

core of a sprawling, glittering “University City.” With the support of the City of Philadelphia, trolley track-lined streets were removed, city land was generously deeded to the university, and buildings needed for campus expansion were condemned. West Philadelphia was literally remade into what is today described as a magnificent, monumental corpus of “Eds and Meds.”

To some degree this book could be described as pure panegyric, the saga of how the University of Pennsylvania arose from being a hallowed, but moldering, playground for a student body of rich, preppy, academically slothful “joe college” types into a major, academically distinguished research powerhouse where service education and community involvement are prioritized over fraternity life. In fact, the battle to tame fraternities, whose actions often appeared racist and sexist, occupies a modest, albeit important, subset of the Penn story. Indeed, the taming in part involved the demolition of the school’s historic “fraternity row.”

Despite the panegyric undertone, the authors temper their conclusion. University City, the University City Science Center, and the Penn Medicine (Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania) complex overwhelmed West Philadelphia. The disjunction between the wealth of the university and West Philadelphia’s still-marginalized black neighborhoods continues to breed tension, despite Penn’s heavy involvement in neighborhood education and other partnership activities aimed at social, economic, and physical revitalization. The book is heavily illustrated, clearly written, and accessible. It richly chronicles Penn’s modern history and offers a powerful case study of the power of an urban university to shape the contours of the twentieth-century city.

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Ethnic Renewal in Philadelphia’s Chinatown: Space, Place, and Struggle. By KATHRYN E. WILSON. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015. 278 pp. Tables, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$84.50; paper, \$29.95.)

The central theme of author Kathryn E. Wilson’s book is “saving Chinatown.” Beyond its descriptive discussions and lively historical documents, the book is one of the first efforts to systematically conceptualize “ethnic renewal.” “Ethnic renewal” is paradoxical. Ethnic indicates legacy; renewal denotes progress. “Ethnic renewal” is a dance between present and past, a negotiation between change and continuity. Those undertaking this process must decide what to save and what to renew. Using Philadelphia’s Chinatown as a case study, this book documents the history of Chinatown’s struggle and survival in the urban warfare against marginalization, objectification, gentrification, and ethnic suburbanization.

This book enhances and complicates the understanding of spatial justice that applies to other marginalized urban space. Chinatown is not just a themed

and commodified space. As Wilson puts it, “it is territory, a space for expression, identity and cultural inheritance” (12). Historically, Chinatown served as a sanctuary for Chinese laborers and merchants who were discriminated against in mainstream society. Now it is a cultural, social, and economic center for Chinese residents of the metropolitan area. Above all, Chinatown is home. It is a “living community for multiple generations old and new” (169). The houses, shops, community churches, and streets are the material carriers of people’s memories and identities. To reclaim, maintain, defend, and expand the space is to protect culture and claim identity. Its changing boundaries embody the history of oppression from outside and resistance from within.

Wilson’s book documents a history of ethnic autonomy and empowerment from below, both at the individual and organizational levels. Empowerment, advocacy, and resistance from inside are reactions to the enforcement from outside. However, as Wilson sees it, the key to ethnic renewal is the exercise of “self-determination,” including self-Orientalism in reaction to discrimination and marginalization and self-representation within neoliberal celebrations of multiculturalism.

This book also portrays a fragmentary Chinatown. The power of “ethnic renewal” largely lies in bridging divisions and negotiating conflicts. These exist between tourists and residents, city government and community organizations, urban planners and activists, and Chinatown and its neighboring communities. The divisions are also within Chinatown, across gender, generation, class, and linguistic lines. Wilson details the difficulties of compromising, negotiating, and balancing within the community as well as the formations of solidarities while facing challenges beyond the community border. “Ethnic renewal” balances the need for outside resources with the desire to maintain the community’s authenticity, allowing its members to be part of a city’s progress in their own ways.

Wilson’s book is timely. It appears in a period of consumption-driven urban development, which often leaves ethnic and minority communities facing the similar challenges of Disneyfication or dislocation. Notable examples include Chinatowns in Portland, Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, New York, and Washington, DC. Thus, this book also provides a toolkit for urban planners, activists, community organizations, and city governments, not only for Chinatowns, but also for other ethnic and minority communities.

However, the question of transnational contributions to ethnic renewal still lingers. Increasing waves of new immigrants have come from mainland China. Moreover, a high percentage of Chinatown residents do not speak English, leaving readers to wonder how representational Wilson’s English-only interviews are. Readers will remain curious about the voices of non-English-speaking Chinatown residents.