# Sign of the Times: The Linguistic Power of Protest Signs in Philadelphia Chinatown's Fight Against the 76ers Arena

Evelyn Lai

賴語晴

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the linguistic landscape of protest signs used in Philadelphia's Save Chinatown movement between early 2022 and late fall of 2024. Through qualitative analysis of selected pictures documenting digital flyers and protest signs from social media accounts, the multilingual nature and diversity of Chinatown's community and the greater Philadelphia scene are made salient. Linguistic strategies are highlighted to reflect how protesters are able to express dissent and engage in discourse across different languages while functioning together under one movement.

KEYWORDS: Chinese, English, linguistic landscape, protest, speech act

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## Section 1- Introduction and Background

1966, 1993, 2000, and 2008 are just a few years that mark defining moments in the fate of Philadelphia Chinatown's survival in their attempts to fight displacement and gentrification against big corporations and government development plans. More recently, since 2022, Philadelphia's Chinatown has begun facing a new threat— the development of a 76ers basketball arena just a block away. This continuing issue of displacing a community primarily made up of non-English speaking immigrants within America brings attention to how political information and discourse are spread in multilingual settings. In particular, questions of *how* political discontent is expressed are raised when examining the Save Chinatown protests that have proliferated as a result of the arena's threat. This thesis aims to explore a socio-political movement that attempts to make its stance clear across different languages. In doing so, this thesis seeks to answer the question: What are the linguistic strategies and devices deployed by protestors? How do these strategies and devices express dissent?

To answer these questions, I gathered data from social media posts by compiling photos of signs displayed in protests, digital infographics, and other artifacts from the movement. Using the existing literature on (protest as) speech act theory as a guiding framework, I analyze data to identify syntactic patterns, understand translation and world language choices, and assess overall semantic content in slogans to further add to existing work on the linguistic landscape of protests, highlighting a multilingual dimension to the sphere of public discourse. In the remainder of this paper, section 1 continues to cover the background for the protest in question, my positionality, and the pre-existing linguistic literature I will draw on. Section 2 covers methodology and data collection, section 3 dives into the analysis of data, and lastly section 4 addresses limitations and concludes my argument.

**1.1. Chinatown Background**

On July 21, 2022, the 76ers, Philadelphia's NBA team, announced their proposal to build a $1.3 billion arena a block away from Philadelphia's Chinatown. Having not contacted the Chinatown organization or property owners for community input, many members of residence and employment were stunned by this decision (Lauer, 2022). This isn't the first time that Philadelphia's Chinatown has faced threats of displacement from big corporations and government-funded developments. In 1966, the Vine Street expressway was proposed to be built, receiving pushback from the community through the 70s before being finished around 1991. The establishment of the express ripped through Chinatown, taking away homes, excavating a cemetery, destroying a community garden, and nearly tearing down a church central to the (religious) community (Yee, 2012). It was during this threat to the Holy Redeemer Church that the Save Chinatown Movement was first founded. Although the church was saved, the expressway remains and Chinatown was forced to endure more displacement. In the 1980s, the establishment of the Convention Center destroyed over 200 houses and the Commuter Rail further removed housing. Since the 1990s, the Save Chinatown movement has successfully stopped the development of a federal prison, the Phillies baseball stadium in 2000, and the Foxwoods casino in 2008 (Wei, 2023). Now, in 2024, the 76DevCorp Arena is the latest threat to the community's existence.

Besides the fraught past of multiple threats, the 76ers arena strikes a chord particularly deep for community members given the recent 2023 developments of Washington D.C's Capital One arena that hosts the NBA's Washington Wizards and NHL's Washington Capitals right next to their Chinatown. D.C's Chinatown has become the victim of gentrification, a phenomenon in which demographic and economic shifts displace previously established working-class

communities and communities of color in favor of wealthier newcomers and real estate development companies. Soaring rent, permanently closed Chinese businesses, and displaced residents are just a few of their symptoms. Comparing census numbers from 1990, 2010, and 2020, the percentage of self-identifying Asian Americans residing in D.C's Chinatown has fallen dramatically from 66%, 21%, and now 18%, respectively (Lauer, 2022). This decrease in Asian population reflects a common trait of gentrification: forceful eviction of longtime residents in response to increasing living costs. Richard Wong, chairman of the Chinatown Service Center, notes a severe loss of low-income housing, residential properties, and local mom-and-pop shops. Now, without any supermarket in their Chinatown, Wong witnesses the majority of the Asian population commuting to Virginia or Maryland just to access an Asian supermarket for their needs (Kaplan, 2023). In a neighborhood that once held 3,000 Asian American residents, now only 300 are left. For these residents that do remain, they find themselves in an environment with fewer than 15 Asian-owned businesses, surrounded by condos ranging from $350,000 to $500,000 per unit and big chain corporations such as Hilton in the spaces where long-time community spaces used to be (Lee et al. 2022). Aside from the original Friendship Arch and Chinese lettering above franchise signs such as Walgreens and Chick-Fil-A, there's hardly much to indicate that D.C. still has a Chinatown at all. Thus, D.C's journey realizes Philadelphia's worst fears, affirming for many community members that the development of the 76ers arena will only repeat history, following D.C's footsteps.

### 1.2. Positionality

Before I proceed any further with my work, I want to address an important statement on the relations between linguistics and politics, which coincidentally is what my work is on, *but* would still be highlighted regardless of the internal content of this thesis. From the book

*Decolonizing Linguistics*, Aris Moreno Clemens writes a chapter on the myth of apolitical linguistics. She specifically uses Black feminist praxis to demonstrate the importance of active and intentional transparency by linguists in their work to progress the field in ways that disrupt colonial frames of power. Clemens makes the case that the notion of scientific objectivity itself is an ideology that privileges certain politics. There is a clear privilege and political act inherent in the ability to ignore the social background and context of a language community and the researchers who study them. As Clemens writes, "It is clear that there is no investigation of language or society that is free from ideology". Given this, it's important to present my own positionality in regards to how it situates me within the work I have chosen.

This thesis was born out of a recognition of a community like mine in a place far from home. Like many other children who come from immigrant families, ethnic spaces have always been important to me and my family's livelihood in America. My experiences living in the racially homogenous, Asian dominant Bay Area of California have given me the privilege of growing up in environments strongly rooted by ethnic communities. There's no doubt that seeing and growing up with people who look like me, being encouraged to and feeling proud of speaking my mother tongue, and having access to cultural roots and practices are all heavy influences that helped me grow into the person I am today. In a country torn by various dividers, racial and ethnic identity being one of the strongest, being able to be proud of who I am and where my family comes from has been one of the few things I've never had to doubt in my life.

Moving across the country to attend a predominantly white institution in the suburbs of Philadelphia has shown me the privilege of ethnic and racial affirmation that I have unknowingly been taking for granted my whole life. No longer being part of the dominant ethnic group and having to commute a significant distance and time to get a glimpse of a community that used to

be right outside my doorstep has reemphasized the importance and impact of belonging to a community that reflects your cultural roots.

I am not native to Philadelphia, and what roots I have here are certainly not to the depth of residency that the stakeholders of Chinatown have to claim. Even so, in my four years of living in the Greater Philadelphia Area, Chinatown has become a way of holding on to what is familiar- a home away from home.

Hearing languages besides English being spoken freely on the streets, seeing Asian languages written and displayed on signs in the space of Chinatown, and witnessing people of all generations populate Chinatown in its thriving community brings such stark contrast to the segregated ethnic enclave it once began as. The existence of Chinatown today as it is, *is* a demonstration of amongst many things, linguistic survival. The proliferation of multilingualism in the neighborhood signals to the ethnic communities who have continued to claim their space for generations past and to come. Philadelphia's Chinatown has become a testament to the ability and hope to survive, and I am but one individual that is immensely grateful to its presence in my life.

Historically, spaces for marginalized communities in America have continuously faced the threat of being replaced by governments or large corporation lobbying in favor of empty promises for economic endeavors. Gentrification is not a phenomenon specific to Philadelphia's Chinatown by any means, but the grand scale of its occurrence speaks to the far too common unjust abuse of power that politicians practice. The history of America is built on the exploitation of labor from colored bodies, and even today little has changed. Government officials meant to represent the people continue to value economic revenue of billionaire corporations over the livelihood and cultural heritage long established by marginalized communities of color. Yet these

same communities are often the ones that drive the already thriving economy of the cities they are in. Displacing communities from their homes while dismissing what they have done for the city is a deliberate erasure of colored bodies from the history and identity of America, and it is disappointing and frustrating to see that little has changed from our representatives despite the passage of time.

This is all to say that my life experiences have greatly influenced my thesis work and choice. This paper is a product of my political motivations, positionalities and sociohistoric understandings of language communities that have existed long before me. I've chosen to pursue this topic not only to highlight the ways in which language is inherently political and tied to justice, race and liberation, but to also engage in the promising power of language and move beyond examining the traumas of marginalized communities in America. Beyond the technical linguistic aspects of this paper, I hope that my work may raise awareness on the threat that Chinatown faces and enables you to act on the importance of change through language, especially outside the formal academic sphere.

### 1.3. Literature Background

This paper builds on the concept of linguistic landscape, a term that describes the "public road signs, signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings," as first defined by Landry & Bourhis in 1997. Although this definition is largely restricted to public signage and government settings, the definition has since been contested and expanded through the development of the field to include analyzing private signs, such as commercial signs and advertising billboards. A general recurring theme that has emerged in the study of linguistic landscapes is that words and signage reflect the relative power and status of languages in given communities. Additionally, written signage has

the power to shape the linguistic behaviors of the participants in that geographic area (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Since this paper focuses on language used in protests, I will briefly review linguistic landscape literature that has formerly explored the intersection between language and discourse. In their chapter on "Discourse and the Linguistic Landscape" in *The Handbook of Discourse Studies* (2019), Sergeant et al. explore the previously mentioned relationship by reviewing select case studies to draw on recurring themes. Their studies exemplify how acts of linguistic and semiotic display in the public arena operate as key sites for social organization and political regulation and contestation. By examining how meaning is generated through layering of contexts, the interplay between multiple signs, the narrative potential of landscapes, and the dialogic possibilities presented by social media, site-specific semiotic events can be brought into much broader discourses. Studies on language use in discourse often occur in individual case studies; Seals (2011) uses the National Immigration Reform March in 2010 as a site of study to show how abstract space can be reappropriated and reinvented to create visibility and solidarity for oppressed minorities through signage. Monje (2017) examines protest marches in the Philippines during November 2016 against the burial of Ferdinand Marcos. Sourcing photos of posters, placards, and other embodied texts of the protest landscape from the internet, Monje discusses how the transient linguistic landscape of protests gave room for the presence of diverse languages to become visible- a chance that normally would have been denied within the fixed linguistic landscape determined by government policies. In his chapter in the *International journal of the sociology of language* (2014), Kasanga uses the "Arab Spring" revolution to question the significance of code choice and the symbolic meaning of linguistic artifacts in protests. From a collection of 126 photographs taken at the height of the Arab Spring revolution (January/ February 2011), Kasanga finds that the language of protest through its mediational

means is polyvocal. Mobile signs, defined as texts resulting from a judicious code choice concerning multiple target audiences, have multilayered dimensions and thus challenge the notion of territoriality or fixed place. Lastly, examining the use of the hand placard in South Korea's Candlelight Protests, Kim & Jang (2022) note that the artifact of protest both ritualized and improvised actions during the protest by synchronizing movement to produce a significant semiotic landscape.

Working tangentially to and inspired by such research, this paper continues to build on the interplay of discourse and language within the linguistic landscape of Save Chinatown's protest site.

## Section 2- Methods and Data

### 2.1. Methods

The present study looks at 62 items found from online sources. The items were found online from either the movement's website of noarenaphl.org, or the following Instagram accounts linked from the website: @apipennsylvania, @nacsphilly, @savechinatownphilly, @asianamericansunited, @spocphilly. The organizations represented in these accounts are listed as follows: Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance, No Arena in Chinatown Solidarity, Save Chinatown Philly, Asian Americans United, and Students for the Preservation of Chinatown. Although the movement against the arena has been in existence since the fall of 2022 (estimated, given that the announcement of the plans to build an arena was made on July 21, 2022), the data collected consists of artifacts from the present (fall of 2024) to 2023. Items that were considered part of the dataset were either digital photographs of signs from protests or digital flyers promoted on these social media accounts. I will be following Backhaus' (2006) definition of a sign as "any piece of text within a spatially definable frame", thus using each individual sign as

an artifact of analysis. To make data more meaningful, each protest sign is only counted as an item of the dataset if unique; therefore, multiple signs with the same line are only indexed as a singular item. Items of the dataset are classified into one of two categories: official and unofficial items. The term official items refers to artifacts produced (and distributed) by official organizations, while unofficial items are artifacts that individual civilians produced on their own. In both of these categories, the data is further sorted based on language use: English only, English and Chinese, Chinese only, and other.

## 2.2. Data

### 2.2a. Language breakdown

To begin with examining the data by their language usage, a majority of signs (67.8%) were written in English only. 16.1% of signs had both English and Chinese, next followed by 12.9% of signs being in Chinese only, and the rest being in a language neither Chinese nor English. The results are summarized in Table 1.

| Language | Counted Signs | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| English only | 42 | 67.8% |
| English and Chinese | 10 | 16.1% |
| Chinese only | 8 | 12.9% |
| Other | 2 | 3.2% |
| Total | 62 | 100% |

**Table 1** Languages contained on signs (n=62)

### 2.2.b Language breakdown by sign type

The distribution between sign types in the dataset was relatively even, with 43.5% of signs being unofficial and 56.5% being official. Additionally, if we compare the data by language within each sign type, 74.1% of unofficial signs are in English only, while 62.9% of official signs

are in English only. Contrastingly, a much higher proportion of Chinese only and Chinese and English signs (37.1%) make up the official sign total compared to unofficial signs where Chinese only and Chinese and English signs only make up 18.5% of the total unofficial signs.

| Sign type | Chinese only | Chinese + English | English only | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unofficial | 3 (4.8%) | 2 (3.2%) | 20 (32.3%) | 2 (3.2%) | 27 (43.5%) |
| Official | 5 (8.1%) | 8 (12.9%) | 22 (35.5%) | 0 (0%) | 35 (56.5%) |
| | | | | | 62 (100%) |

**Table 2** Official versus unofficial signs by language (n=62)

## Section 3- Analysis

### 3.1 Baseline Framework

In order to analyze the artifacts examined within the context of this specific protest scene, I will first introduce the concept of speech acts as defined by J.L Austin from *How to Do Things with Words.* Austin defines a speech act as an utterance that performs an action rather than simply conveying information (1962). He further dissects this framework into three different types of acts that constitute a speech act:

1) Locutionary act: the act of saying something (the utterance itself)
2) Illocutionary act: the intended meaning or function behind the utterance
3) Perlocutionary act: the effect or response the utterance has on the listener

To demonstrate the application of Austin's framework, I've arranged several examples in the table below:

| **Speech act** | **Austin's definition** | **General example** | **Application to Save Chinatown movement** | **Application to specific signages within the movement** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locutionary act** | The act of saying something (the utterance itself) | The utterance "It's cold in here" | The utterance/ slogan "No arena in Chinatown" | The phrase "Chinatown raised me" written on a sign |
| **Illocutionary act** | The intended meaning or function behind the utterance | Intended as a request to close the window | Intended as displaying opposition to the arena | Intended as reminder of the sentimental and social value of Chinatown |
| **Perlocutionary act** | The effect or response the utterance has on the listener | Persuading the listener to close the window | Persuading politicians and developers to change their plans upon seeing opposition | Warning politicians and developers on the unintended consequences of developing the area; taking away family raising environments |

**Table 3-** Application and Examples of Austin's Speech Act Theory

While Austin's definitions and frameworks on speech acts are fundamental to understanding how language functions beyond the literal words spoken and highlight the nuances of pragmatics, further literature has developed the framework of speech acts in ways better suited for analysis.

## 3.2 Normative Functionalist Framework

For example, it's important to understand that while the term "speech act" uses a definition that refers to verbal communication, speech acts actually don't have to be verbal. Thus, we can further apply the idea that the written phrases on signage examined within this paper are also classified as speech acts.

Another area of literature that is critical to understanding the analysis of this work is the differentiation between protest act and speech act. Searle (1975) defines protests as "involving both an expression of disapproval and a petition for change." Chrisman and Hubb in *Protest and Speech Act Theory* (2021) further refine these notions through their normative functionalist framework into a protest act's communicative aspects of the means, object, and redress as defined below:

1) The object: the thing being protested against
2) The redress: the thing being prescribed
3) The means: the way of communicating the two previous connected stances

To illustrate the differences between applying Chrisman and Hubb's framework against Austin's framework, consider the table below that dissects the Save Chinatown movement based on their three differentiations of speech act accordingly:

| **Austin Framework (Speech Act Theory)** | **Chrisman and Hubb Framework (Normative Functionalist Framework)** |
|---|---|
| **Locutionary act (the utterance):** The utterance/ slogan "No arena in Chinatown" | **The object (the item of protest):** The 76ers arena |
| **Illocutionary act (the intent):** Intended as a demand to pause and/or abandon development of the arena | **The redress (the thing being prescribed):** A pause to/ complete abandonment of the development of the arena |
| **Perlocutionary act (the effect):** Persuading politicians and developers to change their plans. Inspiring others to take action against the arena development. | **The means (ways of communicating two previous stances):** Displaying protest signs against the arena |

**Table 4-** Comparison of Austin & Chrisman and Hubb's Frameworks

By breaking down a protest itself, Chrisman and Hubb allow us to consider what parts of the protest are able to constitute a "speech act". Under the normative functionalist framework, "the means" *are* the speech act- it goes beyond just *conveying* information on the object of

protest and moves to *perform* an action through its redress. Furthermore, we can break down the redress again by questioning what the intent and effect behind the prescription is; in other words, what are the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of the utterance or means that contain the redress?

Further highlighting the nuances of protests, Chrisman and Hubb identify that protests necessarily involve different relations of power or authority between the protester and the agent from whom the redress is desired. That is, the two groups at play cannot be equal in terms of power. Lastly, the applicability of an action further determines the specific type of speech act. When looking at protests as a speech act, Rawls, *A Theory Of Justice*, asserts that "it is important that the action be properly designed to make an effective appeal to the wider community" (1999a, 330). Therefore, a speech act is only a protest act if the civil disobedience generated from it addresseses "the sense of justice in the community, an invocation of the recognized principles of cooperation amongst equals".

From these pieces of literature, I've begun with the basic definition of a speech act through Austin's work, expanded it beyond verbal utterances with Campbell's study, and complicated it within constraints that allow it to further function as a protest act under Chrisman and Hubb's theory. Given these nuances, I will be adopting the normative functionalist approach to protests as complex speech acts in the continuing analysis.

**3.3 Normative Scorekeeping**

Aside from the three areas of protest as a speech act that Chrisman and Hubb have identified; the object, redress, and means, they also propose an incorporation of input and output subjects to the nature of protest speech acts. Drawing from Kukla & Lance (2009), Chrisman and Hubb frame the normative functionalist approach to understanding the nature of speech as every

speech act is characterized in normative scorekeeping terms. They state, “speech acts can be abstractly characterized not in terms of the conditions under which they are felicitous but in terms of normative functions from input conditions for a speaker’s entitlement to perform the act in question to output statuses affected by a presumed entitled performance of that act”. Ultimately, Chrisman and Hubb argue that for any particular speech act, one can attempt to characterize the facts, considerations, or reasons that entitle one to perform a speech act- otherwise known as the inputs. The second part of their theory is the outputs, the entitlements, obligations, and reasons to do things, including but not limited to performing other speech acts that are generated by the performance of a speech act. In sum, the normative functionalist approach defines speech acts as composed of two aspects: the inputs- the context that can bring one to perform a speech act- and the outputs- additional aspects that are generated from the performance of speech acts.

Having now defined and laid out the framework I will be utilizing, I will analyze the protest items in the context of input and output conditions in the following sections.

**3.4. Input Conditions**

Following Chrisman and Hubb’s established framework, the leading questions to define the input conditions with the items of analysis are as follows: What are the normative scorekeeping terms that characterize the speech act? What are the general grounds that allow a protest to presume entitlement to negatively evaluate the object of protest? In other words, what context is responsible for producing and characterizing the speech act in question? To answer these questions, I will be examining the physical settings, socio-political settings, and timeline of the Save Chinatown movement.

**3.4.a. Physical settings**

To begin, we must first acknowledge the movement's physical location- Philadelphia. Often coined with the nickname as the birthplace of American Independence, Philadelphia holds a deep background of historical significance to America. Having hosted the First and Second Continental Congress, the drafting and signing of the Constitution, and previously fulfilling the role of the country's capital briefly, the culture of Philadelphia is inherently political and engaged in civic duty. In a city that was once home to many founding fathers and is still home to the Liberty Bell, the residents that live within it are no doubt faced with the everyday reminder of the importance of civic engagement and political rights to stand up for themselves. Another physical aspect of the city that plays an important role in the protest is the close proximity of Chinatown to Philadelphia's City Hall. City Hall being within walking distance of Chinatown eases the logistics of organizing protests, ultimately encouraging residents to rally and march a few blocks to confront their representatives.

**3.4.b Socio-political setting**

As previously mentioned, Philadelphia residents live in an environment that holds the historical significance of political uprising and civic engagement. Along the same line, when contextualizing the protest on a larger scale, we can draw attention to the fact that the protest occurs within America. As a country, America has long politicized various aspects of its society, where its founding, history, and identity has been and is continuously being shaped by its people and the movements that they produce. That, coupled with the long-standing notion of America as a "melting pot" of immigrants and the often quoted right to "make your voice heard" further amplifies the justification immigrant groups may feel to protest for what they believe in. Notably,

immigrant communities (and largely, communities of color) have had to fight extensively over the course of history and even still today, to gain rights, recognition of identity, and equality.

### 3.4.c Save Chinatown Movement Timeline

As previously mentioned in the background, it's also clear that Philadelphia's Chinatown has long been familiar with threats of displacement and gentrification, meaning that protesting is by no means anything new to the Chinatown community. In combination with the political climate and physical context, Chinatown's community may view protest as an aspect integral to their survival as shown through time.

## 3.5. Output Subjects

Continuing to follow Chrisman and Hubb's framework, their claim asserts that output subjects are the entitlements, obligations, and reasons to do things, including but not limited to performing other speech acts that are generated by an entitled performance of a speech act. Thus, the leading questions to examine the data further for their output statuses will be: How are the speech acts performed as a result of the input conditions?

### 3.5.a Language structure

To begin, I'll first be examining the structure of language as it appears in the protest artifacts.

#### 3.5.a1. Language choice

One of the most prominent aspects of language structure in the data is language choice itself; which language do people choose to put on the sign? As seen previously from the data section, a great majority of the signs are written in English only (67.8%), while the next largest category, though significantly smaller, was signs that contained both English and Chinese, making up 16.1% of the data. Aside from these two categories, Chinese-only signs and signs

with other languages compromise the whole of the data, as summarized in Table 5 below. Note that this table is a repeat of Table 1 displayed at the data section earlier in the paper, and does not contain any changed or different data.

| Language | Counted Signs | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| English only | 42 | 67.8% |
| English and Chinese | 10 | 16.1% |
| Chinese only | 8 | 12.9% |
| Other | 2 | 3.2% |
| Total | 62 | 100% |

**Table 5** Languages contained on signs (n=62)

To situate this data in relation to it being an output status, I bring into question the reasoning and obligations for the output to exist in this manner; that is, why does the data exist in separate languages? The first angle of analysis that can be adopted is looking at this from the sociolinguistic angle that Spolsky (2009) proposes when writing about the relevant conditions that determine the choice of languages in a sign. He claims that motivation for language choice falls into three categories; “write in a language you know”, “write in a language which can be read by the people you expect to read it”, and “write a sign in your own language or in a language with which you wish to be identified”. Thus, we can say that protesters choose to write in varying languages because there is also variation in the initial intention behind their writing; some want to write for themselves, for the people they hope to reach, or they write to signal a (linguistic) identity. If we break down the language choice through Austin’s speech acts, we can see that the analysis works well in tandem with the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The illocutionary act examines the intended meaning or function behind the utterance; is the protester choosing this utterance because they have the intention of writing in a language they know, in a

language that can be read by their expected audience, or in a language that signals a part of their identity? The perlocutionary act examines the effect or response it has on the listener, but to do this, we have to first predict the listener that the protester has in mind. In other words, the signed utterance is a product of a consideration of either the language that the intended audience can read or a hope that the audience can identify and correctly link the language to the identity being signaled.

Let's take this framework and apply it to some of the data. A noted trend is that although not all English signs are directed toward politicians, signs that are directed toward politicians are *only* in English. To determine the reasoning behind this, we can walk through each of the three considerations: are the protestors choosing English because this is a language they know? This is a probable reason given America is a largely English-speaking country, and by survival most residents must know some degree of English. Are the protesters choosing English because the language is their own, or do they wish to be identified with English? This could be possible, though perhaps not as likely; non-immigrant residents of Chinatown could think of English as their own language, and immigrant residents might wish to be identified with English to show their language proficiency. Lastly, are the protesters writing in a language that the expected audience can read? This is the most likely option- protesters are writing signs calling to specific politicians, all of whom speak English as their primary language. It would make no sense if politicians were called out in Chinese, a language they cannot understand; it would prescribe no urgency, no hold to accountability, and thus produce no results.

In another example, we can consider the logo of the Save Chinatown movement in Figure 1. To begin, the logo consists of both Simplified Chinese and English. The bilingual choice could be made because the organization knows both languages; it is made up of and organized by

residents of Chinatown, including immigrants and children of immigrants. Accordingly, the choice may also be made because the language is considered their own, and they want to be identified with it; the Chinese may speak to the immigrant community that largely operates through Chinese, and the English may signal to the new generation of residents in Chinatown that are more familiar with English. Lastly, it's also possible that the sign is written in two languages so they can be read by the expected audience. Considering the positionality of an organization that is posed against the arena, the organization serves to both rally civilians and signal opposition to politicians and developers. Therefore, they must make their mission understood by immigrant communities through Chinese and politicians through English. Additionally, we can consider the importance of the semantic content of the logo and the references to former threats of displacement. By including "STADIUM" and "CASINO" crossed out and having "ARENA" written over them, it also draws attention to what Chinatown has faced and survived before, lending more support and drive to their cause. The equivalent is also written in Chinese; "棒球场" -baseball stadium, and "赌场" -casino written under "篮球馆"- basketball arena, to convey the same meaning to Chinese readers.

**Figure 1** No Arena in Chinatown Logo

Lastly, let's consider the existence of signs in languages other than English or Chinese. In Figure 2, note that the sign is *only* in Spanish, whereas in Figure 3, the signage uses both Korean and

**Figure 2** Spanish

English and even a little bit of Chinese. This difference may again signal a variation in intentions. For the Spanish signage, we can reason that having the audience understand the meaning of the utterance doesn't lend as much weight to motivation as identity signaling, otherwise they would have provided an English translation. In contrast, the mixed Korean signage might have a primary motivation of signaling their identity, but makes a point to address the importance of being understood by audiences that don't read Korean. With that being said, we can reasonably conclude that for both signages, the protesters choose their language because it *is their language.* Korean and Spanish are an integral part of the Korean and Spanish speaking communities and, by extension, signal to that identity of the protesters. We would thus ask, what is the purpose of making this identity known to their audience? This can be read on a variety of levels. On one level, the visibility of other ethnic identities may signal solidarity to the first audience: Chinatown residents. On another level, the solidarity being displayed may be intended to intimidate or further pressure the second audience: the politicians and developers. Interestingly, while the diversity in language may largely be attributed to an attempt to signal solidarity, it has two additional effects: increasing accessibility to the movement while simultaneously ostracizing others who cannot understand the language on display.

**Figure 3** Korean Chinatown Protest Signs

**3.5.a2. Question usage**

Another recurring linguistic tool used in signage was the use of rhetorical questions. In Figures A, B, and C note that all signs are addressing politicians *only.* Thus, we can use this to analyze the language choice backward through Austin's speech acts. Since we know that politicians are the intended audience, we know the effect it should have on the audience; the perlocutionary act for this sign is that it has the effect of reminding or persuading the councilman to follow the needs of the people he was elected to represent. Knowing this, we can further extract the intent behind the utterances; the locutionary act is that the protesters intended to draw attention to the representative's disloyalty by posing a question to his actions.

**Figure A**

**Figure B**

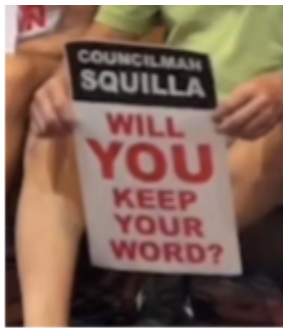


**Figure C**

**3.5.b. Interaction**

The second theme from artifacts that I will be examining in the context of outputs is the interaction generated from the speech acts performed through the signs. Here I use the term "interaction" to describe the production of one or more relations between groups from the content of the signs.

**3.5.b1 Semantic nature of slogans**

The semantic content of the signs is an integral part of understanding how the protest functioned as a speech act. Drawing from semantic distinctions made by Holmes (2013), protest

sign utterances could be filed as either one of two major communicative functions: directive or expressive. Expressive messages primarily focus on voicing the protestor's demands or general sentiments. Directive messages are concerned with influencing the actions of others. Table 6 lists some examples of the different types of messages found at the protest scene.

| **Information scale** | **Information function** | **Examples** |
|---|---|---|
| General | Directive | "Meet us at City Hall. Rally Against The Arena."<br>"WE NEED YOU THERE! WED 9/11 6PM @ CONVENTION CENTER" |
| | Expressive | "Save Chinatown"<br>"Chinatown raised me"<br>"Coast to Coast ARENAS HURT Communities of Color"<br>"We are against the move to the maxey 0 arenas in Chinatown"<br>"我们不会被逼迁离唐人街"<br>("We won't be displaced")<br>"人民团结好<br>永不被打倒"<br>("The people unite well, we will never be defeated") |
| Specific | Directive | "Mayor Parker don't do this"<br>"Councilman Squilla do the right thing"<br>"Councilman Squilla, do you represent your constituents or 3 billionaires?" |

**Table 6** Contents of the protest signs by semantic content

Rather than breaking down each specific utterance, here I will examine the information scaling and function in relation to Austin's speech acts. At the most basic level we can determine that the different information scaling and function exist due to the need to be heard in different manners. With general messages, the illocutionary act is the intention to be heard by or appeal to a larger audience. Specific messages have the illocutionary act of intending to appeal to a narrow and oftentimes singular audience in mind. The information functions can be read as the

perlocutionary acts for each utterance; they are intended to either direct the action of another or express a sentiment of the protester. Putting these together, we can see how the scale and function work together to produce the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of each utterance. For example, the utterance “WE NEED YOU THERE! WED 9/11 6PM @ CONVENTION CENTER” is a general message whose illocutionary act works with the intention to appeal to nearly anyone- signaled by the inclusive and general pronoun “you.” The directive function works as the perlocutionary act that instills an urge to participate from the audience. We can note the clear difference in function (but not scale) when comparing the following utterance: “人民团结好，永不被打倒”- “The people unite well, we will never be defeated.” Although the choice to use Chinese here can be read as scaling to the specific audience of Chinese readers only, it’s important to note the use of the term “人民” in the utterance, which means “people” in the same sense that English speakers may be familiar with the phrase “we the people”. Thus, while world language choice here might be interpreted as a specific scaling, the utterance is actually the same level as the previous one. Both lack a specific call out to an audience member, but instead use a generic “you”, or reference to “people” as a collective body in their respective languages. The difference lies in the function, where the Chinese utterance is not meant to produce an action from the audience, but rather produce *emotions* from the audience. The perlocutionary act, then, is that the utterance has the effect of bringing awareness or instilling the sentiment of resilience in fighting within the audience. Lastly, specific scaled information is often directive by nature because the intended audience is a figure (politician) that can instill change through action. Since the protestors know this, signs towards politicians are made with the intention of invoking action because the effect would, accordingly, be producing tangible change through a politician’s actions.

**3.5.b2. Formation of solidarity**

Another area of meaningful interaction within the Save Chinatown movement is the visibility of solidarity. In the previous analysis, I've covered signaling solidarity through language diversity. Now, I will explore solidarity formation through a specific repeated utterance.

**Figure D**

**Figure E**

**Figure F**

In Figures D, E, F, G, and H, note that the utterance or locutionary act roughly follows the same singular format of "X SAYS NO ARENA IN CHINATOWN" or the Chinese translation "X 说我们不要篮球场在我们的市中" ("X says we don't want a basketball arena in our city center").

**Figure G**

**Figure H**

The format thus makes it easy to substitute out different group labels with the intent of displaying support from those outside the Chinatown resident community towards the movement. In accordance, the perlocutionary act is that representatives may feel pressure upon seeing large and diverse support for the movement and feel inclined to change their action and stance.

**3.5.b3. Positioning of groups**

An interesting phenomenon that emerged from the signs was the intentional positioning of group narratives used to paint the protest scene. In general, the grouping tended to go along the theme of people versus "dominant entities." Consider Figures X, Y, and Z, where there's a repeated iteration of posing civilians against large corporations. Here, we can examine the overall structure of the utterance and the way it lends credit to the semantics of the utterance. We can simplify the utterances to a general format of [people/ grouping representing civilians] followed by [big corporation/ profit-driven entity]. The syntax of the utterance has the intention of drawing attention to who or what the conflict is being driven through and impacting. It then has the effect of making the audience consider which side they are aligning with.

**Figure Z**

**Figure X**

**Figure Y**

**3.5.b4. Official vs unofficial signs**

The last area of interaction that I examine is the existence of official and unofficial signs that occurred in the protest scene and how this complicated its function as a speech act. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the distribution between sign types in the dataset was relatively even, with 43.5% of signs being unofficial and 56.5% of signs being official as represented again in Table 7 below.

| Sign type | Chinese only | Chinese + English | English only | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unofficial | 3 (4.8%) | 2 (3.2%) | 20 (32.3%) | 2 (3.2%) | 27 (43.5%) |
| Official | 5 (8.1%) | 8 (12.9%) | 22 (35.5%) | 0 (0%) | 35 (56.5%) |
| | | | | | 62 (100%) |

**Table 7** Official versus unofficial signs by language (n=62)

This general balance demonstrates that the political linguistic landscape is equally determined by citizens and organizational groups. For both unofficial and official signs, a majority were written in English only, potentially signaling that both groups' intentionality leans towards appealing to English speaking government officials. When we further break down the data by language within each sign type once again, proportionality gives more nuance into the differing goals of each group. 74.1% of all unofficial signs are in English only, while 62.9% of official signs are in English only. This means that within civilians, there's a greater concern with making themselves understood to representatives than organizations are. Contrastingly, a much higher proportion of Chinese only and Chinese and English signs (37.1%) make up the official sign total compared to unofficial signs, where Chinese only and Chinese and English signs only make up 18.5% of the total unofficial signs. In this case, a greater proportion of organizations are concerned with signaling identity and increasing visibility and accessibility to the group they are representing. Additionally, the two unofficial signs that had languages aside from Chinese and English were in Korean and Spanish, demonstrating that ethnic solidarity was realized through individual acts rather than formal organizational displays.

## Section 4- Limitations and Conclusion

### 4.1. Limitations

The work in this thesis has a variety of limitations that influence the depth and generalizations in the analysis that can be made. Most crucially, the data format poses a large area of limitation as it is drawn from pre-chosen and curated content via social media. This is particularly important as the social media accounts are arguably an input form themselves- they are a product of the speech act protest, and thus the photos from the accounts I am obtaining could even be an input within an input; in essence, this is not purely "raw data." The curated data thus skews the actual understanding of the linguistic landscape because I am working with preselected images that are posted with an audience and intention in mind, in contrast to data obtained if I were to attend a rally myself and document the signages I witnessed there. Additionally, the fact that the data is presented on social media poses the limitation of content moderation and narrative control. The creators behind the accounts, knowing that content is subject to moderation from platform guidelines and general critique/ impressions of presentation from the public, will somewhat screen the data beforehand for issues so that only the "safest" content will be accessible for my analysis. Another form of limitation is that I am only drawing from written utterances and not spoken utterances, such as chants or speeches that were also present at the protest scene. This leaves out a significant portion of meaningful data, especially when a contrast could be made between spoken and written utterances and the intentions behind the choices.

### 4.2. Conclusion

In examining the linguistic landscape of Philadelphia's Save Chinatown movement, this paper looks at the ways linguistic strategies are used in multilingual communities and

environments when operating under a singular movement and motivation. Pulling from photographic data on the social media accounts associated with the movement's organization, the study has looked at a total of 62 artifacts consisting of 12 digital flyers and 50 physical posters. Analyzing recurring trends and employing Austin's speech act and Chrisman & Hubb's normative functionalist frameworks has made it clear that protestors utilize various linguistic tools to articulate dissent and participate in discourse. Largely, protesters are acutely aware of their positioning both in terms of multilingualism and social identity which informs their decision in world language choice, semantic content, and syntax structure. Ultimately, it is this awareness that allows protestors to utilize language in a manner that addresses a wide range of audience members effectively and thus express dissent in a uniform manner across different languages and discourse strategies.

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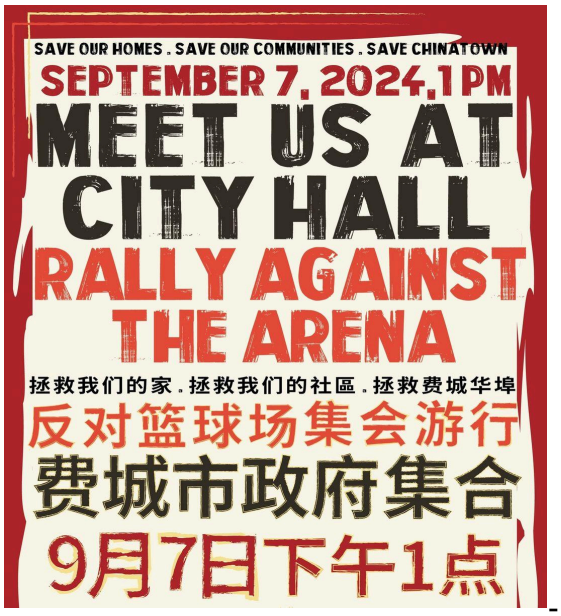
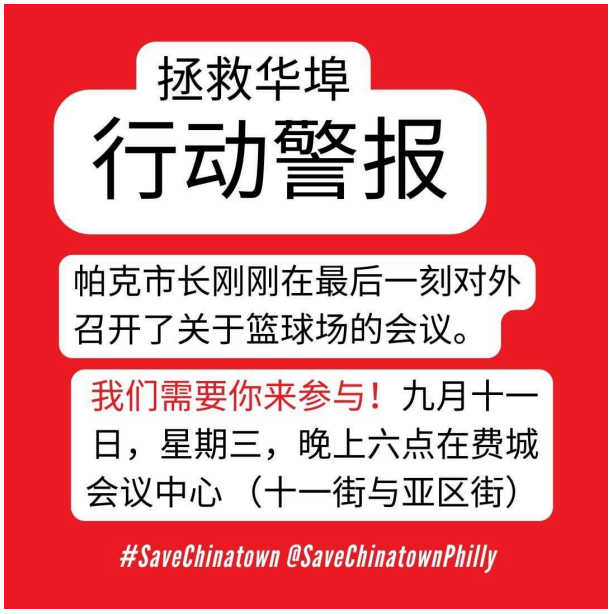
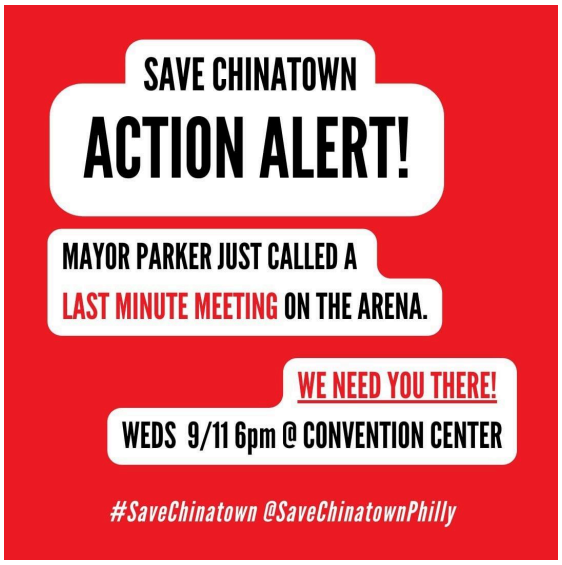
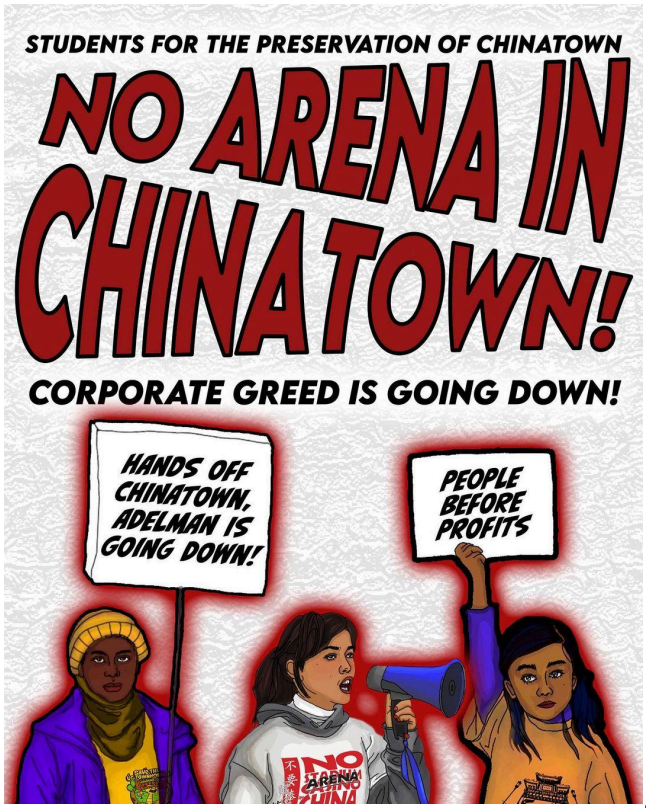
**Appendix: Data Items**




STUDENTS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF CHINATOWN
NO ARENA IN CHINATOWN!
CORPORATE GREED IS GOING DOWN!
HANDS OFF CHINATOWN, ADELMAN IS GOING DOWN!
PEOPLE BEFORE PROFITS

NO ARENA IN CHINATOWN!
保护典城华埠!
反对篮球馆!

这个提案还没有定论!
THE ARENA IS NOT A DONE DEAL!
11月14日
晚上6点
NOV 14
6PM
唐人街
社区会议
一年半过去了，开发商的提案毫无进展。
我们的社区正在全费城市范围内寻求支持！
来听听我们与篮球场抗争的最新进展。来看看全费城有多少的社区组织支持唐人街的抗争，了解组织者们的工作，并了解你怎么可以对拯救唐人街尽一份力！
CHINATOWN
TOWN HALL
A year and a half after their announcement, the developers have made no progress in their proposal. Our community is gathering support citywide! Come hear about the latest in our fight against the arena. Hear from organizations around the city who are supporting Chinatown in this fight, learn about what organizers have been doing, and find out how you can help Save Chinatown!
中华基督教会中心
第10 街和春天街交汇处
CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
10TH & SPRING STREET
由华人反篮球场联盟主办
Hosted by the Chinatown Coalition to Oppose the Arena

拯救费城华埠!
SAVE CHINATOWN!
篮球馆：还未结束
我们的社区有权了解，询问和表示关注
我们有权决定我们的社区未來与发展
费城华埠社区会议将于十二月十四日下午六点
在 1023 Race 街, 聚福金阁酒家商讨有关费城76人队篮球馆事宜
76篮球馆开发商被邀请到现场为你们解答问题。篮球馆对华埠会有什么影响? 获得有关篮球馆的实际信息。将你们对本项目，该程序，以及对社区的影响的疑问提出来。
Basketball Arena: It's not a done deal
The community has a right to know, ask questions, and express concerns.
Our community has the right to decide its own future.
Chinatown Town Meeting about the 76Place Arena
December 14 at 6pm, Ocean Harbor Restaurant, 1023 Race Street
The 76Place Developers have been invited to attend to answer your questions. How will the proposed NBA arena impact Chinatown? Get facts about the arena and ask questions you have about the project, the process and the impact on the community.

# 反对建篮球场!
## 这件事还未有定论

拯救华埠联盟和华人反篮球场联盟一直在努力阻止篮球场的建设。这战斗不但在继续，而且还在升温。请来了解我们自上次的社区会议以来的工作与进度，并了解我们可以采取的下一步措施来击败这篮球场。

讨论篮球场建设的社区会议

时间：星期三， 4 月 12 日， 6:00pm - 8:00pm

地点：中华基督教会, 11街与万安街(11th and Vine)

**保护我们挚爱的社区！ 拯救唐人街！**

会议现场以 中文国语 主持，提供 广东话 和 英文 翻译

# No Arena in Chinatown!
## The Arena is NOT a Done Deal

The Save Chinatown Coalition and the Chinatown Coalition to Oppose the Arena have been working to stop the arena. The fight is continuing and heating up.
Come out to learn all that has happened since our last Town Meeting and learn about next steps we can take to defeat the arena.

**WHAT: Town Meeting**
**WHEN: Wednesday, April 12, 2023, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**
**WHERE: Chinese Christian Church Annex, 11th and Vine**

**Protect our Beloved Community! Save Chinatown!**

会议组织主办方 **Meeting host by:** (排名不分先后)

Pennsylvania United Chinese Coalition 宾州华人侨团联盟• Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance (API PA) 宾州亚太裔政治联盟 • Philadelphia Hoyu Chinese American Association 美国费城福建猴岘聯誼會 • Changle Association of Greater Philadelphia 费城长乐公会 • A&C Assoc Philadelphia INC 费城華人協會 • American Fujian/Ming Huo Chamber of Commerce 美国福建闽候工商总会 • Hoyu Chinese Folk Culture Center 美國猴峒民俗文化中心 • American Philadelphia Chinese Women Association 美国费城妇女联合会 • Asian American Fellowship of Pennsylvania 賓州亞裔聯誼會 • Asian Arts Initiative 亚裔艺术中心 • Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance-Philadelphia Chapter 亚太劳工联盟-费城分部 • CAST-Philadelphia 旅美科协费城分會 • Chinese Christian Church and Center 中華基督教會暨服務中心 • Chinese Northeast association of USA 美国东北同乡会 • Chinese Restaurant Association of Greater Philadelphia 大費城华人餐馆协会 • Concerned Citizens of Chinatown Association 华裔会 • Cross-Strait Peaceful Development Forum 两岸和平发展论坛 • Greater Philadelphia Fujian Association 大費城福建同乡會 • Greater Philadelphia INdonesian Chinese American Association 大費城印尼華僑联誼 • Greater Philadelphia Lianjiang Association 大費城連江同鄉会 • Greater Philadelphia Shaanxi Association 大費城陝西同乡會 • Greater Philadelphia United Chinese America Chamber of Commerce 大費城华人工商联合总会 • Guangxi Association of Pennsylvania 賓州广西同鄉会 • Hok Shan Association 鹤山公所 • International

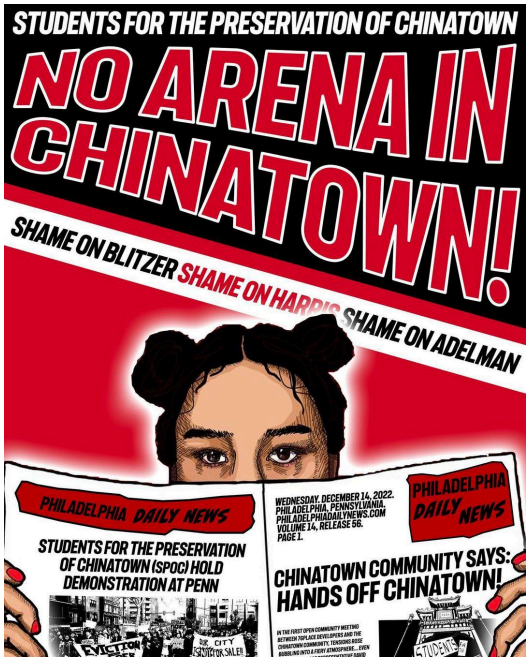
亚裔联合会对帕克市长宣布支持76人篮球场的提议感到失望，但并不意外。这意味着她站在了市中心最后一个有色人种社区的对立面。唐人街再一次被践踏了。

两年来，成千上万的费城人民明确表示唐人街不需要篮球场。69%的选民反对它的建立。这项掠夺性的开发项目将迫使移民搬离他们的家园，小型商户也会失去顾客来源。篮球场还会堵塞前往急诊室的通道，使患者承受病痛甚至死亡的威胁。篮球场将会因为提供低薪、季节性工作，削弱工会的力量，打散南费城体育中心UNITE HERE工会成员的凝聚力。

费城不能将宝贵的资源浪费在亿万富翁的体育场上，而我们的学校连操场、空调和图书馆都没有。费城应得到比这更好的待遇！

支持篮球场的做法极其武断不负责任，尤其是在开发商夸大数字、采取可耻的强硬手段的情况下。这只是我们社区长期斗争的下一阶段。这并非已成定局。我们将继续反抗到底！

aau
asian americans united



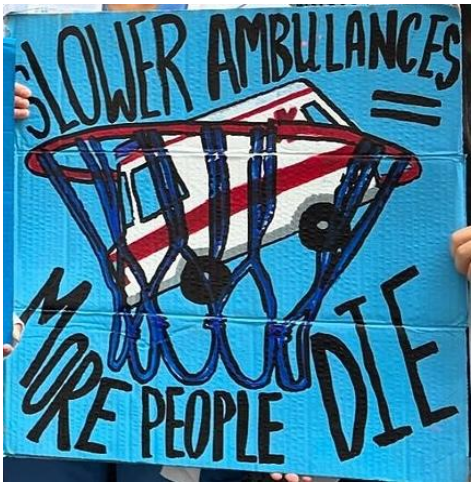
NO ARENA
SAVE CHINATOWN

DOCTORS + NURSE
SAY
NO ARENA

MAYOR
PARKER
DON'T DO THIS

SAVE
CHINATOWN

CHINATOWN
RAISED
ME


SLOWER AMBULANCES =
MORE PEOPLE DIE

SAVE OUR
PATIENTS
DOCTORS + NURSES SAY:
NO ARENA

Support Small Businesses
NOT The Arena

Coast to Coast
ARENAS HURT
Communities
of COLOR

NO ARENA
SAVE CHINATOWN

CHINATOWN
IS NOT
FOR SALE

保护费城华埠
NO ARENA
反对篮球馆

NO ARENA IN
CHINATOWN!
PEOPLE POWER
The Fight for our Community!

STOP DISPLACEMENT IN CHINATOWN
NO
ARENA
ZONE

LOVE CHINATOWN
SAVE CHINATOWN
喜爱华埠·拯救华埠

no arena in the
heart of our city

NO ARENA
HEART IN THE OF OUR CITY!

LOCALS SAY
NO ARENA
IN THE HEART
OF OUR CITY

COUNCILMAN
SQUILLA
DO
THE
RIGHT
THING

PHILLY SAYS
NO ARENA
IN THE HEART
OF OUR CITY

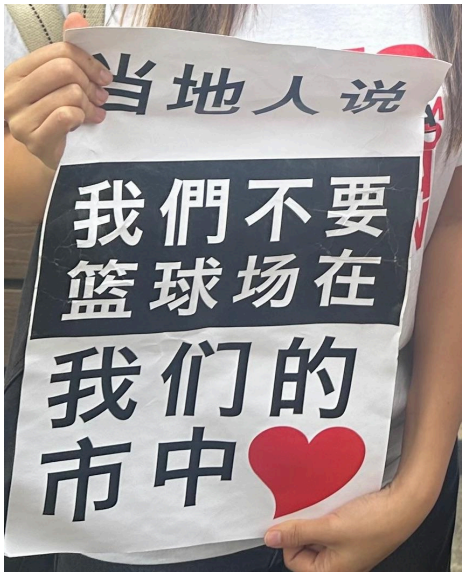
我们住房不拆
唐人街绝不卖

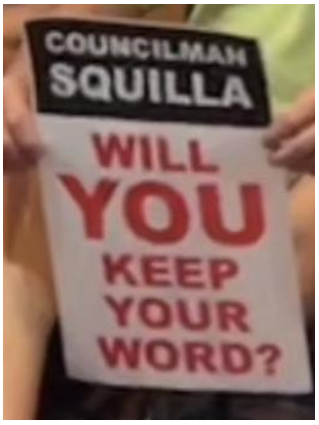
save chinatown

NO ARENA
STOP DISPLACEMENT
PROTECT CHINATOWN

NOT FOR
SALE

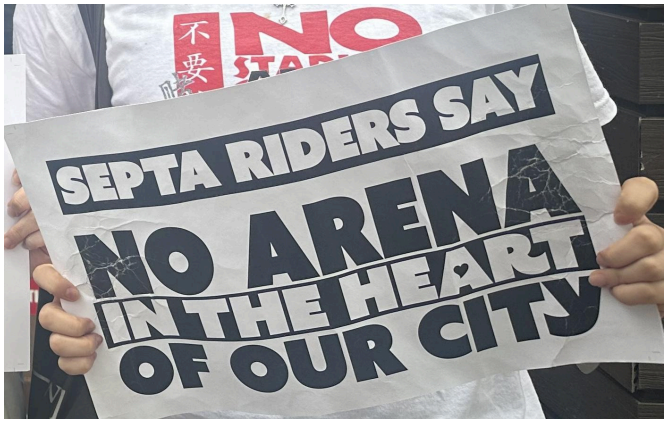
PEOPLE
OVER
PROFIT

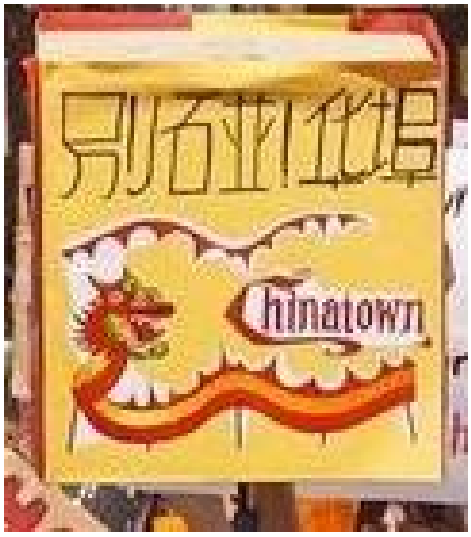

当地人说
我們不要
篮球场在
我们的
市中


COUNCILMAN
SQUILLA
WILL
YOU
KEEP
YOUR
WORD?

HANDS
OFF
CHINA TOWN

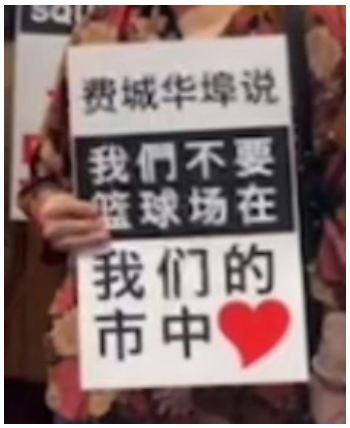
NO ARENA
OF OUR CITY


不要
SEPTA RIDERS SAY
NO ARENA
IN THE HEART
OF OUR CITY


Chinatown

WE ARE AGAINST THE MOVE
TO THE MAXEY
0
ARENAS IN CHINATOWN

WE WONT BE DISPLACED
我们不會被逼遷離唐人街


费城华埠说
我们不要
篮球场在
我们的
市中

NO ARENA
LOVE EMBIID
AGAINST
Temple in Solidarity
WITH CHINATOWN

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA
Do You Represent
YOUR
CONSTITUENTS
or
3 BILLIONAIRES?

WORKERS SAY
NO ARENA
IN THE HEART
OF OUR CITY

TENANTS SA
NO ARENA
IN THE HEAR
OF OUR CITY

15,000
PETITION SIGNATURES SAY
NO ARENA
#NoArena
#SaveChinatown

SIXERS FANS SAY
NO ARENA
IN THE HEART
OF OUR CITY

WHOM DO YOU TRUST,
MR. SQUILLA???
3 Billionaires
OR
2,100 Architects

这里是群城华埠
我们在这里
吃饭

RESIDENTS SAY
NO ARENA
IN THE HEART
OF OUR CITY

NO ARENA
SAVE CHINATOWN
차이나타운
KOREANS
Chinatown

MARKET
EAST
COMMUNITIES OF COLOR ARE NØT FOR SALE

STUDENTS FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF
Chinatown
SAVE CHINATOWN