

A Study on the Landscape Formation and Cultural Characteristics of Daerim-dong Chinatown

Chun Hyunjin

^a Arts College, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, NJ 211106, China

No. 29 Jiangjung Road, Jiangning District, Nanjing 211106, Jiangsu, China

Full Professor, tough4324@naver.com, +86-18652067945

Abstract: Daelim-dong Chinatown, a representative Chinese residence in Seoul, is a space that exhibits unique cultural characteristics. In addition, Daelim-dong Chinatown in Seoul has developed into a space where the cultural characteristics of Chinese migrants are well displayed in a physical space, not just a space where Chinese people live. This study applied a three-step study method of literature study, field observation, and in-depth interview to analyze the landscape formation and cultural characteristics of Chinatown in Daelim-dong, Seoul. The main findings in this study are that physical and non-physical cultural landscapes coexist in Daelim-dong Chinatown, and Korean-Chinese cultural mixture, conflict, fusion, and immigrant identity expressions appear in this area. Therefore, in this study, the formation of landscapes and cultural characteristics of Chinese residents in Daerim-dong, Seoul are analyzed. The findings provide specific theoretical support for design practice for revitalizing multicultural spaces and contribute to the expression of cultural identity to help the sustainable development of multicultural spaces.

Keywords: *Daerim-dong Chinatown; Landscape Formation; Cultural Characteristics; Chinese Immigrants; Cultural Hybridity; Cultural Landscape*

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, as Korea's economy has developed rapidly, many foreigners have migrated to Korea. As the number of these foreigners increased in Korea, many foreign group residences were created. These spaces represent distinct cultural characteristics within the city. Among these foreign group residences, Daelim-dong Chinatown, a representative Chinese group residence in Seoul, is a space representing unique cultural characteristics. This study begins with the question of what implications the cultural characteristics of Daelim-dong Chinatown have for multicultural space design. Daelim-dong Chinatown is a unique multicultural space where Korean-Chinese culture is fused. This space not only coexists with physical and non-physical cultural landscapes, but also expresses immigrant identity. Daelim-dong has been developed by Chinese immigrants since the 1990s. Entering the 2020s, Daelim-dong Chinatown developed into a unique space where Koreans and Chinese people coexist. In addition, Daelim-dong Chinatown in Seoul has developed into a space where Chinese migrants' cultural characteristics are well displayed in a physical space, not just a space where Chinese people live. Therefore, it is possible to understand the life and culture of Chinese migrants through the formation of landscapes and cultural research in such spaces. Therefore, this study analyzes the formation and cultural characteristics of landscapes in Chinese residences in Daerim-dong, Seoul. It provided a specific strategy for realizing cultural identity in multicultural space design. These research results can serve as theoretical basic data for spatial design for the revitalization of multicultural spaces.

2. Research Method

In this study, the formation of landscapes and cultural characteristics is analyzed for Chinese residents in Daerim-dong, Seoul. It goes through three research stages to conduct this study. These research stages consist of literature research, field observation, and in-depth interviews. The field survey of this study was conducted for about 3 months from June to August 2025, and in-depth interviews were conducted a total of 15 times. The interviewees were selected as Chinese immigrants, living in Daelim-dong, Korean residents, and self-employed in China. Interviewees were selected by stratified sampling, and the characteristics of each resident group were organized to be represented, including Chinese immigrants, Korean residents, and Chinese self-employed groups living in Daelim-dong. The first step is to conduct literature research related to Chinatown, Korean immigrant history, and Daelim-dong Chinatown. In literature research, books, magazines, and newspaper articles related to Chinatown are used. In the second step, the researcher directly visits the Chinatown in Daelim-dong and analyzes the physical form such as products and distances, and local residents. In the third step, the researcher conducts in-depth interviews with local residents. The targets of the in-depth interview are not only Chinese, but also Koreans living in this area. And through in-depth interviews, the cultural characteristics of the landscape of Daelim-dong are analyzed. Observation records and photographic data were used for the field observation data, and landscape characteristics were classified by analyzing the results of the study. In addition, the interview data was analyzed the recorded files to explore the cultural characteristics of the space. The process of this study is summarized as follows (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Process of Research Method

Research Process	Research Purpose	Detailed Research Content	Research Tools and Materials
Literature Research	Establish the theoretical basis of the research	Collect and analyze domestic and foreign studies related to Chinatowns	Academic databases, related books and papers, local government reports, newspaper articles.
Field Observation	Directly grasp the landscape of Daerim-dong Chinatown	Observe and record physical, commercial, and socio-cultural landscapes	Observation checklist, camera, field notes
In-depth Interviews	Understand residents' perceptions and identities regarding the landscape	Select interviewees through stratified sampling	Interview outline, audio recorder, interview transcripts

2.1. Literature Research

Literature research is the stage of gathering basic data to conduct this study. And through these literature studies, the theoretical basis for this study is established. Literature research conducts research on Chinatown. It analyzes academic papers related to Chinatown. Literature related to the history of Chinese immigrants in Korea is analyzed. It also analyzes Korea's immigration policy and data on foreign immigrants in Seoul. Media articles and books related to Daelim-dong Chinatown is also analyzed. This study also analyzes Daelim-dong Chinatown from a cultural anthropological point of view because it is a space with a clear cultural identity.

2.2. Field Observation

After conducting literature research, the researcher directly visits the Daelim-dong Chinatown and conducts

field observations. And in field observation, the physical environment is analyzed. The researcher analyzes the physical environment of Daelim-dong Chinatown based on cultural factors. In general, Chinese immigrants reflect cultural identity through physical landscapes. So, by analyzing the physical environment, the researcher can grasp the cultural meaning inherent in the physical environment. And the researcher observes and analyzes not only the physical environment but also the non-physical environment.

2.3. In-depth Interviews

The researcher conducts in-depth interviews with local residents based on the results analyzed through local observation. The main content of the in-depth interview is about the perception and cultural identity of local residents that cannot be sufficiently reflected by observation alone. The main target groups for the interview are Chinese immigrant residents, Chinese self-employed, tourists, and Korean residents.

The interview process takes place in a natural way of communication and includes in-depth content about the cultural landscape.

2.4. Research site

The research target site is located in Daelim-dong, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul, and is the largest Chinatown in Korea. This research target site is called Daelim-dong Chinatown and is located in the southwestern part of Seoul. The main characteristic of Daelim-dong Chinatown is not a tourist destination, but a space where actual Chinese people live. So, this space is a space with clear cultural characteristics of China (**Figure 1**). In addition, a special landscape that combines Chinese and Korean landscapes appears. Currently, about 60,000 Chinese people live in Daelim-dong. Due to these characteristics, this space is suitable for studying the cultural landscape of Chinese migrant residences in Korea. So, in this study, this space is selected as the research target site.



Figure 1. Main streets of Chinatown

3. Theoretical research

3.1. Landscape from a cultural anthropological perspective

From a cultural anthropological point of view, the landscape is not simply a physical space, but includes the lives and cultures of the people living in this area. In general, an immigrant's space tries to express the original culture of the immigrant in space. Therefore, the humanities and sociological meaning of space must be analyzed through the interaction of people and space. In addition, a landscape is a space to which humans give meaning from a cultural anthropological point of view. Therefore, in the cultural anthropological landscape, the cultural identity of people who use space is well shown. For this reason, when planning the landscape of a space, a design that reflects not only the aesthetic beauty but also the experiences and meanings of local residents should be made. Therefore, from a cultural anthropological point of view, the subject of the landscape is not an urban planner or designer, but a resident who uses the space. For this landscape design, the resident participatory design that can reflect the experiences of residents is becoming more important than simply the opinions of experts. Therefore, the Chinese group residence should be designed as a space that represents the cultural characteristics of Chinese and Koreans well, which can have a positive effect on the lives of residents.

3.2. Chinatown

Chinatown is a space that represents Chinese culture well while Chinese migrants collectively live in other countries. Chinatown is a representative space among the spaces of immigrants, and it is a space where the identity of Chinese people can be well displayed as well as economic activities. These Chinatowns have been created worldwide since the 19th century, and the purpose of migration is mostly for economic reasons. Migration countries are various places, including the United States, Europe, and Korea. The representative Chinatown is located in San Francisco, USA. This Chinatown is not a simple group residence, but a complex functional space that combines commerce, education, and housing. So, the landscape of Chinatown can be divided into two. These two can be divided into a material landscape and an immaterial landscape. In the material landscape, symbols of Chinese culture such as facilities and buildings are located, and these material landscapes are recognized by the Chinese as spaces where their own culture exists. In the non-material landscape, Chinese traditional holidays, languages, and lifestyles appear in the space. And Chinatown is a space that expresses multicultural characteristics by combining with local culture. So, multicultural characteristics are well displayed in the material landscape and the non-material landscape. The physical and non-physical classification of the Daerim-dong Chinatown cultural landscape is based on field observation. In addition, these classification criteria were derived based on the difference between the physical shape of the landscape and the non-physical behavior of the residents. This classification can provide a clear criterion for landscape analysis for spatial research (Table 2).

Table 2. Landscape Type of Chinatown

Landscape Type	Specific Content	Cultural Meaning
Material Landscape	1. Traditional Chinese architecture (dragon a patterns, red roofs), 2. Chinese-character signs (restaurants) 3. Chinese-style facilities(marts, restaurants)	Directly expressing the symbolism of Chinese culture and serving as a medium to promote Chinese culture to the outside world
Non-material Landscape	1. Events of traditional Chinese (Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival) 2. Chinese language 3. Chinese eating habits	A life-oriented expression of Chinese culture

4. Landscape Formation Process of Daelim-dong Chinatown

Daelim-dong Chinatown has changed sequentially over time. At each of these stages, the cultural landscape of Daelim-dong shows various characteristics according to the influx of Chinese people, the degree of cultural adaptation, and interaction with the region. This convergence of Chinese migrants and local cultures has a great influence on the cultural landscape of the Daelim-dong region. In this study, these characteristics were divided into three stages. These three steps are as follows (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Landscape Formation Process of Daelim-dong Chinatown

Development Stage	Period	Immigrant Characteristics	Main Landscape Features
Initial Stage	1990s	Mainly labor immigrants, immigration for economic purposes	Korean-style landscape dominates
Growth Stage	2000s	Increase in international students and marriage immigrants	Increase in Chinese-style stores, growing use of red signs and Chinese characters
Mature Stage	2010s~Present	Stabilization of immigrants, growth of the second generation	Mixed Chinese -Korean cultural landscape

4.1. Early days of Chinatown (1990s)

From the 1990s, Chinese people began to gather in Daelim-dong. At first, the Chinese residence in Garibong-dong near Daelim-dong expanded to Daelim-dong. A characteristic of this area is that a factory area called Guro Industrial Complex is located nearby. During this period, as the Korean economy developed rapidly, many foreign workers came to Korea to get a job. So, the Chinese also came to Korea and got jobs in factories and made money. The characteristic of Daelim-dong is that it is a suitable space for Chinese immigrants to live in, as the cost of living is low and there are many factories located nearby. The migration pattern of Daelim-dong Chinatown changed from the Korean style to the Korean-Chinese hybrid type, and the economic change changed to the spread of Chinese-style facilities. As a result, the cultural interaction of this space forms the unique cultural landscape of the space. During this period, the cultural landscape of Daelim-dong was not clear about China's cultural characteristics. During this period, the main residents of the area were Koreans and some Chinese people. And the number of Chinese people was steadily increasing every year. And during this period, Chinese restaurants and shops began to appear in this area.

4.2. Chinatown Growth (2000s)

It is the time when Daelim-dong Chinatown is growing. During this period, many Chinese people flowed into Korea through Chinese international students and international marriages. For this reason, Chinese restaurants, marts, and stores have also increased in Daelim-dong Chinatown. So, Daelim-dong Chinatown has been transformed into a space where you can feel Chinese culture in terms of landscape. The major landscape changes of Daelim-dong Chinatown are as follows. First, the physical form of buildings has changed a lot in the Chinese style. In the store, many signs of Chinese characters were created, and many colors showing Chinese characteristics such as red and yellow were created. Second, Daelim-dong Chinatown has many public facilities for Chinese immigrants. These facilities play a role in helping Chinese immigrants live in Korea.

4.3. Chinatown Mature (2010s~present)

During this period, Daelim-dong Chinatown was completed and continues to expand. In addition, existing

Chinese immigrants purchase houses or buildings in Daelim-dong and live a stable life. In addition, the second generation of Chinese immigrants has grown in this area and is engaged in various activities. And if Daelim-dong Chinatown had become a nationally famous Chinatown in Korea, it would have grown to the largest scale in the country (**Figure 2**). So now, the landscape of Daelim-dong Chinatown is more complex and diverse. And many Korean tourists gather to experience Chinese culture in this space. There are various types of Chinese stores and many facilities where you can feel Chinese culture. And this space is being transformed into a space where new forms of mixed culture appear by combining Chinese and Korean cultures.



Figure 2. Daelim-dong Chinatown

5. Analysis of the Cultural Landscape of Daelim-dong Chinatown

In this study, through in-depth interviews, Daelim-dong Chinatown can be divided into physical and non-physical cultural landscapes. And Daelim-dong Chinatown is not simply a space that replicates Chinese culture, but is combined with Korean culture to represent a unique cultural landscape.

5.1. Physical Culture Landscape

The physical landscape of Daelim-dong Chinatown is an expression of the cultural identity of Chinese immigrants. Representative physical landscape elements are expressed on the exterior of signboards and buildings. K, an immigrant from China, said, "The red color is used a lot on store signs in Daelim-dong. This is because the red color symbolizes good luck in China." And red and yellow are generally used on the exterior. Red means good luck and prosperity in China, and yellow means gold and tradition. That's why these colors are also used a lot on the exterior of buildings in Daelim-dong Chinatown. And in some buildings, Chinese immigrants had to engrave dragon and flower patterns on the exterior of the building. However, Daelim-dong Chinatown is not completely rebuilt in Chinese style, but only partially renovated. And public facilities such as parks in Daelim-dong Chinatown are provided with services by using both Korean and Chinese.

5.2. Non-physical cultural landscape

Daelim-dong Chinatown is multilingual. In Daelim-dong, Korean, Chinese, and English are used. Chinese immigrants speak Korean and Chinese freely in this space. Also, there are many tourists in Daelim-dong Chinatown now, and these tourists sometimes speak English in this space. Chinese self-employed C said, "The

store writes down menus in three languages: Korean, Chinese, and English." And the landscape of life is well seen by Chinese immigrants in Daelim-dong Chinatown. For example, there are many Chinese residents who celebrate both Chinese and Korean holidays in this space. L, a Korean resident of Daelim-dong, said, "We celebrate the holidays with our Chinese neighbors every year on Chinese New Year's Day. Daelim-dong Chinatown has many restaurants mixed with Korea and China, so cultures seem to mix with each other." In addition, there are many restaurants that mix Korean and Chinese food in commercial facilities. So there are many mixed life landscapes of Korea and China in this space (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Daelim-dong Chinatown Cultural Landscape Analysis

Classification of Cultural Landscapes	Category	Specific Content
Physical Cultural Landscape	Color	Mainly uses red and yellow
	Patterns	Applies traditional Chinese patterns such as dragon patterns and flower patterns
	Renovation	Partially adds Chinese cultural elements to existing buildings
Non-Physical Cultural Landscape	Public Facilities	Provides bilingual services in Korean and Chinese
	Language	Multilingual use of Korean, Chinese, and English
	Festivals	Celebrates both Chinese and Korean festivals
	Diet	Many restaurants serving a mix of Korean and Chinese cuisine are located

6. Cultural Characteristics of Daelim-dong Chinatown

6.1. Mixed space of culture

Daelim-dong Chinatown is a space that represents a mixed cultural landscape that combines Chinese and Korean cultures. These cultural landscapes were combined with Korean and Chinese landscapes to form a new type of cultural landscape. Culture is not just mixed, but it can create a new form of culture, not Korean and Chinese culture. In addition, many new forms of food, not Korean and Chinese food, are being developed in this region.

This study is based on the theory of cultural hybridity and the theory of cultural landscape related to migration. The cultural interaction between Korea and China in Daelim-dong Chinatown can prove the theoretical basis and be a representative example for the study of migrant space. Therefore, various events and activities are also combined with Korean and Chinese cultures to create new forms of events and activities.

6.2. Space of conflict and convergence

The formation of Daelim-dong Chinatown developed through conflict and convergence between Korean residents and Chinese migrants. In the early days, the conflict between Korean residents and Chinese migrants was serious. Korean residents had a lot of quarrels because of their dissatisfaction with Chinese migrants. For example, illegal space occupation and garbage dumping by Chinese migrants have become major problems. This is a problem caused by cultural differences between the two countries. However, in recent years, cultural exchanges between Koreans and Chinese have become active, leading to cultural convergence and helping the two groups understand each other. In addition, as many tourists gathered in this area, a commercial district was formed. In addition, as real estate prices rose a lot, Koreans had positive feelings toward the Chinese. Currently, residents of Daelim-dong Chinatown are contemplating the direction of future development for this space with a special landscape. In Daelim-dong Chinatown (**Figure 3**), conflicts between Korean residents and Chinese migrants arose

due to neglect of garbage and illegal occupation in the initial migration stage. However, Daelim-dong China Town has gradually increased mutual understanding and has advanced to the stage of convergence between Korea and China.



Figure 3. Red sign in Chinatown

6.3. Space that expresses the identity of immigrants

Chinese people want to come to Korea and show their identity. So, Daelim-dong Chinatown is a space to express their identity to Chinese immigrants. In general, immigrants express their cultural identity through their physical environment. The empirical findings of Daelim-dong Chinatown directly show the cultural interaction between residents of Daelim-dong, which is the logical basis for the cultural landscape design strategy. The design strategy based on these empirical findings can reinforce the community convergence of Daelim-dong Chinatown by reflecting the actual interactions and needs of residents. For example, red and yellow signs are installed in Chinese stores. And traditional patterns such as phoenix and dragon are used a lot. Through this action, immigrants are proud of their culture and want to express it in various ways.

7. Cultural Landscape Design Strategy of Daelim-dong Chinatown

7.1. Core Principles of Cultural Landscape Design

The core principles of cultural landscape design in Daelim-dong Chinatown can be divided into three. These three are the principle of cultural convergence, the principle of regional connection, and the principle of convenience of viewing. First, the principle of cultural convergence is to fuse Chinese culture and Korean culture. This convergence shows that the architecture of Daelim-dong Chinatown does not simply duplicate Chinese architecture, but exhibits special originality. Second, the principle of regional connection is that Daelim-dong Chinatown strengthens cultural connection by linking it with the surrounding regional landscape. Third, the principle of viewing convenience needs to be designed in consideration of the convenience and stability of tourists and residents visiting Daelim-dong Chinatown. The principle of such convenience is that clear signs, sufficient rest areas, and convenience facilities should be installed (Table 5).

Table 5. Core Principles of Cultural Landscape Design

Core Principle	Basic Content	Specific Requirements/Goals
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Cultural Integration Principle	Application of mutual integration of Chinese and Korean cultures	Prevent architectural duplication, realize regional and innovative design
Regional Linkage Principle	Link Chinatown with surrounding landscapes	Strengthen regional cultural connectivity and enhance a sense of integration
Visitor Convenience Principle	Prioritize user convenience and safety	Install signs, secure rest spaces and convenience facilities

7.2. Specific Strategies for Cultural Landscape Design

The specific strategies of cultural landscape design in Daelim-dong Chinatown can be divided into three. These three are the establishment of cultural identity, improvement of infrastructure and convenience facilities, and participation of local residents. First, in order to build a cultural identity, a cultural street is created on the main street of Daelim-dong Chinatown. Lanterns with traditional Chinese patterns are installed on these streets to enhance the night view. And various sculptures can be installed on the cultural street to express the cultural characteristics of Chinatown. Second, for infrastructure and convenience facility improvement, rest areas and toilets are installed. These spaces can provide convenience to tourists and local residents. In addition, information boards are installed in Daelim-dong Chinatown, and these information boards are written in Korean, Chinese, and English to provide convenience to various tourists. Third, local resident participation allows Chinese residents to actively participate in the design of Daelim-dong Chinatown (Figure 4). So, the opinions and needs of local residents can be reflected as much as possible. In addition, various cultural activities are held in Daelim-dong Chinatown so that local residents can directly participate in the cultural experience program (Table 6).

Table 6. Specific Strategies for Cultural Landscape Design

Specific Strategies	Strategic Goals	Specific Measures
Establishment of Cultural Identity	Clearly express the cultural characteristics of Daelim-dong Chinatown	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a cultural street on the main road of Daelim-dong Chinatown 2. Install lanterns with traditional Chinese patterns to enhance the night landscape 3. Install various sculptures to express the cultural characteristics of Chinatown
Improvement of Infrastructure and Convenience Facilities	Improve the convenience of use for tourists and local residents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Install convenience facilities such as rest spaces and toilets 2. Install information boards in Korean, Chinese, and English
Local Resident Participation	Reflect the opinions and needs of local residents and promote cultural participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage active participation of Chinese residents in the design to reflect their opinions and needs as much as possible 2. Hold various cultural activities to allow local residents to directly participate in cultural experience programs



Figure 4. Daelim-dong Chinatown Store

8. Conclusion

In this study, the formation of landscapes and cultural characteristics was analyzed targeting Chinese residents in Daerim-dong, Seoul. The main insight of this study is that Daelim-dong Chinatown has formed a cultural hybridity through the interaction of Chinese migrants and Korean residents, which provides important implications for the design of a multicultural space. The analysis of the characteristics of Daelim-dong Chinatown is as follows. First, it is a space representing a mixed cultural landscape that combines Chinese and Korean culture. Second, the formation of Daelim-dong Chinatown developed through conflict and convergence between Korean residents and Chinese migrants. Third, the Chinese want to come to Korea and reveal their identity. This study has a limitation in that it is difficult to generalize the research results of Daelim-dong Chinatown to other Chinatowns or multicultural spaces. In addition, there is a limitation in that the diversity of migrant cultural landscapes cannot be sufficiently reflected by analyzing only a single case. The results of this study can reflect the elements of Korean-Chinese culture convergence in the landscape design of Daelim-dong Chinatown. The proposed design strategy can be applied to actual landscape design and referred to other multicultural areas.

Authorship Contribution

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Asian Cultural Landscape Association (approval number: ACLA-REC-2025-003), with

which both authors were formerly affiliated.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Written informed consent has been obtained from the patient(s) to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article; further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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