Applicable Criteria
1691 Laguna Street	Sokoji Soto Zen Temple	Zen Buddhist Temple founded in 1934 at Bush Street Temple property. Current building constructed in 1984.	C1, a, g
1700 Sutter Street	Christ United Presbyterian Church	Congregation established in 1885 – oldest Japanese Christian Church in US. Moved to Japantown in 1916. Relocated by redevelopment; current location since 1975.	C4, a, g
1909 Bush Street	Konko-kyo Church of San Francisco	Congregation established in 1930. Current location since 1931. Church closed for 6 years during WWII. Current building built during redevelopment on original site, 1974. Konko-kyo faith developed in Japan 150 years ago.	C1, C4, a, g
1881 Pine Street	Buddhist Church of San Francisco	Congregation founded 1898 – oldest Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Church in US. Moved to current location 1913. Outgrew building, which was replaced in 1935 on same site. Holy Relics of Buddha in stupa on roof, 1935.	C2, C3, C4, a
1710 Octavia Street	Buddhist Churches of America	Founded in 1899, based on presence Buddhist Church of San Francisco. Became umbrella organization for Buddhist Churches throughout US. Current building constructed 1971.	C4, a, g
2211 Bush Street	Nichi Bei Times	Newspaper est. in 1946 in effort to reconnect JA community after internment– No. Cal's oldest JA bilingual daily paper, one of 3 remaining bilingual papers in continental US. Current location since 1972.	A, g
2016 Pine Street	Nichiren Buddhist Church	Church established ca. 1940, building constructed ca. 1893. Houses sect of Buddhist faith founded in 13 <sup>th</sup> century Japan.	C4, a
1581 Webster 1715 Buchanan Street	Kimochi	Established in 1971 for Sansei to help Issei deal with senior citizens services – demonstrates cultural respect for older generations. First located in Kimochi Lounge at 1581 Webster (on Webster Bridge).	A, g
1881 Bush Street	Bush Street Temple/ Sokoji Soto Zen Temple/Kokoro	Built in 1895. 1934-1972 served as Buddhist temple and Zen Center. Now serves as Japanese American seniors home – demonstrates cultural respect for older generations.	A, g
1530 Buchanan Street	Japantown/Buchanan YMCA	Constructed in 1936, funded by Japanese American community and served Japanese American minority group.	A, C4
	Japan Center & Peace Plaza	Plaza is site of traditional community parades, celebrations and events. Mall designed by Minoru Yamasaki as part of A1 phase of redevelopment in 1965-1968. Peace Plaza and Pagoda designed by Yoshiro Tanaguchi.	A, C1, C2, C3, g

<b>Address</b>	<b>Resource Name</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Applicable Criteria</b>
	Buchanan Mall	Site of traditional community parades, celebrations and events. River of cobblestones by Rai Okamoto, fountains and benches by Ruth Asawa. Developed as part of A2 phase in 1975.	A, C1, C2, C3, g
	Post Street (btwn. approx. Laguna and Webster streets)	Site of Cherry Blossom parade and other traditional community parades, celebrations and events.	A

Potential TCP Properties in San Francisco's Japantown

