Chinatown as Heterotopia:

Culture and the Crisis of Commodification in Toronto's Chinatown(s)

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis studies the historical and present roles that culture plays in the formation of cities by analyzing the evolution of North American Chinatowns as heterotopias within the city throughout the cultural and social milieu of the 20th century. It proposes that Chinatowns began as a heterotopia defined by its difference in rules, customs, language and population from the rest of the city, but due to the changing role of culture in cities under post-industrialism, it is now a heterotopia defined by a theme-park like manufactured façade of cultural products, that threatens to displace communities that depend on it for survival. Concurrently, bringing together both existing sociological and ethnocultural studies of Chinatowns as ethnic enclaves as well as critical analyses of the treatment of Chinatown in film and other artifacts, it follows two contrasting ideas: *the exterior perception of Chinatown, and the interior perception of Chinatown as a community*. The changing relationship between these two ideas throughout time is used to explain the present-day condition of Chinatowns "losing their soul" en masse to gentrification. The thesis will draw on stories from various North American Chinatowns to establish an evolutionary theory before applying the theory to a focused case study of Toronto's Chinatown(s). It uses archival research to uncover visual and demographic information from various stages of Chinatown's growth, and is supported with mapping, drawing and photography. The thesis aims to contribute to a greater, historically-rooted understanding of the underlying forces of gentrification in Chinatown, as well as demonstrate the inherent value of Chinatown as a home, community and cultural space.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Val Rynnimeri, my supervisor, for your unwavering guidance and patience throughout the many pivots that this thesis took. Your early questions and comments helped take my formless and disparate thoughts and shape them into something coherent and important. Thank you for encouraging me to take risks, and reassuring me in my ability to write. It's been a pleasure chatting with you about movies and culture and old Chinese restaurants.

Thank you, Adrian Blackwell, my committee member, for your articulate and instructive comments that have been so crucial in shaping the direction of this work. Your wealth of knowledge in theory structure has been very helpful in lending nuance and rigor to my thoughts.

Thank you, Fiona Lim Tung and Mark Sterling, for your important and insightful questions probing the future implications of this thesis research regarding anti-displacement in Chinatown, which helped ground the discussion in real practice.

To my friends, your companionship and support throughout the late nights and video calls over the past 6 years have given me so much strength.

All of the Chinatowns of Tkaronto (Toronto) are situated on land that is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee and Wendak peoples.

Additionally, I acknowledge that the University of Waterloo and the Architecture School in Cambridge, the educational institution for which this thesis was written, is situated on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

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01 Introduction

Whether by force or by design, many North American ethnic enclaves have existed outside of the realm of what theorists might coin “the official city”. In the words of Michel Foucault, they are a type of heterotopia, an ‘other’ space, where if you were to walk inside, you might feel as if you had walked into a different world. As cities have evolved, so too have ethnic enclaves redefined themselves. While in the early days of immigration, ethnic enclaves were othered by the material manifestations of socio-economic difference and racist policy, among other things, today these same ethnic enclaves are most affected by the ups and downs of tourism and a cultural economy, having leveraged their ‘otherness’ for touristic attention. Chinatowns are a particularly interesting case: today there may not be another type of enclave more explicitly visible and distinct than the fabric of Chinatown, with its abundance of exoticized pagoda roofs and dragon motif detailing. This thesis explores the ways that Chinatowns have evolved within the space of the North American city amidst the social, political and cultural milieu of post industrialism (see figure 1.1). While they began as impoverished but vibrant communities, they are now facing a crisis of commodification - a place that is increasingly co-opted by a wealthy class trying to profit off it by legitimizing and placing it in the ‘official city’ but making it increasingly inauthentic and uninhabitable in the process.

Recognizing that different Chinatowns are uniquely subject to their own city’s individual policies and events, this thesis will be focusing on the evolution of Toronto’s Chinatown West and demonstrating how, despite the noted informal and authentic fabric of the neighborhood, it is still trending towards a state of ‘theme park heterotopia’, a space whose cultural products are manufactured for touristic consumption. This thesis will weave together a master narrative of both social and urban evolution in Toronto’s Chinatown(s), drawing on a myriad of historical and contemporary events to explain Toronto Chinatown’s current and possible future situations. Toronto’s Chinatown(s) share many similarities to others in North America: it first formed in disinvested inner-city locations, which led to its eventual displacement from its original location. It has a rich history of traditional associations (clans, tongs) whose changing responsibilities are tied

fig.1.1 San Francisco Chinatown (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library)

directly to Chinatown's negotiation of space in the city. Also similar to other Chinatowns, outside forces of speculative development and city planning are fast encroaching upon it, threatening to make immense changes to its building fabric and social character. The thesis uses the exploration of Chinatown to critically question the ways both constructed and organic culture is used in the making of our ethnocultural landscapes and, amidst a rapidly gentrifying city, consider who is benefitted and excluded in the process. The following introductory chapter introduces the various theories and topics that the thesis engages with in the form of a literature review to contextualize the more specific work of the later chapters.

Family Beginnings

Between 1997 and 2002, my parents lived in a series of rented rooms in and around Toronto's Chinatown West, having just immigrated to Canada from the Fujian province in China. They were part of a new wave of Fujianese immigrants to Chinatown in the late 90s, who today, are known for establishing an expansive network of grocery stores and food wholesalers particularly in Toronto and the GTA, and whose presence and language are highly visible in Chinatown West. Here, my parents found their first jobs, my mother as a worker in the garment factories on the south end of Spadina Ave. and my father as a dishwasher in a restaurant. They also made their first friends here; friends who later became roommates, business partners and extended family, permanent fixtures in our lives even more than twenty years later. In this way, the social structures and community found in Chinatown West helped my parents establish themselves in this new country, as it has for many before them, and is thus a crucial part of my family's immigration story in Canada. While I myself am a proud, diasporic child of the suburbs, I was drawn to investigating these remarkable and unique downtown Chinatown conditions, both past and present, in hopes of more deeply understanding my own family beginnings in Canada. How is Toronto's Chinatown West different from other Chinatowns? Moreover, how did it all begin and what accounts for their vast differences in structures and perceptions today? It is within this context that I begin my work.

Chinatowns as Ethnic Enclaves

Ethnic enclaves are formed when clusters of immigrants from the same or similar ethnic group settle in close spatial proximity to each other, otherwise known as chain migration.[1] Traditionally, this

1. Kathryn Terzano, 'Commodification of Transitioning Ethnic Enclaves', *Behavioral Sciences* 4, no. 4 (December 2014): 341–51, https://doi.org/10.3390/bs4040341.

process has helped to give new immigrants easier access to housing, language services, employment and social community as they are often unfamiliar with the host country's customs and language. Inside enclaves, there are culturally familiar grocers and food establishments, schools and community venues, all operating using the immigrants' familiar language and customs thus providing a valuable "landing pad" for new immigrants to establish themselves in a new country.

Classic assimilation theory (the Chicago School) has traditionally seen ethnic enclaves as temporary phenomena as it was believed immigrants would follow a straight-line path to assimilation into the wider society after they had moved up the socio-economic ladder[2] (see figure 1.2). In other words, after social assimilation was reached, spatial assimilation would follow inevitably. Although it may be true that some ethnic enclaves dissolve this way, a high-level observation of today's cities will show the existence of many ethnic enclaves that have been around since the late 19th century, showing a clear resistance to such spatial assimilation. Key to the evolution of Chinatown is the distinction between the residential portion of ethnic enclaves and their associated commercial portion, as they are often conflated to behave the same way. When enclaves naturally dissolve and move, commercial portions often have much more permanence, being much slower to move than the residential portion. This is due both to the habits of business owners themselves, but also the privileging of commercial areas in city planning policy.

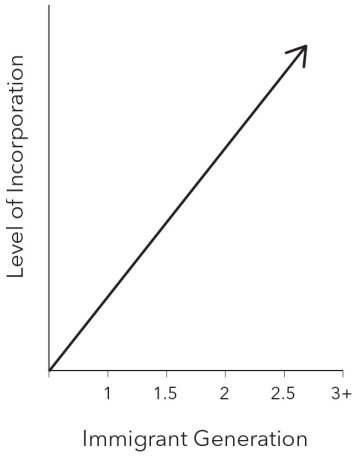


fig.1.2 Visualization of the Chicago School "straight line" assimilation model

Another important distinction is between the term 'enclave' vs 'ghetto'. A ghetto is "a neighborhood of racial or ethnic concentration that is largely the result of social exclusion practised by the mainstream society" [3], while enclaves are "the result of the voluntary locational choices of individuals within the prevailing market structures and public policies". It should be noted that there is much discourse around the true level of 'voluntary choice' exercised by immigrants and minorities within markets and policies with institutional biases. Even in contemporary society, there may be systematic segregation happening in subtle ways that is working to 'ghettoize' emerging enclaves. However, for the purposes of this thesis, 'ethnic enclave' will be used as an umbrella term to describe any clustering of an ethnic group, while 'ghetto' will be used to describe an area of forced spatial segregation of an ethnic group.

The term 'Chinatown' has been used frequently to describe any Chinese

2. Ibid.,
3. Mohammad Qadeer, Sandeep K. Agrawal, and Alexander Lovell, 'Evolution of Ethnic Enclaves in the Toronto Metropolitan Area, 2001–2006', *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l'integration et de La Migration Internationale* 11, no. 3 (1 August 2010): 315–39, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-010-0142-8.

ethnic enclave, including the newer Chinese 'ethnoburbs' located in the suburbs. As these enclaves are quite different from each other in both social demographics and dynamics, it is important to note that this thesis will use the term *Chinatown* only to refer to historic, pre-war formed Chinatowns located in the downtown and their direct replacements. These Chinatowns have become ubiquitous across almost every major city: several streets of densely packed Chinese / Asian-owned businesses in the downtown. They have roots that date back to the late 19th century when farmers from the South of China came to North America in search of gold. These original Chinatowns where ghettoized – Chinese settlers were forced to settle in the poorest, most impoverished parts of the city. Consistent with other ethnic enclaves, Chinatowns became a 'first stop' for new Chinese immigrants, who were often lower-class and had very little knowledge of English. They were able to achieve strength through unity – consolidating employment networks and creating community. Today the neighborhoods are known for its Chinese signage and 'Chinese' architectural ornamentation to varying degrees as well as a myriad of restaurants attracting visitors from far away to taste all kinds of pan-Asian cuisines.

Enclaves and Gentrification in Toronto

Toronto and the GTA have uniquely been a city known for its myriad of enclaves new and old, coexisting within the fabric of the city – so much so that it has become a hotspot for academic studies on immigration, migration and ethnic clustering, such as Mohammad Qadeer's study "Evolution of Ethnic Enclaves in the Toronto Metropolitan Area". Within his study, Qadeer details the ways enclaves evolve over time, with different patterns of evolution observed. Some, like Little Portugal, have more or less stayed where they've been since they formed. However a vast majority of Toronto's enclaves have been observed to move towards the edges of cities as time progressed, such that today, the nucleus of most ethnic enclaves are concentrated in the suburbs (Mississauga, Brampton, Markham, Vaughan), where homeownership is much more accessible (see figure 1.3). For example, The Italian enclave had a historic centre in Little Italy in Toronto and have since moved its locus out to Woodbridge (a neighborhood in Vaughan) with smaller concentrations in Northeast Brampton, and surrounding areas. Qadeer's study also distinguishes between several waves of immigrants in the CMA (Toronto Census Metropolitan Area). The first older wave is made up of the Jews, Portuguese and

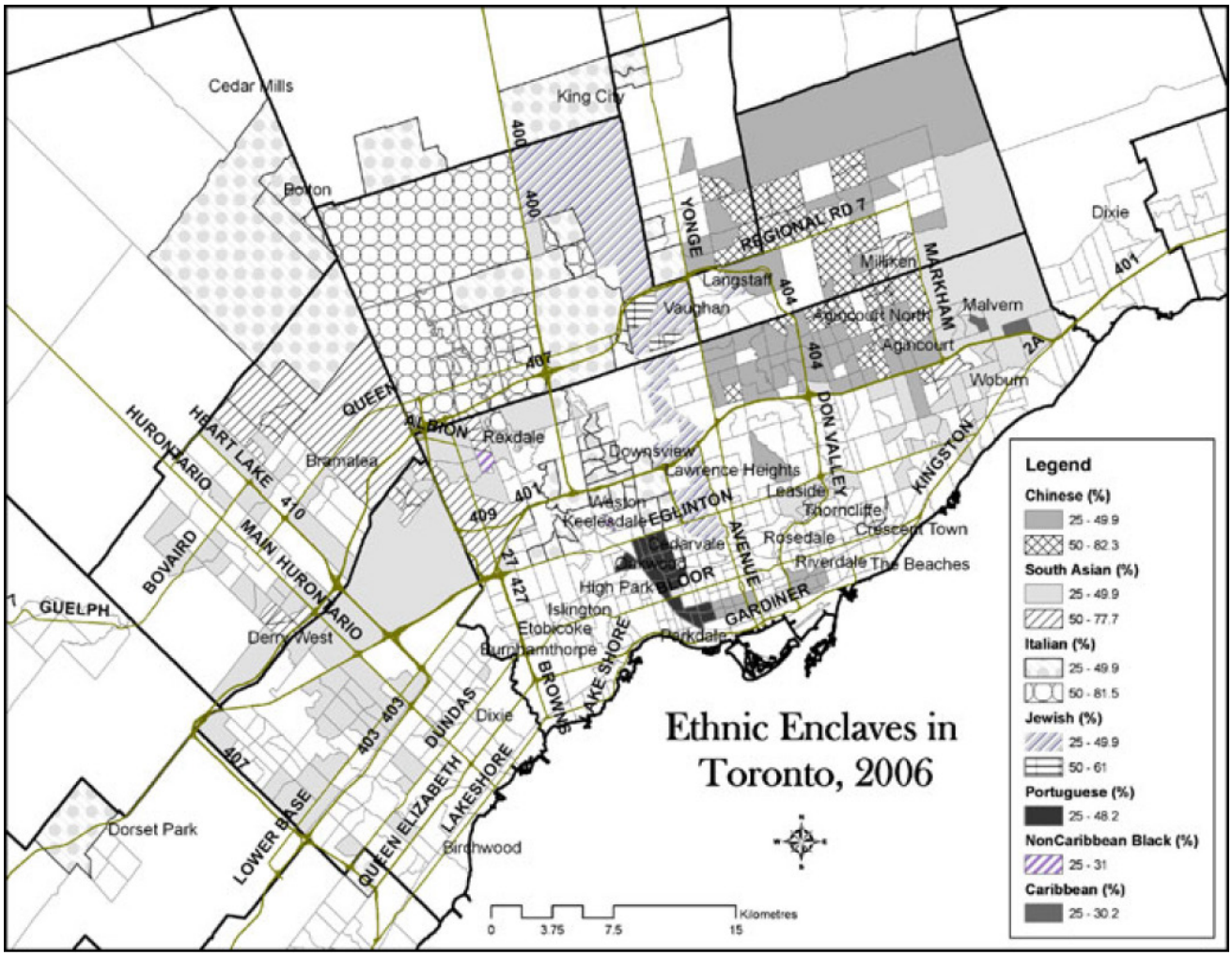


fig.1.3 Map from 'Evolution of Ethnic Enclaves in the Toronto Metropolitan Area, 2001-2006' by Qadeer et al. With the exception of the Portuguese enclave, all other enclaves are most concentrated in Toronto's surrounding suburbs.

Italians, whose enclaves have not grown in size and have tended towards consolidation and contraction. The second, newer wave is made up of groups from East and South Asia, whose enclaves have grown considerably in the period the study was done (2001-2006) due to increased immigration. The Chinese enclave is observed to have grown out of its two historic inner city neighborhoods (Chinatown East and Chinatown West) to expand northward through to Markham and Richmond Hill.

Importantly, there has also been a noted a pattern of both ethnic and class gentrification occurring in Toronto's ethnic enclaves such as in Little Italy[4], Little Portugal[5] Little Jamaica[6]. In Little Portugal, ethnic gentrification (the displacement of one ethnic group by another) is taking place through the takeover of retail by non Portuguese, who's businesses are predominantly arts related, as opposed to the groceries and restaurants of original Portuguese businesses. In Little Jamaica, gentrification is observed to be transit-oriented, propelled by the construction of the Eglington LRT, which is ushering in development of market-rate condos and displacing both local businesses and residents.[7] In Little Italy, ethnicity is packaged and commodified in marketing material and commercial offerings that have the effect of valorizing real estate in the area, and displacing the very community that planted the culture originally.[8] This pattern reveals that the gentrification in Chinatown is by no means an isolated case, and that in Toronto, the presence of ethnic culture, in addition to disinvested building fabric, makes ethnic enclaves especially vulnerable to gentrification.

The Power of Culture in Post-industrial Cities

"It is clear that media images and consumer tastes grease the wheels of global urbanism, anchoring the power of both capital and the state in the spaces of our individual desires, persuading us that consuming the authentic city has everything to do with aesthetics and nothing to do with power" [9]– Sharon Zukin, Changing Landscapes of Power

Central to the discussion of contemporary Chinatowns and its place in the city is the contemporary role of culture in city-making. In the past couple decades, scholars have increasingly argued that within our current post-industrial society, culture is no longer just a byproduct but a meaningful and active agent in determining the flow of capital and city making.

4. Jason Hackworth and Josephine Rekers, 'Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification: The Case of Four Neighborhoods in Toronto', *Urban Affairs Review* 41, no. 2 (November 2005): 211–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087405280859.
5. Koki Takahashi, 'Toronto's Little Portugal: Gentrification and Social Relations among Local Entrepreneurs', *Urban Geography* 38, no. 4 (21 April 2017): 578–605, https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2016.1176695.
6. Jasmine Mohamed, 'The Impact of Transit Development on Racialized Neighborhoods in Toronto: A Case Study of Little Jamaica' (Toronto, York University, 2021).
7. Ibid.
8. Hackworth and Rekers, 'Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification'.
9. Sharon Zukin, 'Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 2 (2009): 543–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00867.x.

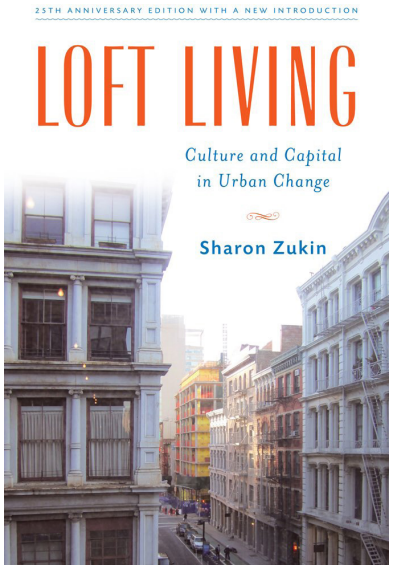


fig.1.4 Loft Living by Sharon Zukin (Rutgers University Press)

The post-industrial society, as introduced by Daniel Bell, is a widely accepted concept that indicates a society that has shifted from one that bases its economy on manufacturing material goods, to one that is run by service-based industries. The industrial society in this case is often connected with the Fordist economy, named after Henry Ford, who invented the assembly line, a key component of mass production. In North America, the reason Fordism fell apart is attributed to the diversifying of markets, resulting in less predictable demand which is detrimental to the assembly line mass manufacturing system as it is very rigid and inflexible[10]. What has replaced it is the service sector that values the exchange of information, and accumulates wealth through the "proliferation and the amelioration of symbolic and relational systems"[11]. This means that cities are now defined by intellectual products and creative industries (Food and Beverage, TV/ Movies, Music, design, hospitality), while manufacturing has mostly moved to the suburbs.

Sociologist Sharon Zukin's work in "The Cultures of Cities" discusses the adoption of the "Symbolic Economy" by post-Fordist American cities which rely on culture industries like tourism, media, and entertainment, rather than manufacturing, to draw capital. This puts unprecedented power on culture and cultural symbols to define economic flow and consumption, and through it, shape urban space and discussion around revitalization. This is seen in the 'bohemian' art districts of Zukin's *Loft Living*[12] that sold the aesthetic of the artists' lifestyle as a hot commodity, or in the introduction of the Museum of Modern Art to the small factory town of North Adams, Massachusetts that created not just hundreds of jobs within the MOCA complex, but spawned a whole tourism industry.[13] Perhaps the foremost example is Disney World, where Zukin demonstrates the ways that curated visual coherence (Disney's uniforms, the environment of facades) and the cleaning up of undesirable people and behaviour create an aesthetic culture that sells Disney's brand[14]. It is essential then to consider how the formerly-organic ethnic cultures of ethnic enclaves are used in the post-industrial symbolic economy as a cultural marketing strategy and what affects this commodification will have on the real communities that still live there? Within our post-Fordist contemporary cities, Chinatown's inherent cultural symbols and products make Chinatowns an easy target for commodification which, according to Hackworth and Reckers, can speed up the process of gentrification. They call this strategy ethnic packaging - when commercial areas of ethnic enclaves

10. Volker M. Rundshagen, 'Post Industrial Society', in *Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility*, ed. Samuel O. Idowu et al. (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 1859–67, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-28036-8_175.
11. George Liagouras, 'The Political Economy of Post-Industrial Capitalism', *Thesis Eleven* 81, no. 1 (2005): 20–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513605051612.
12. Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, Special edition (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014).
13. Sharon Zukin, 'A Museum in the Berkshires', in *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 79–108.
14. Sharon Zukin, 'Learning from Disney World', in *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 49–78.

strategically and purposefully curate a consistent ethnic experience through building façade upgrades, public art installations, marketing etc. The increased tourist investment as a result of these actions valorize real estate prices in the area. This is observed to be happening in enclaves like Little Italy, Little India, and Chinatown, among many others.

Linguists Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan's paper "Commodified language in Chinatown" discusses how the use of language and signage can be a powerful indicator of spatial commodification when examined against sociopolitical histories and uses Chinese language signs in Washington DC's Chinatown (a famously gentrified area) as a main case study[15]. Small changes like the location and hierarchy of Chinese characters to English names on signs can indicate when and how recently the particular establishment was opened in the neighborhood[16], which can then be traced to waves of gentrification that have been previously noted.

fig.1.5 The facade from "Its a small world" attraction in Disneyland designed by Marie Blair. (Julie de la Fe)

Displacement

This question of survival of Chinatowns is further complicated when considering the long and widespread history of planned displacement that has occurred over the course of the 20th century in North America. Vitiello and Blickenderfer (2018) note that "seemingly all [Chinatowns in North America] have faced public and private plans for destruction as well as related development"[17], whether or not they came to fruition. Over its history, Chinatowns have been fully or partially displaced by government and civic projects, private condo and mall developments, highways, hospitals and sports complexes amongst others. The fact that most cities (at least on the surface) still have a very visible Chinatown within its downtown speaks to the power of cultural commodification as a form of resiliency. Recall that Chinatowns are early adopters of cultural commodification, having strategically added "Chinese" flourishes to buildings as early as the 1910s – a technique that came to be known as *strategic self-orientalization*[18]. The various iterations of cultural commodification and its evolving effects on the Chinatown community are central to the overall narrative of the evolution of Chinatowns.

Filmic Chinatown

Chinatowns have a long history being used as a powerful and elusive symbol in the mythic imagination such as in the 1974 film "Chinatown" directed by Roman Polanski. Trends in movies and film

15. Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan, 'Commodified Language in Chinatown: A Contextualized Approach to Linguistic Landscape [1]', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 3 (June 2009): 332–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2009.00409.x.
16. Ibid.
17. Domenic Vitiello and Zoe Blickenderfer, 'The Planned Destruction of Chinatowns in the United States and Canada since c.1900', *Planning Perspectives* 35, no. 1 (2 January 2020): 143–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2018.1515653.
18. Greg Umbach and Dan Wishnoff, 'Strategic Self-Orientalism: Urban Planning Policies and the Shaping of New York City's Chinatown, 1950-2005', accessed 6 October 2022, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1538513207313915.

have frequently been seen as 'barometers' of wider patterns in society, such as the rise of horror films during the 1980s as a reaction to the fear of an impending nuclear war.[19] "The City in American Cinema" argues that film can also expose trends in city and urban culture. For example, it highlights the way the rise of film noir in the 1940's and 1950's as well as the "neo noir" and crime thriller in the 1970s is a direct response to patterns of "white flight" and suburbanization in American cities that had been occurring. These films project the public's anxiety about the breakdown of the city and social order onto racialized groups and spaces, associating them with criminality[20] (see figure 1.6). This thesis utilizes an analysis of the filmic treatment of Chinatowns to study the evolving perception of Chinatown by the wider society. Anthropologist Selma Siew Bidlingmaier's paper "The Spectacle of the Other" deconstructs two films from the 1980's: Big Trouble in Little China by John Carpenter and Year of the Dragon by Michael Cimino and finds that despite having been made well after the seeming obsolescence of "yellow peril" and similar racist sentiment and policies of the early 20th century, they still depict Chinatown as a sort of "wild west" – mysterious, dangerous and impenetrable[21]. Indeed, a wide survey of major Chinatown related films in the 20th century exposes a general association of Chinatown with crime and violence (see figure #), betraying the public's prejudices about Chinese people and Chinese spaces. However, a closer analysis shows a slight shift in the treatment of Chinatown in films released post 1990, that framed Chinatown's mystery and intrigue as an apparatus for self-actualization and discovery, rather than simply a dangerous place to avoid. In this way, Chinatown becomes more accepted by the official city through its potential for consumption by its non-Chinese visitors.

On 'Heterotopias'

Michel Foucault originated the concept of 'heterotopia' by describing it as a contrast to 'utopia'. Whereas utopias are sites reflecting a perfect version of society but with no real place, 'heterotopias' are localisable real places that are simultaneously "outside of all places". While both reflect an altered, bounded version of reality, utopias are simultaneously everywhere and unreal, while heterotopias are real and locatable. Foucault presents several examples of heterotopias including cemeteries, brothels, colonies, museums, prisons and ships – the latter of which, according to Foucault, is the foremost example of a heterotopia. These examples are all bounded spaces which establish a world of its own, following different or unfamiliar social systems,

19. '8.3 Movies and Culture', 22 March 2016, https://open.lib.umn.edu/mediaandculture/chapter/8-3-movies-and-culture/.

20. Johan Andersson and Lawrence Webb, eds., *The City in American Cinema: Film and Postindustrial Culture* (London New York, NY Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 19-20

21. Selma Siew Li Bidlingmaier, 'The Spectacle of the Other: Representations of Chinatown in Michael Cimino's Year of the Dragon (1985) and John Carpenter's Big Trouble in Little China (1986)', *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* 8, no. 0 (2007), https://doi.org/10.5283/copas.95.

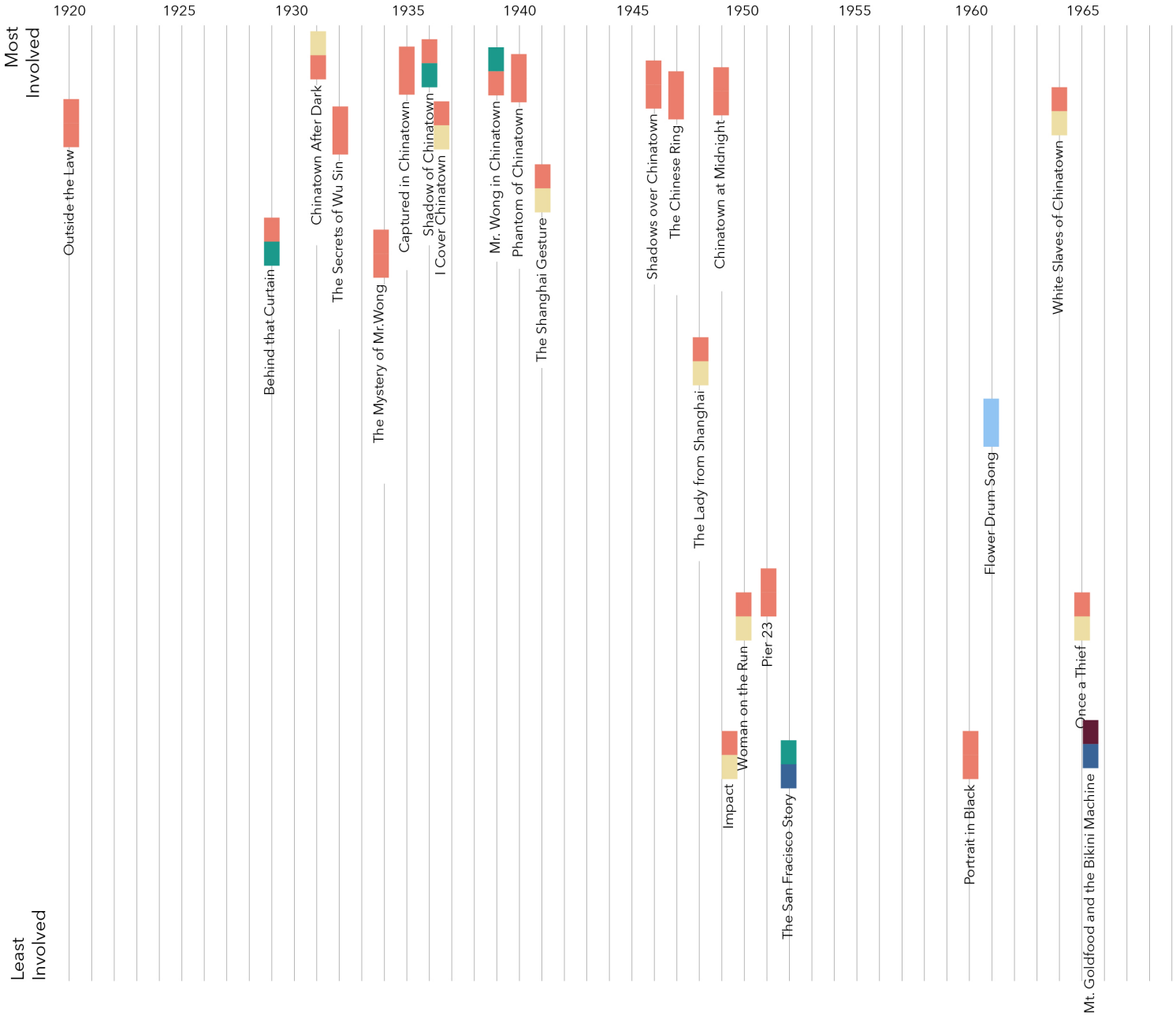
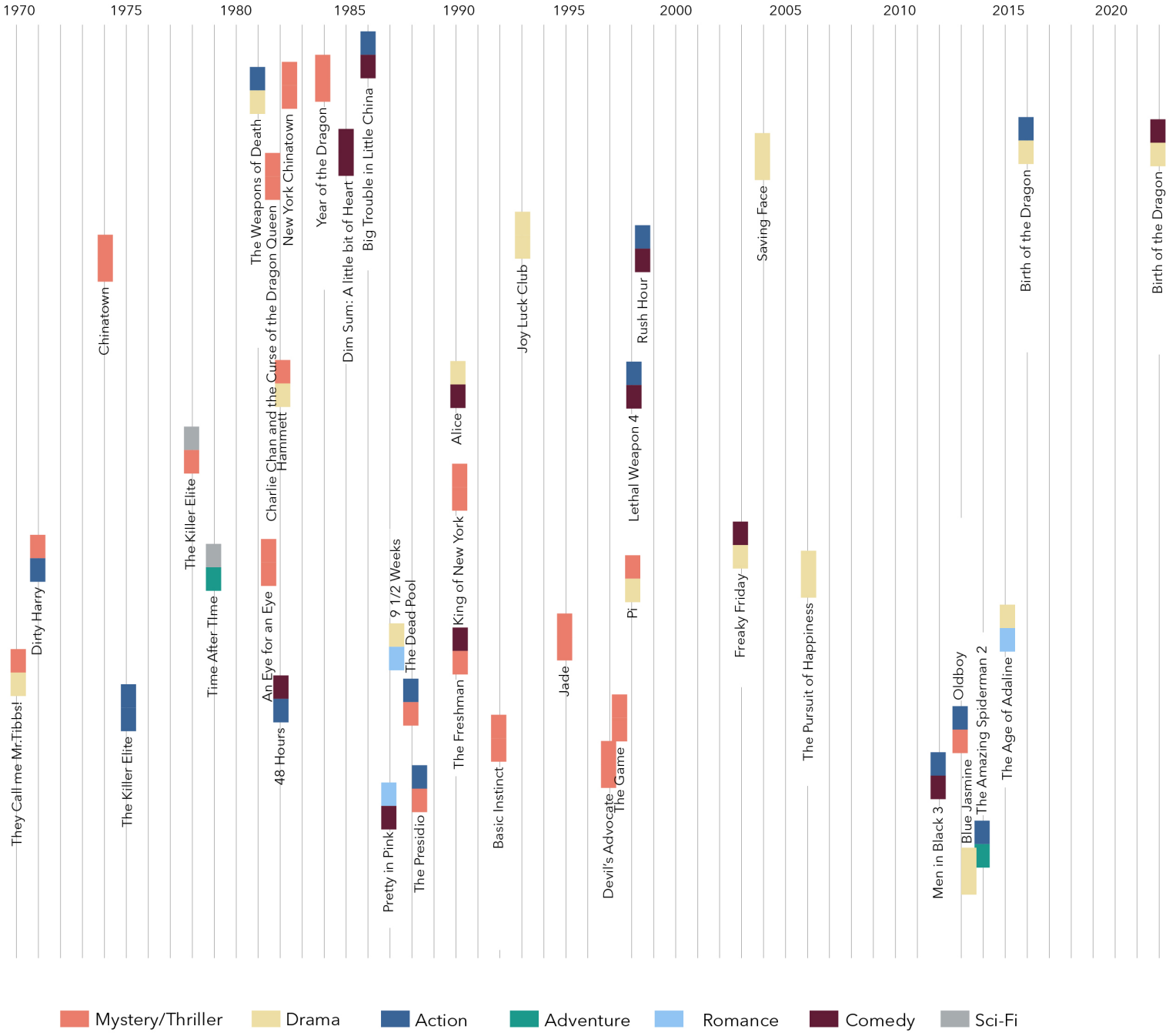


fig.1.6 Survey of genres of all movies released by a major American studio relating or set in Chinatown , 1920-2020.


1970
1975
1980
1985
1990
1995
2000
2005
2010
2015
2020
They Call me MrTibbs!
Dirty Harry
The Killer Elite
Chinatown
Time After Time
The Killer Elite
An Eye for an Eye
48 Hours
Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen
Hammett
The Weapons of Death
New York Chinatown
Year of the Dragon
Dim Sum: A little bit of Heart
Big Trouble in Little China
Pretty in Pink
9 1/2 Weeks
The Dead Pool
The Presidio
The Freshman
King of New York
Alice
Basic Instinct
Joy Luck Club
Jade
Devil's Advocate
The Game
Pi
Lethal Weapon 4
Rush Hour
Freaky Friday
Saving Face
The Pursuit of Happiness
Men in Black 3
Blue Jasmine
Oldboy
The Amazing Spiderman 2
The Age of Adaline
Birth of the Dragon
Birth of the Dragon
Mystery/Thriller
Drama
Action
Adventure
Romance
Comedy
Sci-Fi

rules and/or structures while still being locatable and connected to the broader space of reality.

Given the brief nature of Foucault's original talks there have understandably been a wide variety of interpretations to the concept in architecture and urban design. This thesis will engage with two interpretations found in "Heterotopia and the City: Public space in a post-civil society" edited by Michel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter.

The first is named *Heterotopias of Difference* which defines heterotopias as marked by the presence of people, customs or images who do not fit into the dominant "social norm". This is an extension of Foucault's original "Heterotopias of Deviance" which defined "deviance" through traditional, fixed Fordist ideas of social norm, thus the examples of mental institutions, jails or cemeteries. Cenzatti's expanded definition acknowledges that in a post-Fordist society, "the social norms from which deviance emerges have become more flexible" and have thus expanded to include more transient indicators of self-definition like multiculturalism, social identities and lifestyles.[22]

The second interpretation is the *Heterotopia of the Theme Park Street* by Kathlene Kern which sees heterotopias as "phantasmagorical, enclosed, safe havens" marked by "the realized utopias of the cult of today: shopping"[23]. In contrast to the previous interpretation, the theme park street (or the shopping mall) is heterotopic in its carefully maintained utopianism, "shielding" its inhabitants from the conflicts and dangers of the outside world, such as the poor or the politically volatile.[24]

How might these concepts apply to Chinatowns? Early Chinatowns were perceived by the wider society as unfamiliar and incomprehensible to the hegemonic western society – in everything from signage and architecture to the behaviour and interconnections of its inhabitants. In film, original Chinatowns were perceived by-and-large as spaces of criminality, with an air of incomprehensibility. From another angle, these early differences were produced by frameworks and policies of exclusion enacted on the Chinese community which prompted the creation of Chinatown as an apparatus for mutual aid. Present day Chinatowns exist in a changed economic and socio-political order and are a phantasmagoria of exotic symbols and bright colours, leveraging the notion of the 'exotic other' to draw touristic interest to the area. This effectively transformed the supportive and necessary

22. Marco Cenzatti, "Heterotopias of Difference" in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Post-Civil Society,* ed. Michael Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 75-85.

23. Kathleen Kern, "Heterotopia of the theme park street" in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Post-Civil Society,* ed. Michael Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 105-115

24. Ibid., 106

space of Chinatown into a 'theme park' heterotopia, commodifying and caricaturizing cultural symbols in much the same way Disneyland does. With widespread immigration, globalization and various other factors discussed in the later chapters, the space of Chinatown is no longer perceived or defined by its 'difference. Instead, it retains its quality of 'otherness' through overt, sanitized displays of culture, evident in the ornamentation, signage and symbols still present there today. In the following chapters, the thesis will further use the breakdown of these ideas of heterotopia to describe and explain the various conditions and stages of Chinatown's evolution.

Interior Chinatown

This thesis will also draw on a collection of previous work that has critically analyzed the interior and social conditions of certain major Chinatowns throughout North America, illustrating the material affects the social organization and architectures of Chinatown had on its community. "The New Chinatown" by Peter Kwong is a study of the socio-political conditions of New York's Chinatown in the 1980's, with specific interest in the informal political structures – organized crime, tongs and illegal employment networks – as well as the nature of labour and economics in Chinatown. Kwong alludes to a burgeoning class divide within NYC's Chinatown that subjected the working class to a "dual form of oppression" due to Chinese working class having to answer to both a racist host society as well as an exploitative and predatory informal elite within Chinatown[25]. This flies in the face of scholarly descriptions of ethnic enclaves that seem to describe them as broadly positive and supportive structures for all immigrants. Kwong's description exposes the oft overlooked intersectionality that underpins many Chinatowns and Chinese communities. Li Ting Guan's architecture thesis "Learning from Chinatown" is a study of the informal architectures of Toronto's Chinatown West. In it, Guan highlights and analyzes several architectures that the Chinese in Chinatown have created (including one particularly deep study on Fujianese clan structures) that have uniquely resulted in the economic and social success of the Chinese community in Toronto (see figure 7)[26]. Richard Thompson's 1989 study on Toronto's Chinatown provides a valuable narrative into the social evolution of Chinatowns since it's inception. It particularly points out the inverse relationship between the power and control of traditional associations relative to the gradual diversification of the neighborhood due to immigration[27]. In a similar vein, Arlene Chan's expansive book: "Toronto Chinese: From Outside

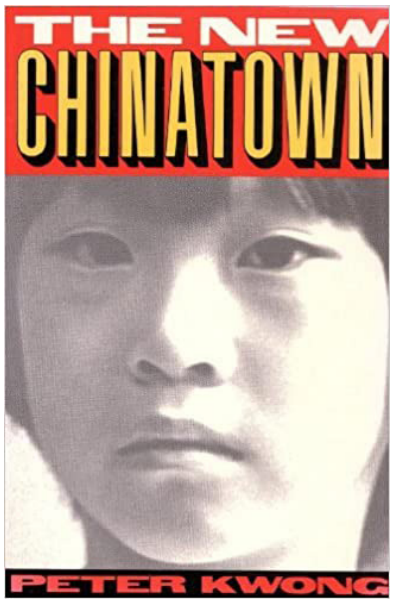


fig.1.7 The "New Chinatown" by Peter Kwong (Hill and Wang)

25. Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987).
26. Li Ting Guan, 'Learning from Chinatown' (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, University of Waterloo, 2013).
27. Richard H. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown: The Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community* (AMS Press, 1989).

to Inside the Circle" tells the story of the Chinese immigrant group in Toronto from its beginnings in 1848 to present day, describing major milestones for the Chinese community, culturally relevant community organizations and day-to-day anthropological observations, ultimately depicting a success story – a gradual claiming of power and acceptance in the city – with Chinatown playing a large role in it.[28] The latter part of the thesis will also draw on speculative practices engaged in the heritage construction work of Linda Zhang, editor of *Reimagining ChinaTOwn: Speculative Stories from Toronto's Chinatown(s) in 2050*[29]. This anthology, and its companion exhibition, game and symposium, explore different perceptions of 'Chinatown-ness' from the unique vantage point of each participant/writer, each projecting their own idea of value for Chinatown's speculative future.

A Brief Outline of the Thesis

After the introduction, the thesis will be split into two parts. The first part will develop and establish a theory of Chinatown evolution that will explain the general pattern through which Chinatowns have evolved in North America. It will distinguish between two eras, Original Chinatown and Present Day Chinatown as well as two perspectives, Chinatowns' exterior perception in the city versus Chinatown's interior perception as a community and examine their relationship to the notion of heterotopia. It will explain how/why this evolution came about by referring to historical macroeconomic trends, specifically Chinatowns' history of displacement and its evolving use of cultural commodification within post-industrial North America. The theory will be supported both by real life examples from various Chinatowns across North America as well as imagined depictions inside the canon of filmic Chinatowns. These films span multiple decades starting from the 1960's to as recently as the 2010's, including the oft-cited "Chinatown" (1974), or "Alice" (1990). Viewed together, these individual stories and examples paint a picture of the relationship between the changing place Chinatown has had in the city and its interior growth as an ethnic enclave.

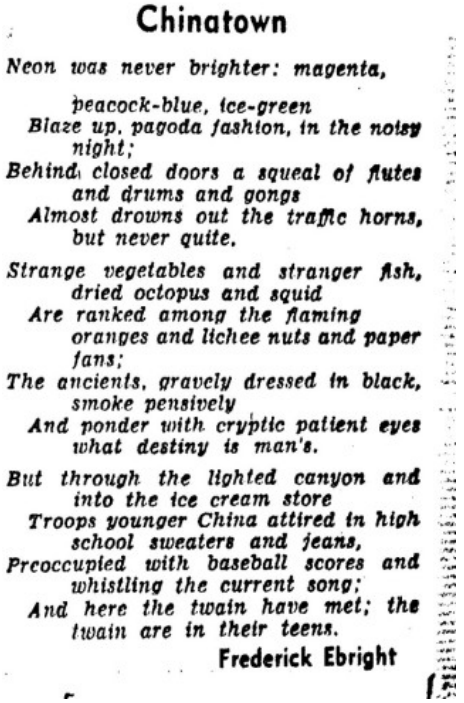
Part 2 applies the theory from part 1 into a case study of Toronto's Chinatown. It will examine the architecture of heterotopia in Toronto's Chinatown West through four eras and determine how Toronto's Chinatown might or might not differ from the established pattern in the theory. This section will make use of extensive archival research into the urban history of Toronto, and be supported by mapping and drawing reconstructions of significant architectures

28. Arlene Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to Inside the Circle* (Toronto ; Tonawanda, N.Y: Natural Heritage, 2011).

29. Linda Zhang, ed., *Reimagining ChinaTOwn: Speculative Stories from Toronto's Chinatown(s) in 2050* (Toronto: Reimagining Chinatown Press, 2021).

of heterotopia within each era. Following this, the next chapter will speculate on Chinatowns' future place in Toronto amidst a myriad of pressures coming in from speculative development, city planners and various Chinatown advocacy groups. It will draw extensively on city policy (Toronto's Official Plan, Cultural District Policy), development proposals as well as community based control mechanisms to inform three distinct visions of the Future of Chinatown West. The final chapters will compare Chinatown to its newer suburban counterpart, the ethnoburb, and use its differences to reiterate and justify the importance of the survival of downtown Chinatown.

As designers who engage with cities, it is increasingly important to understand the issues and forces driving the evolution of cultural and ethnocultural landscapes and how their histories and dynamics of otherness plays a part in their position as real neighborhoods in the city. This thesis hopes to make key contributions to the understanding of Asian cultural landscapes in the GTA while also specifically demonstrating Chinatown's uniquely resilient position in the city and our collective consciousness.



Chinatown

Neon was never brighter: magenta,
peacock-blue, ice-green
Blaze up, pagoda fashion, in the noisy night;
Behind closed doors a squeal of flutes and drums and gongs
Almost drowns out the traffic horns, but never quite.

Strange vegetables and stranger fish, dried octopus and squid
Are ranked among the flaming oranges and lichee nuts and paper fans;
The ancients, gravely dressed in black, smoke pensively
And ponder with cryptic patient eyes what destiny is man's.

But through the lighted canyon and into the ice cream store
Troops younger China attired in high school sweaters and jeans,
Preoccupied with baseball scores and whistling the current song;
And here the twain have met; the twain are in their teens.

Frederick Ebright

fig.1.8 Poem about Chinatown in Washington D.C. published in a letter to the editor in the June 29, 1951 Evening Star (CGTN)

Part 1

02 A Theory of Chinatown Evolution

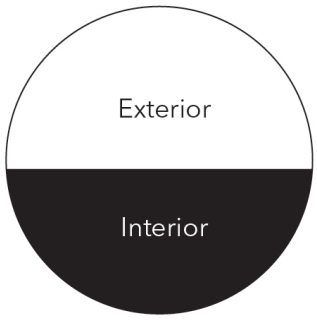


fig.2.1 The theory will analyze the evolving dynamics of Chinatown perceptions from both the interior and exterior. The "Interior" refers to the community that is supported directly by Chinatown, and/or has personal involvement in Chinatowns' interior structures and organizations, while the "exterior" is everyone else; which in the early days of Chinatown's growth especially referred to the white anglo-saxon hegemony that dominated city making, media, institutions of power.

Two qualities set Chinatown apart from other ethnic enclaves. The first is that they are a seemingly hyper resilient enclave. San Francisco's historic Chinatown and Victoria's Chinatown have roots as far back as the late 19th century, shortly after the first Chinese immigration to North America started. The second is that they are also a very pervasive mythic symbol in all forms of imagined media. Chinatowns, perhaps more so than other ethnic enclaves, have been endlessly written about, caricaturized, and fictionalized by outsiders since the late nineteenth century. There is clearly a rich history of Chinatown *exterior perceptions* that runs parallel to Chinatowns *interior perception* as an ethnic enclave. Is there a connection between this potent exterior image of Chinatown and its seeming hyper resiliency on the urban landscape? In this chapter, I present a theory of Chinatown evolution which argues that original Chinatowns and present-day Chinatowns are completely different neighborhoods formed by the evolving relationship between Chinatown's exterior perception in the outside city, and its interior growth as an ethnic enclave (see figure 2.1) , within the post-industrializing economies of the 20th century. While both versions can be viewed as 'heterotopias', original Chinatowns are heterotopias of difference, a place formed by exclusion and operating under drastically different rules and customs compared to the wider society. In contrast, present day Chinatowns have become theme park heterotopias, carefully curated places of consumption for the wider society. These ideas provide insight into why collective perceptions of Chinatowns are often contradictory and dual. Manya Koetse writes in her blog post *The Imagined Space of Chinatown*: "It is supposedly a dark, mysterious space that is a breeding place for crime and gambling. But on the other hand, we know it as a colourful, lively place where shops and restaurants have been flourishing for decennia"[1]. While connected under the name of 'Chinatown', these two forms are constructed by very different worldly forces and support vastly different communities. This chapter will trace the evolution of both interior Chinatowns as ethnic enclaves as well as their exterior perception in the city through an analysis of Chinatown related major studio films. It will start from Chinatowns' beginnings as a heterotopia of difference through the twentieth

1. Manya Koetse, 'The Imagined Space of "Chinatown"', *Manya Koetse* (blog), 8 December 2012, https://www.manyakoetse.com/the-imagined-space-of-chinatown/.

century to its present-day condition as a theme park heterotopia and propose a general pattern by highlighting similarities across various North American Chinatown examples.

fig.2.2 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown before the 1906 earthquake and Fire (San Francisco History Centre, San Francisco Public Library).

fig.2.3 Grant Avenue in 2015. (Andreas Wulff)

Original Chinatowns

'Gold Mountain' Beginnings

The first North American Chinatowns started in the late 19th century following the great gold rushes of the 19th century, namely the California Gold Rush (1848-1855) and the Fraser Valley and Cariboo Gold Rushes in British Columbia (1858-1867). The gold rushes have been cited as the instigator of the first large-scale trans-pacific migration[2]. The vast majority of these Chinese gold seekers (and later founders of North American Chinatowns) were from three regions in the Southern Guandong province of China called Siyi ('four counties'), San Yi ('three counties') and Zhong Shan[3] (see figure 2.4). This region of Guangdong suffered from cycles of drought and flood which led to crippling food shortages. Even without these disasters, Guandong's natural food yield could only feed about one-third of its booming population[4]. These food shortages led to a series of peasant uprisings, such as the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64, which added to the economic and political unrest in the region. This is presumably what motivated a marked increase in emigration from the south of China in this period.[5] Early 'Chinatowns' were formed out of the various operations that arose to supplement and support the Gold Rushes. For example, the location of San Francisco's Chinatown today is approximately a block from the bay and is where early Chinese settlers would open up shops to sell provisions to miners before they headed inland to the goldfields. The Chinatown in Victoria, B.C., Canada's oldest Chinatown, was the main port of entry for Asian immigration to British North America (later Canada) and was the main hub for waves of gold miners heading to the Fraser River Valley and Cariboo.

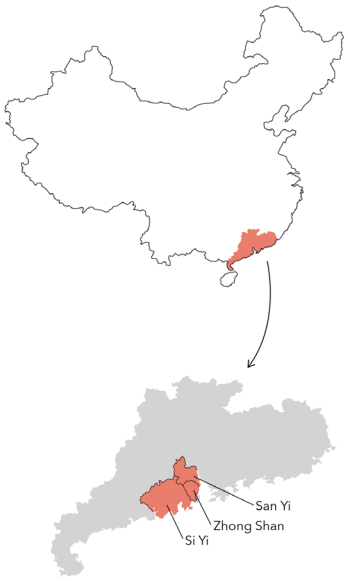


fig.2.4 San Yi, Si Yi and Zhong Shan regions of Guandong province.

From there, many Chinese immigrants already in California and British Columbia for mining and similar operations were recruited into the large railway projects of the late 19th century: first, in the western leg of the U.S. transcontinental railway in the 1860s and later the Canada Pacific Railway in the 1880s. Both railway projects are estimated to have employed up to 15 000 Chinese workers each at one time[6, 7]. On these projects Chinese workers were paid less than their Euro-American counterparts and were given the most dangerous tasks such as boring tunnels, building retaining walls and clearing obstructions. Despite being horribly mistreated for their work, the Chinese gained a reputation for being industrious, skilled and resourceful workers. In the U.S., after the completion of the transcontinental railway, they

2. 'Recognizing the Chinese Canadian Experience During the BC Gold Rushes' (Royal BC Museum), accessed 16 May 2022, https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/assets/Chinese-Legacy-Gold-Rush_Final.pdf.
3. Lynn Pan, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 36.
4. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878*, 16.
5. Ibid., 32
6. Chris Fuchs, 'Recovering an Erased History: The Chinese Railroad Workers Who Helped Connect the Country', NBC News, 22 April 2019, *https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/recovering-erased-history-chinese-railroad-workers-who-helped-connect-country-n991136.*
7. Omer Lavalle, 'Canadian Pacific Railway', in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 15 July 2021, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadian-pacific-railway.

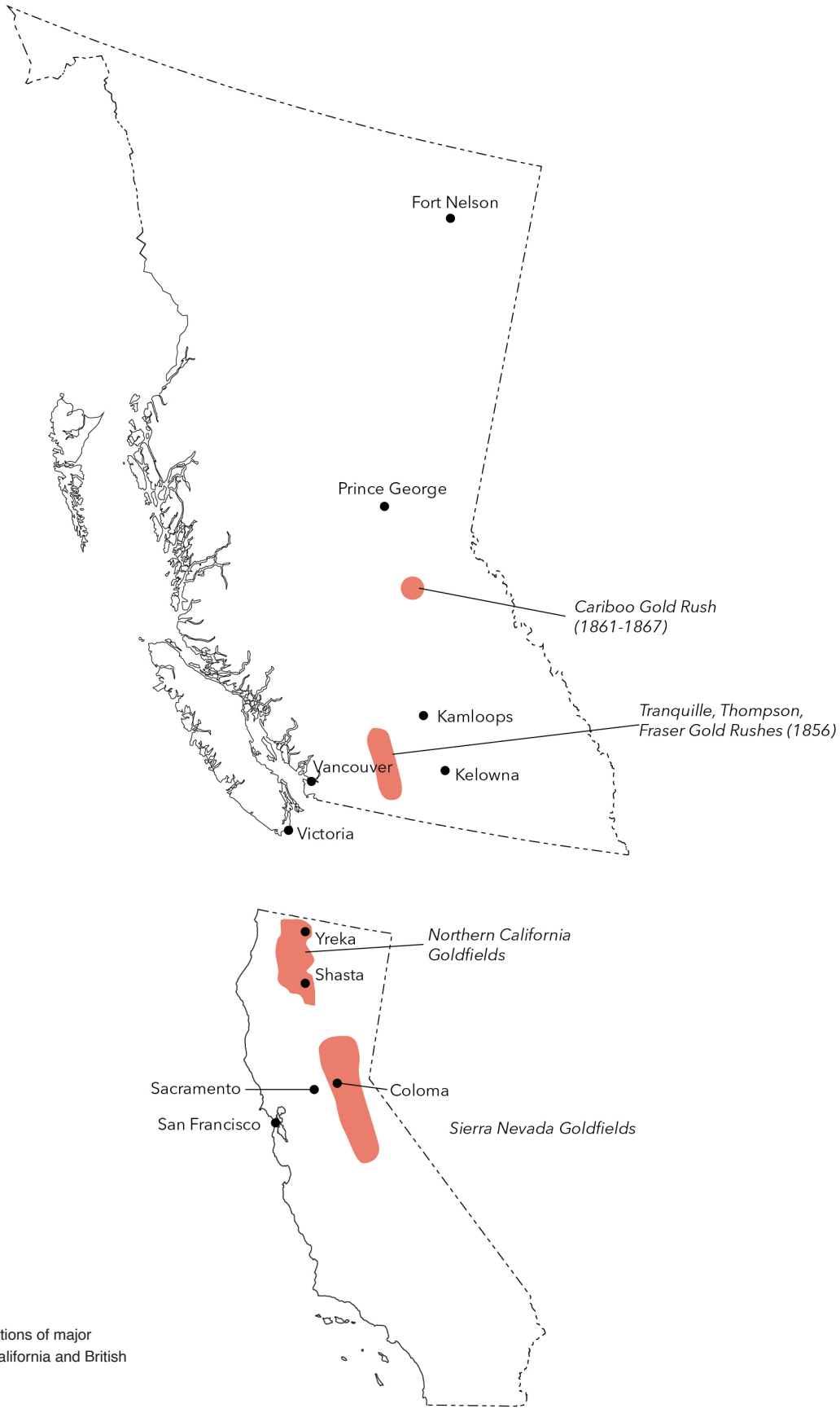


fig.2.5 Map showing locations of major Gold Rushes in California and British Columbia

continued to find work on other smaller railroad projects that would take them out East[8], eventually leading to more Chinatowns on the eastern half of the continent. It is for this reason that Chinatowns on the Western coast like San Francisco, Vancouver, Victoria generally have deeper historical roots than those in the East like Toronto, Montreal and Washington D.C.

A Product of Exclusion

When speaking of Chinatowns as a modern ethnic enclave, there is an impression that they are *voluntary* clusterings of the Chinese ethnic group in a defined area for advancement of their own interests. While Chinese immigrants have historically played an active role in the placemaking of their neighborhoods, the term 'enclave' obscures the fact that Chinatowns were initially formed out of myriad of racist and exclusionary policies stemming from intense xenophobia and 'yellow peril' that influenced which places they settled and how they were allowed to settle it (see figure 2.7). As a highly visible and racialized minority with intensely different customs (appearance, hairstyles, fashion, food, language) the Chinese community were subjected to greater levels of racial violence and hostility by the white Anglo-saxon community compared to the hostility that other European immigrant groups experienced (like the Irish, Italian or Jewish groups). This xenophobia was often compounded by larger labor and economic tensions that stemmed from worries that the hardworking Chinese would squeeze white people out of their jobs by working for less compensation, which was heightened during the economic recession of the 1870s-90s.[9] In this way, original Chinatowns can be much more accurately described from a land use point of view as 'ghettos' rather than enclaves[10] and draw similarities to WWII Japanese internment camps or the likes of oft-cited modern American ghettos like Flint, Michigan.

fig.2.6 "The Unanswerable Argument", 1907 (Kay J. Anderson)

Forced displacement through racial violence started on the gold mines and continued into the 20th century and even contributed to Chinese settlements moving east across the continent. Several instances of violent raids and lynching were reported in both the Western U.S. mining towns and British Columbia. One such example is the raid of the Brighouse Estate camp on Vancouver's West End. Chinese laborers there were willing to clear land at low cost, which stirred feelings of resentment from the European residents. It instigated a violent raid on February 24, 1887 that involved 300 rioters destroying first the camps

8. Chris Fuchs, 'Recovering an Erased History: The Chinese Railroad Workers Who Helped Connect the Country', NBC News, 22 April 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/recovering-erased-history-chinese-railroad-workers-who-helped-connect-country-n991136.
9. Fuchs, 'Recovering an Erased History'.
10. Peter Marcuse, 'Enclaves Yes, Ghettoes, No: Segregation and the State', 2001, 15.

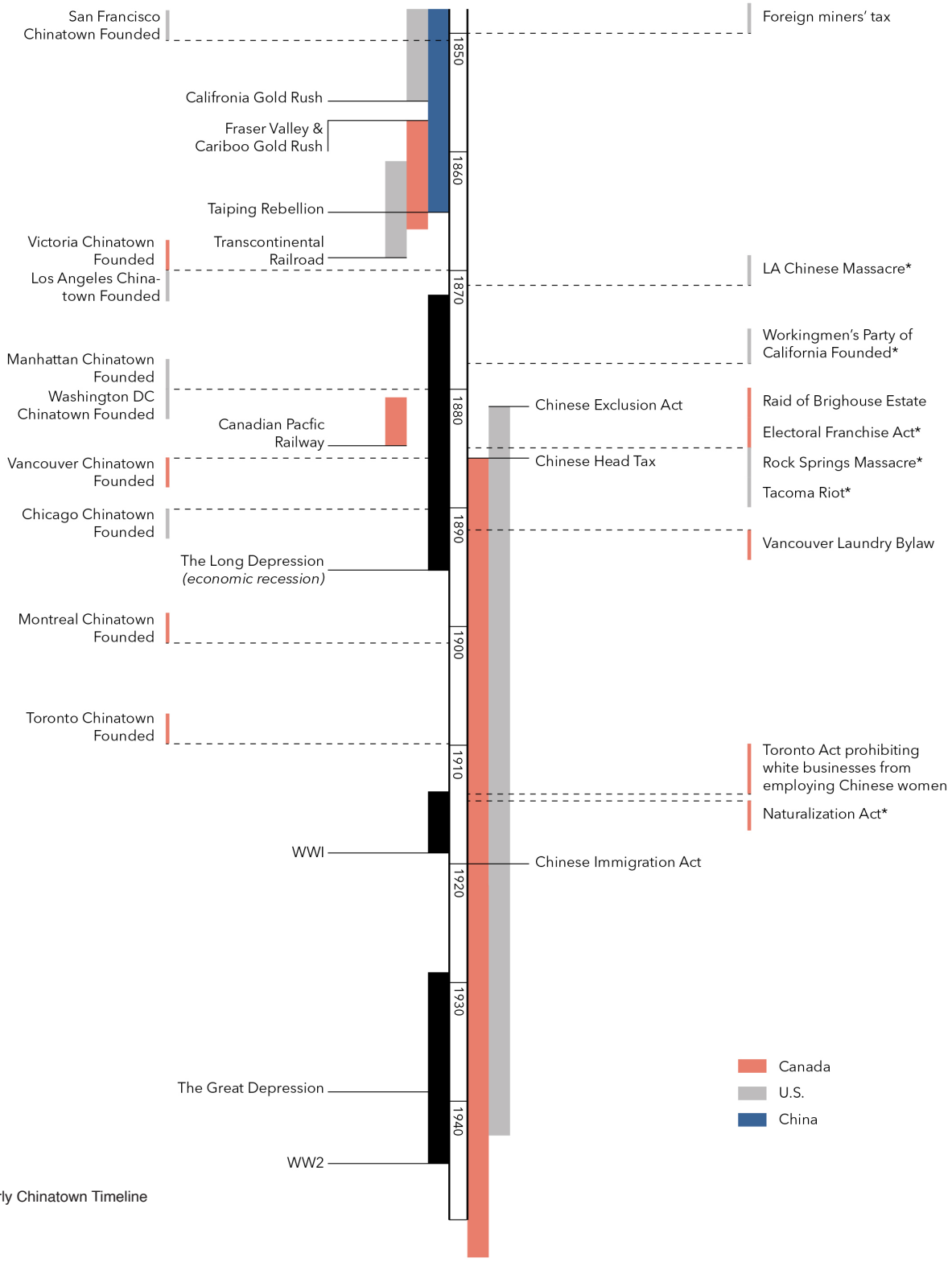


fig.2.7 Early Chinatown Timeline

of the Chinese laborers and then the other structures in the vicinity of Dupont street like the washhouses, stores and shacks. In response to this violence, when residents came back to Vancouver they established a "highly concentrated pattern of residence"[11] on Dupont street, which eventually developed into the Vancouver Chinatown that still exists today. Additionally, Toronto's first settlement of Chinese was made up of people who were fleeing racial discrimination in British Columbia and looking for a more forgiving place to live and do business.

Worries about job competition also led to a series of policies designed to limit the Chinese' ability to find economic success which, in turn, determined the make-up and types of businesses in areas that would later become Chinatowns. The Chinese laundry bylaw enacted in Vancouver in 1893 (and later a similar laundry tax in Toronto) restricted Chinese laundries to specified spatial limits in the city (in this case the area on and around Dupont Street) in an effort to restrict the Chinese to open the laundries while working around existing anti-discriminatory acts in Vancouver's charter.[12] The state of California enacted the *Foreign Miners Tax* in 1850 of $20/month on foreign miners which was then repealed and replaced with a $4/month fee. Both policies arose out of resentment towards Chinese miners which made up a large percentage of the mining industry.[13]

fig.2.8 A Vancouver ad from 1915 imploring citizens to use White laundries over Chinese laundries, as they were seen as giving unfair competition to the white laundries. (The Daily Province)

Perhaps the most potent discriminatory policy was enacted in the form of exclusionary immigration laws that would limit or stop the immigration of Chinese and other "Asiatic" Races from coming into the country. Both Canada and the U.S. instigated these laws and were the first, and only, laws in the history of Canada and the U.S. to ever restrict entry to the country based explicitly on ethnicity. In Canada, the *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1885 imposed a head tax of $50 on every person of Chinese origin to enter Canada. This was then changed in 1923 to completely ban Chinese immigration outright, and was not repealed until 1947. In the U.S. the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 halted Chinese immigration for ten years, but was then extended until 1943. The act also made it impossible for existing Chinese immigrants to become naturalized citizens, and required Chinese residents to carry certifications of residents in order to avoid being sentenced to hard labor or deportation.[14] These laws succeeded in their intention and drastically reduced the Chinese population in North America. Chinatowns across the continent became "bachelor societies" as they were only populated by men who came as laborers during the gold rush and railway projects, leaving them with no way to bring their

11. Kay J. Anderson, 'The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4 (1987): 580–98.
12. Ibid., 586
13. 'Foreign Miner's Tax, 1851-1855', accessed 17 May 2022, https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/260miners.html.
14. "Chinese Exclusion Act". https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/chinese-exclusion-act-1882

families to join them in North America[15].

Interior social organization and Traditional Associations

Amidst the hostile conditions of late nineteenth century North America, early Chinatowns were understandably quite insular and tight knit. They were very homogenous communities of poor, rural laborers who all spoke the same dialect and came from the same place. Outside of the railway and mining industries, the Chinese found niche business opportunities (the laundry being the most prominent) that allowed them to live and work for a modest income in the same place. In order to survive under these hostile conditions, the community formed traditional associations (by clan, district, community and political affiliation) to provide mutual aid. This system of forming associations is believed to have been adapted from similar long held systems existing in China, where rural workers who migrated to the city would form associations (hui guan) as a means of protection and mutual aid as they were seen as 'vulnerable and easily exploitable' by the city commercial infrastructure[16]. In immigrating to North America, an arguably more hostile environment, these rural settlers established the same traditions. Many Chinatowns typically had a hierarchy of associations with clan or surname associations at the bottom, then followed by district/regional associations, and then overseen by a large overarching association named the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) (see figure 2.9). Clan associations were associations of members with the same last name, while district associations linked members with the same ancestral town or village in China (see figure #). The associations had many responsibilities and were highly involved with their members' everyday lives. They oversaw economic and community functions like providing lodging, employment and operated a credit union. They held social and ritualistic functions like providing space for social clubs, games, and running important cultural celebration. The CCBA represented the community in politics and acted as a pseudo government, settling internal disputes and mediating between the Chinatown community and the wider society. These associations were crucial to the functioning of the community while allowing limited contact between the Chinese and the wider society.

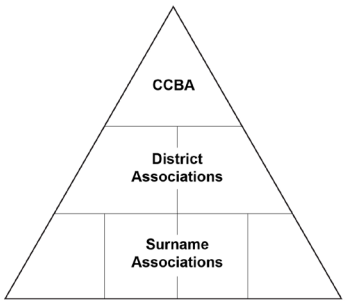


fig.2.9 The hierarchy of traditional associations in many large Chinatowns across North America. Diagram adapted from Thompson, Toronto's Chinatown.

Merchant's associations (or Tong's) also existed whose leaders sometimes gained control of many of the "illegal" Chinese activities

15. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878.*
16. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown*.

like gambling, the sale of opium, prostitution and smuggling. Due to their widely publicized and documented era of infighting and violence along major Chinatowns on the Pacific coast and New York City between 1880s-1920s (called "Tong Wars")[17], they have garnered a bad reputation from the public for being dangerous and violent. This disregards the many merchant's associations who were genuine mutual aid and protective societies and offered membership to people who did not fit into the membership requirements for other associations.

Of Crime, Vice and Disease

American films up to as recently as the 1980s engaging with Chinatown perpetuate the idea of Chinatown as space of difference by positioning it as a symbol for disease, lawlessness and/or crime. Chinatown is thus perceived as a place to *avoid*, due to its adjacency to danger and shadowy characters. Films in the early 20th century evoked this quality quite explicitly – as Selma Siew Bidlingmaier points out: "without detailed explanation, merely the titles of these early motion pictures give us an insight of Chinatown depictions: The Chinatown Mystery (1935), Chinatown Villains (1916), Chinatown Nights (1929), Captured in Chinatown (1935)." [18] These films also contain exoticized characterizations of the "Yellowman" which sociologist Jan Lin (also quoted by Bidlingmaier) describes as being portrayed by "white actors who wore Chinese shirts, baggy pants, and Qing-era queue hairpieces [b]umbling and prone to opium addiction, staged as pagans unable to accept Christianity and western morality"[19]. These absurd and mocking displays of both Chinese people and the space of Chinatown shows a clear hostility from the white middle class to accept a culture that differs from their own in so many dimensions.

Towards the latter half of the 20th century, despite the progression of civil rights and race theory in real life, some representations of Chinatown continue to be depicted as a place of danger, albeit with much more subtlety and nuance, emphasizing a "more than meets the eye" danger within. This is seen most obviously in the presence of Chinatown in *noir* films of the 1970s and 1980s[20]. A literary and cinematic subgenre of crime, it has been characterized by a tough anti-hero, blurring the lines of conventional morality, with themes of paranoia and revenge. Noir has been described as more than just a style, but a mood – the sense that something is amiss, a "murky amorality"[21], a "strange world that's almost half in your head"[22]. It is described by Mike Davis as "a fantastic convergence of American

17. Michael Zelenko, 'The Tongs of Chinatown', *FoundSF*, accessed 28 November 2022, https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_Tongs_of_Chinatown.
18. Bidlingmaier, 'The Spectacle of the Other'.
19. Ibid.
20. This was a precursor to the full-fledged resurgence of noir in the 1990s (called neo-noir) that is presumed to be fuelled by wide political unrest in the 90s. The first wave of noir came in the 1940s following WWII.
21. Brian Raftery, 'Unpunished Evil: When Neo-Noirs Took Over the '90s', The Ringer, 7 July 2021, https://www.theringer.com/movies/2021/7/7/22565971/nineties-neo-noir-film-history-usual-suspects-basic-instinct.
22. Ibid.,

'tough-guy' realism, Weimar expressionism and existentialized Marxism – all focused on unmasking a 'bright, guilty place'"[23].

This is particularly clear in *Chinatown* (1974) dir. Roman Polanski which follows detective J.J. "Jake" Gittes as he unravels the mysteries surrounding the L.A. water crisis in the 1930s. Chinatown here is used as an overarching symbol for the dark, layered, absurdity underlying the fabric of society at large. For this reason, the streets of Chinatown do not actually make a visual appearance until the very end, nor does the plot involve anything physical about/in Chinatown. The first reference to Chinatown comes when, in a conversation with a police officer, Jake reveals he used to work in the police force, patrolling Chinatown. The exact reasons for why he left the police force are uncertain, but it is strongly implied that he felt his sense of purpose questioned trying to police Chinatown. It is later revealed that he had hurt people trying to do what he thought was right while patrolling Chinatown and became disillusioned with the job. Here, through his lived experience, Jake sees Chinatown as a sort of "no-man's land", one that is so deeply removed from normal society and entrenched in crime that it is incomprehensible to outsiders and any attempt at policing it would be futile. This sentiment is further exemplified in a conversation Jake has with Noah Cross, the mastermind behind the water crisis, where Noah says: "You may think you know what you're doing, but you don't", to which Jake responds "That's what the district attorney told me when I used to work in Chinatown."[24] Here, in addition to establishing that Chinatown is symbolic of a disorienting and infinitely layered, incomprehensible place, it also reveals that in dealing with the L.A. water crisis Jake was, in essence, dealing with a reproduction of Chinatown, thus the film's namesake. Indeed, what begins as a simple investigation into the intimate affairs of Hollis Mulwray, the chief engineer at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, quickly evolves into a much more complex and sinister web of conspiracies involving the manipulation of the Los Angeles water supply by a group of shadowy, power-hungry oligarchs. Thus, Chinatown is the material manifestation of 'the bright, guilty place' in Davis' description and is used repeatedly as a device to describe the condition of Los Angeles being much more sinister than what meets the eye.

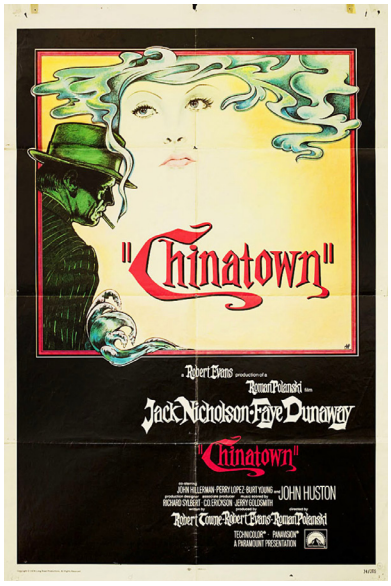


fig.2.10 Film poster for *Chinatown* dir by Jack Nicholson (Jim Pearsall)

A more overt example depicting Chinatown as layered, lawless place, is Michael Cimino's 1985 film "Year of the Dragon". Released a decade after *Chinatown,* the main character Stanley White shares many

23. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Verso Books, 1990).

24. *Chinatown*, Mystery, Drama (Paramount Pictures, 1974).

fig.2.14 One of the few shots of Los Angeles Chinatown in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* .

fig.2.11 A street in Los Angeles' Chinatown, the location of the final shootout, from Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*.

fig.2.13 Stanley White in the middle of a shoot out in a Chinese Restaurant in Chinatown, from *Year of the Dragon*.

fig.2.12 Smoky gambling parlour where members of the Chinatown triads are hanging out, from *Year of the Dragon*.

similarities to Jake Gittes, in that he works for the police force (this time in New York not L.A.) and is assigned to Chinatown. Stanley is career obsessed and makes it his mission to get "the rice to boil over in Chinatown", essentially casting Chinatown as 'the last frontier' that he will bring under control[25]. This becomes increasingly dangerous and difficult for Stanley as the dangerous triads of Chinatown take down everyone around him. One key nuance in this film is the separation between *crime Chinatown* and *regular Chinatown*, which is different from the broad generalization made in Polanski's *Chinatown (1974)*. Regular Chinatown is made of everyday Chinese people who go about their ordinary lives, eating in the restaurants, shopping at the vegetable stalls, working safe, regular jobs. Crime Chinatown, is made of the tongs, gangs and sects of organized crime who frequent run-down back of house spaces, smoky underground gambling rooms and damp, dark processing facilities. They terrorize everyone to bring about their own selfish goals, including the hapless victims of regular Chinatown. The architectural spaces of crime Chinatown are separated far from the public facing side of Chinatown, tucked away deep through several flights of stairs and through several doorways. This duality exposes the prevailing notion that although Chinatown had, at this point in the 80s, been largely reformed from the slums of the early 20th century, this perceived normality is only surface level - concealing a great corpus of danger and evil within.[26]

25. *Year of the Dragon* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Bros Home Entertainment, 1985).

26. *Year of the Dragon* was very controversial on its release due to its stereotypical and outdated depiction of New York City's Chinatown, which prompted a disclaimer to be added to the beginning of the movie about the "lack of intention to demean" Frank H. Wu, 'Reliving the Year of the Dragon', HuffPost, 20 June 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/reliving-the-year-of-the-dragon_b_5949454ae4b0d097b29bc85d.

Heterotopias of Difference, Exclusion and Mutual Aid

Original Chinatowns were 'Heterotopias of Difference'; they were inhabited by and ruled by cultures that deviate from the accepted social norm. In the late 19th century and early 20th century 'social norms' were quite a rigid and narrow set of ideas compared to how they are today. Original Chinatowns were inhabited by a homogeneous society of poor Chinese male labourers from the Guangdong province, with material customs and traditions that reflect this, while the wider society was overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Saxon and middle class. The Chinese in Chinatown differ from the hegemonic society in three important dimensions: class, race and religion which all work together to further 'other' the space of Chinatown from the rest of the city. In addition to this difference, Heterotopias of difference are also produced and upheld by two other forces that come together to reinforce each other in a cycle (see figure 2.15) and that each inform the production of either the exterior or interior perception of Chinatown. These are exclusion and mutual aid. Under traditional ideas of hegemony, the difference produced systems and frameworks of exclusion in the form of policy, violence and hostility. This in turn, encouraged the production of structures of mutual aid within the Chinese community that then led to further difference and separation from the wider society.

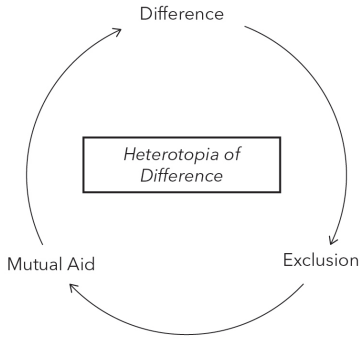


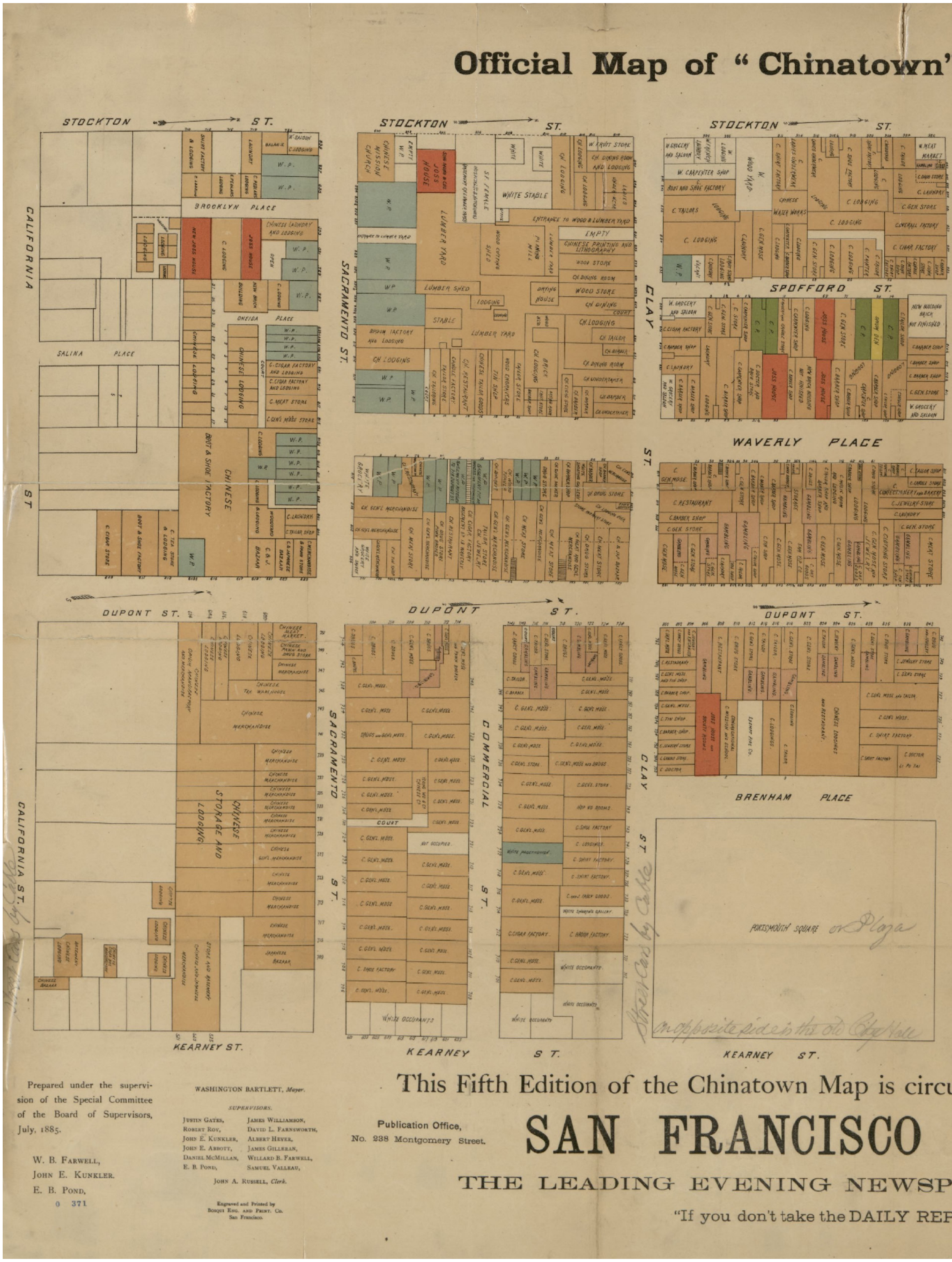
fig.2.15 A Heterotopia of Difference is reinforced and upheld by Difference, Exclusion and Mutual Aid.

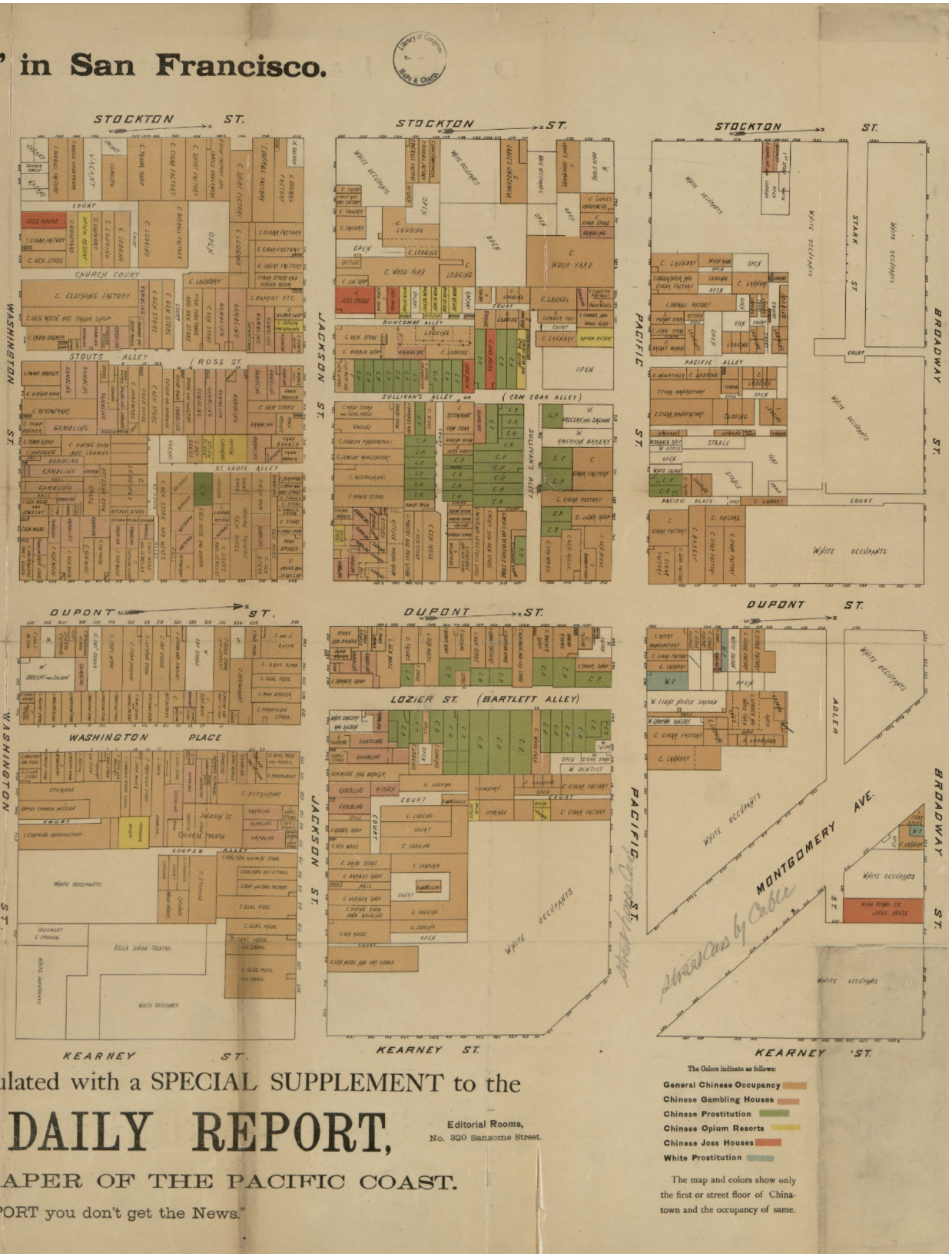
The exterior perception of Original Chinatowns is thus a Heterotopias of Difference informed by exclusion. Early media depictions of Chinatown were both an instigator and product of exclusionary frameworks stemming from racist sentiment (like yellow peril) and intolerance for difference. They capitalized on the most digestible elements of Chinatown from the Western lens and presented it as a dangerous, diseased, and vice-run neighborhood. The interior perception of original Chinatowns is a Heterotopia of Difference informed by mutual aid. From the interior perspective, the community responded to social and economic exclusion by creating separate support and governance systems leading to further separation and difference from society. From a land-use point of view, Chinatowns became 'complete communities. Being unwelcomed from the rest of society, it necessarily contains within relatively close distance to each other all the services that are required to sustain a community, including schools, residences, stores and community buildings (see figure 2.18). Consistent with classic interpretations of heterotopia, it is truly a 'city within a city'.

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1266, f1266_it98337

fig.2.16 Men in Toronto's First Chinatown, celebrating the Allies' victory over Japan in 1945. (City of Toronto Archives)

fig.2.17 Map of San Francisco's Chinatown created for the newspaper San Francisco Daily Report, in 1855 with special places of 'ill fate' called out in the legend (Library of Congress)





ılated with a SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT to the

DAILY REPORT,

Editorial Rooms,
No. 320 Sansome Street.

APER OF THE PACIFIC COAST.

PORT you don't get the News."

fig.2.18 Map showing San Francisco Chinatown colour-coded with full spectrum of land-use

- Residential
- Misc Stores
- Grocery and Food Stores
- Services
- Health Specialist
- Cultural
- Laundry
- Restaurant
- Industrial
- Ill-fate
- Misc/Undifferentiated
- Vacant/Under construction

Contemporary Chinatowns

In post war North America, Chinatowns across the continent participated in a sweeping rebranding that sought to shed its previous image as a dangerous place of moral vice into a fun and exhilarating place to visit to get a taste of the Chinese culture. Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as 'strategic self-orientalism'.[27] This pattern was started by San Francisco's Chinatown, where, after a fire levelled it in 1906, clever Chinese businessmen led by Look Tin Eli decided to hire white American architects to build it back based on what they believed China looked like[28]. With only pictures of Chinese religious buildings to go off, the resulting buildings sported ornamentation that was a peculiar, caricaturized version of Chinese religious vernacular, with curved pagoda roofs, dragon motifs, ornate railings and signage with the infamous 'Chinese' font. This transformation became extremely popular with the tastes of the white middle class, who began to frequent the neighborhood for its colourful architecture, vibrancy and food. Thus, the exotic other was used by the Chinese business owners in Chinatown to draw profit in an early example of cultural commodification. Chinatown was being rebuilt in the image of an outsiders' perception of China. This transformation was mirrored in several other Chinatown projects across the continent in the decades following.

Where did the old Chinatown business leaders like Look Tin Eli get the inspiration to turn Chinatown into a tourist district by leveraging its exotic "otherness"? The tradition has roots back to the World's Fairs, which put each invited county's cultural artifacts (food, architecture, clothing, etc) on display to be consumed by curious visitors of the West (World Expo's were exclusively held in Western Europe and the U.S until 1967). It presented a visually coherent and choreographed series of spaces which were explicitly designed to transport visitors into another world, appealing to the exotic other. San Francisco Chinatown specifically has a more direct precedent in the 1893 Columbian World's Fair in Chicago. During this expo, the Exclusion Acts in the states resulted in China's boycotting of the fair. However, the Chinese in Chicago still wanted to participate in an effort to rectify the negative stereotypes that the West had attached to their culture. Three Chinese people under the name Wah Mee (Chinese American) Corporation put together "Chinese Village" complete with a theatre, Joss House, bazaar, tea garden, and café which was placed in the "fun" part of the expo in the Midway Plaisance[29]. Since Wah Mee Co. did not

27. Greg Umbach and Dan Wishnoff, 'Strategic Self-Orientalism: Urban Planning Policies and the Shaping of New York City's Chinatown, 1950-2005', accessed 6 October 2022, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1538513207313915.

28. Ranjani Chakraborty, 'The Surprising Reason behind Chinatown's Aesthetic', Vox, 10 May 2021, https://www.vox.com/videos/2021/5/10/22428437/chinatown-aesthetic-survival-anti-asian-racism.

29. Grace Krause, 'A Cup of Real Chinese Tea: Culinary Adventurism and the Contact Zone at the World's Columbian Exposition, 1893', 1 June 2018, https://gradfoodstudies.org/2018/06/01/a-cup-of-real-chinese-tea-culinary-adventurism-and-the-contact-zone-at-the-worlds-columbian-exposition-1893/.

fig.2.19 Map of 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Chinese Village is marked with the blue dot in the top left hand corner (Grace Krause)

Chinese Worship Temple

ON SECOND FLOOR.

BAZAAR, TEA GARDEN AND CAFE

ON FIRST FLOOR

CAFE

CHINESE VILLAGE

MIDWAY PLAISANCE

Light served from

---A. M. to---P. M.

Soup.....15

COLD.

Roast Beef	$0 35	Boiled Ham	$0 30
Beef Tongue, Boiled	30	Pork and Beans	25
Corned Beef	30	Sardines	35
Roast Pork	35		

SALADS.

Chicken	50	Potato	25

SANDWICHES.

Ham	10	Tongue	10
Cheese	10	Beef	10
Egg	10		

OATMEAL, ETC.

Rice, Chinese style	20	Oatmeal and Bowl of Milk	25
Chinese Pudding, with cream	15		

WITH CREAM, 10 CENTS EXTRA.

RELISHES.

Lettuce	15	Sliced Tomatoes	15
Sliced Cucumbers	15	Chow Chow	15
Radishes	15		

CHINESE CAKES AND CONFECTIONS.

FRUITS AND NUTS.

Li Chee Nuts (Chinese)	10	Preserved Plums	10
Preserved Ginger	10	Preserved Fruits	10
Crystalized Ginger	10		

PASTRY.

Pies	10	Pudding	10
Eclairs	10		

ICES.

Ice Cream (all kinds)	15		

HOT DRINKS.

Tea (Chinese)	10	Tea (Chinese) Longsoy	25
" " Oolong	15	Coffee	10
" " Syle Seen	20	Cocoa	10

COLD DRINKS.

Iced Tea	10	Milk	5
Iced Coffee	10	Cream	10
Plain Lemonade	15	Appollinaris pt. 25; qt.	40
Apple Cider	10	Soda	10

fig.2.20 Menu of Cafe inside Chinese Village at the World's Expo in 1893. The Bazaar, Tea Garden and Cafe are pictured in the illustration. (Grace Krause)

fig.2.21 Visualization of *China Village*, an unrealized "strategic self orientalization" urban renewal plan introduced by the New York State Housing Division together with Chinatown's merchant class in 1950, to replace the existing Chinatown. (Umbach and Wishnoff)

fig.2.22 Prominent import-export company Sing Fat Co. owned the Sing Chong building, one of the first buildings built in the new "Chinese" style in San Francisco. (UC Berkeley)

have China's cooperation however, they were only able to hire Euro-American architects, who captured the style of traditional Chinese architecture rather inaccurately (see figure 2.20). Nevertheless the China Village was a hit with fair goers and also provided a cultural "contact zone" for Westerners to sample Chinese food and piqued interest for Chinese restaurants among the urban white middle class[30]. Importantly, Chinese Village allowed the already curious city dwellers to adventure into their exotic fantasies within the constructed safety of World's Fair.

Indeed, Chinatowns in their original form were already attracting more daring adventurers seeking "otherness" into its various establishments. Muckraking journalist Jacob Riis wrote in 1880 that Chinatowns had a "pungent odor of burning opium and the clink of copper coins on the table" which lured white victims into "its dens of vice and their infernal drug"[31]. However what Look Tin Eli and the other Chinese businessmen did was lend a palatable safety and legitimacy to the otherness, one that would rid the image of Chinatown as a dangerous "other" place and turn it into a fun and safe "other", thus considerably widening its market.

A striking example is LA's two Chinatowns, "China City" and "New Chinatown", the latter of which was described as "the first modern American Chinatown, owned and planned from the ground up by Chinese"[32] as well as "one of the nations first malls". When the California Supreme Court approved the construction of the new Union Station on the site of Los Angeles' old Chinatown, which was already recognized as having some touristic appeal, Chinatown leaders had to find a new place to relocate all the old businesses. "China City" was a solution imagined by prominent Los Angeles socialite and civic leader Christine Sterling, who had envisioned and developed the nearby Olvera Street, the city's romanticized Mexican Market. Sterling built China City following the same strategy for Olvera street, turning it into a tourist attraction that would help keep the culture alive while allowing the Los Angelenos to partake in the cultures and crafts of a faraway land (see figure 2.23). Architecturally, China City was constructed with networks of winding cramped alleyways that, provided tourists a sense "of genuine discovery and privileged access to the tourist's experience of a space that was thoroughly planned, packaged, and safe"[33]. China City is, like San Francisco's Chinatown, yet another example of a Chinatown that was rebuilt in the image of China by a white American outsider. A second solution was led by Peter Soohoo

30. Ibid.,
31. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (Place of publication not identified: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 1890).
32. The Los Angeles Chinatown 50th Year Guidebook, June 1988
33. Josi Ward, '"Dreams of Oriental Romance": Reinventing Chinatown in 1930s Los Angeles', *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 1 (2013): 19–42.

fig.2.23 Plaza inside Christine Sterling's China City. Note the Chinese vendor-performers dressed in traditional garb pulling rickshaws. (Werner von Boltenstern Postcard Collection)

fig.2.24 View of Sun Mun Way on the west side of Central Plaza in New Chinatown, Los Angeles. (Werner von Boltenstern Postcard Collection)

fig.2.25 Chinese Village at Vancouveer's Golden Jubilee in 1936

and other members within the Chinatown business community. They acquired, with great difficulty, a portion of land on North Broadway and built all the buildings in the New Chinatown from the ground up through a collective community process, which was completely owned and funded by the Chinese community for business. The Chinese community looked to their heritage for architectural inspiration, designing with many Chinese building motifs and symbols much like San Francisco. Importantly however, they built in 'modern and airy' buildings, with streets that 'would be wide, for an open, safe look' to be 'palatable to the casual American tourist as well as fellow Chinese'.[34] (see figure 2.24). Once it finished, it was celebrated much like the opening of a large new shopping center, with a grand opening event complete with festivals, parades, lion dances, speeches from important figureheads, and ads published in newspapers inviting visitors to partake in "The Enchanting Charm of Old China in Los Angeles". Heavily centering commercial interests from the ground up, Los Angeles' New Chinatown is hugely removed from the community atmosphere of its old counterpart and more closely resembles the modern American shopping mall. In this example, Chinatown is rebuilt from within the community but to service outside interests, by centering commercial functions and selling Chinatown cultural products to outsiders.

North of the border, Vancouver's Chinatown had long been a victim of harassment from the city, who believed it a place with deplorable hygiene, morality and civility. Perhaps due to this, it was encroached on the West end by tracks from the Great Northern Railway Co. as well as a proposed plan to relocate Chinatown in 1911. However, after the Great Depression, city officials and Chinatown merchants alike began to take interest in a more fantastical and exoticized image of China. Kay Anderson describes: "age-old fantasies about China's ancient and venerated civilization began to be invoked and absorbed into the historically established imagery and discourse about Chinatown."[35] This led to the development of the "Chinese Village" for the city's Golden Jubilee in 1936, collection of buildings on the southeast corner of Fender and Carall Streets that featured a Buddhist temple, a "Mandarin house complete with carved and jewelled furnishings", an "ornate eight-foot bamboo arch tower", among others (see figure 2.26). The popularity and success of this event cemented Vancouver's Chinatown into a tourist area, with guided tours and buses frequenting the neighborhood a mere two years later. Business owners followed

34. 'History of Chinatown LA', *Chinatown Business Improvement District* (blog), accessed 6 October 2022, https://chinatownla.com/history/.

35. Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/gibson_crkn/2009-12-01/1/400898#page=6.

suit by making building façade upgrades to further support the image of a fantastical other in Chinatown. A notable technique used was neon light facades, which was decidedly a Western invention and not technique used in China. In the 1970s, after decades of increased touristic acceptance of Chinatown, and amidst the federal government's new imperative for multiculturalism, Vancouver's Chinatown was subject to many historic preservation and beautification proposals meant to preserve its "character" and "personality". City officials even released signage guidelines (not unlike Washington's example) that suggested the use of Chinese characters, and preservation of neon in building facades, which was met with contempt on the part of Chinatown's Chinese merchants, who favoured more modern and cosmopolitan storefronts.[36] Vancouver's Chinatown example shows strong government-oversight, especially in the latter half of the 20th century to maintain "otherness" in Chinatown through the careful maintenance of it as a tourist area.

Explaining the Shift Toward Commercialization

The sweeping adoption of this strategic orientalization in Chinatowns all across North America is tied to a few key structural forces. The first is that regardless of location, Chinatowns were subject to consistent pattern of displacement all throughout the 20th century. A study of planned destruction of Chinatowns by Vitiello and Blickenderfer describes a series of both planned and proposed Chinatown displacement projects mapped to well-known city planning movements: namely the City Beautiful era (c. 1890s – 1930s); the Urban Renewal Era (c.1940s-1970s); and the era of post-industrial downtown revitalization (c.1980s – present).[37] Besides the most recent era, both previous planning eras were concerned with replacing undesirable 'slum' conditions in the downtown with new, attractive public projects. Strategic self-orientalization in this case, was used as a resiliency strategy to 'clean up' and make Chinatown productive as a tourist space, and thus evade displacement. Second is the rise of post-industrialism in the late twentieth century which saw cities strive to produce unique and cultural experiences to draw people into the downtown. For Chinatowns, that meant increased, government backed support to package culture for tourists' consumption, while at the same time losing blocks to large entertainment projects (see Washington D.C. example). The third important factor is that with the maturing of the Chinese immigrant community, there is a natural

36. Ibid.,

37. Domenic Vitiello and Zoe Blickenderfer, 'The Planned Destruction of Chinatowns in the United States and Canada since c.1900', *Planning Perspectives* 35, no. 1 (2 January 2020): 143–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2018.1515653.

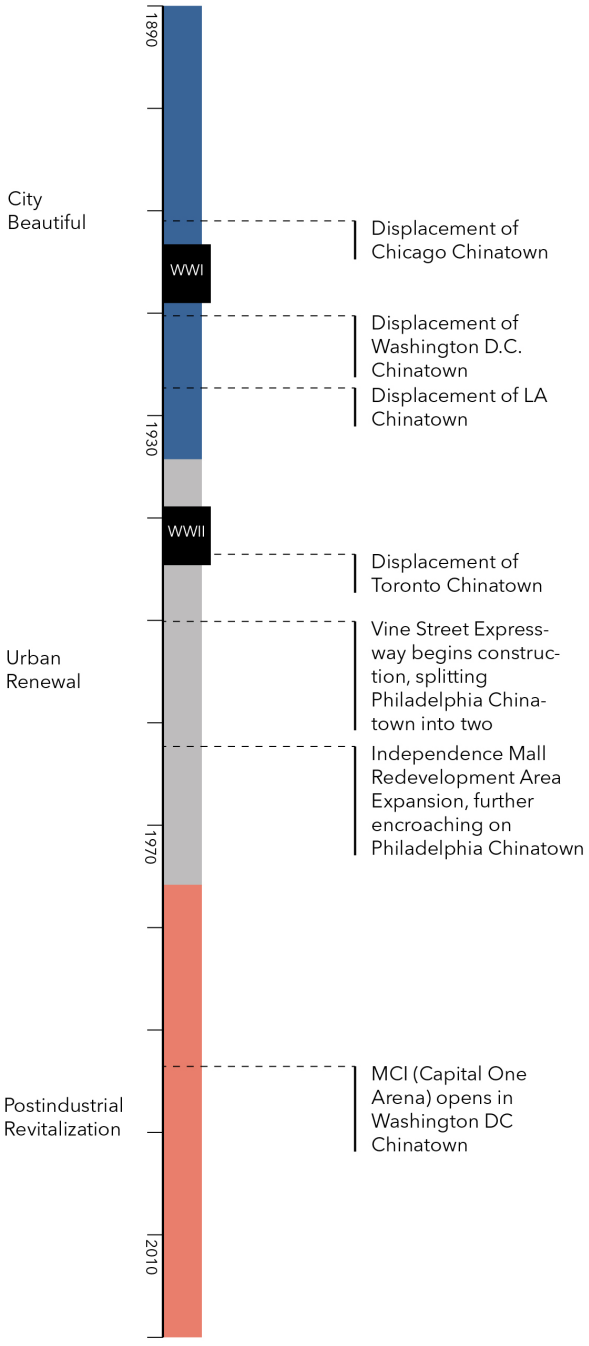


fig.2.26 Timeline of twentieth century planning eras.

diversifying of the group with different classes and lifestyle aspirations. On one hand, the rise of second and later generation Chinese led to an increased assimilation into Western society. Influenced by Western notions of "othering", there is a desire from within the community to hold on to more symbolic elements of culture. On the other hand, the diversifying of immigrants to Canada as well as the associated outmigration of immigrant residents, meant less Chinese people were living in Chinatown. In this way, Chinatowns emerged from the twentieth century as an area synonymous with consumption, tourism and exotic food experiences.

On City Planning and Slum Clearance

The City Beautiful Movement was driven by the idea that cities should be designed to foster civic pride and engagement and aimed to remove those qualities which city dwellers (for the first time in history outnumbering rural dwellers) thought made them undesirable: they were congested, unsanitary and unsafe. Chinatowns, being a poor ethnic neighborhood at a very central location in downtown, exemplified all of these 'social ills' and they became natural targets for numerous City Beautiful Plans, which worked to displace them with large civic and public projects. Both Chinatown examples discussed earlier were victims of City Beautiful Era plans. Los Angeles' old Chinatown was razed in the late 1920s to make way for the Union Station, which opened in 1933.[38] Also in the 1920s, Washington D.C's Chinatown was replaced by the Federal Triangle Complex. Chicago, widely accepted to be the birthplace of City Beautiful would have eradicated Chinatown through a series slum clearance and street widening detailed in the 1909 Plan of Chicago. While these specific plans did not get implemented, Chinese tenants were systematically pushed out of the area by private and public development, which sought to replace the existing building fabric with corporate and federal office buildings.[39]

Urban Renewal Era was similarly interested in removing 'blighted' [40] slum areas within cities but instead of fostering civic pride, aimed to dissuade 'white flight' in the city by removing racialized populations. Compared to City Beautiful, post-war plans tended to favour highway projects and parking garages compared to the previous era's boulevards, as well as "office, medical and educational districts, stadiums and convention centers"[41] A significant example is seen in Philadelphia's Chinatown, which was targeted for a series of urban renewal projects

38. Ibid.,

39. Ibid.,

40. Describing an urban community as 'blighted' is steeped in racial and ethnic prejudice. 'Blight' has a long history of being used mostly on racialized spaces of Black, Latino, Asian, groups among others to justify their widespread urban removal without hinting at the underlying socioeconomic problems causing the urban decline. Thus the unspecific, diseased associations of 'blight' becomes connected with not just disinvested areas of the city, but ethnic residents of those areas, which validates their complete replacement for something new. Brentin Mock, 'What We Mean When We Talk About "Blight"', *Bloomberg.Com*, 16 February 2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-16/why-we-talk-about-urban-blight.

41. Ibid

throughout the 1940s-1970s. The first was a six-lane highway project that eliminated the north side of Chinatown, displacing over 600 residents. Another was an expansion of the Independence Mall Redevelopment Area in 1962, which eliminated a large concentration of Chinatown's single room occupancy units. While Philadelphia's Chinatown never experienced a full displacement, like the one seen Los Angeles, urban renewal projects removed about 40% of the land area forcing many residents to move out. Importantly, housing was overwhelmingly more targeted for displacement compared to commercial buildings. Thus, while the Chinese residential presence diminished, the commercial presence remained relatively untouched, demonstrating a clear prioritization of commercial areas over residential areas by city officials.

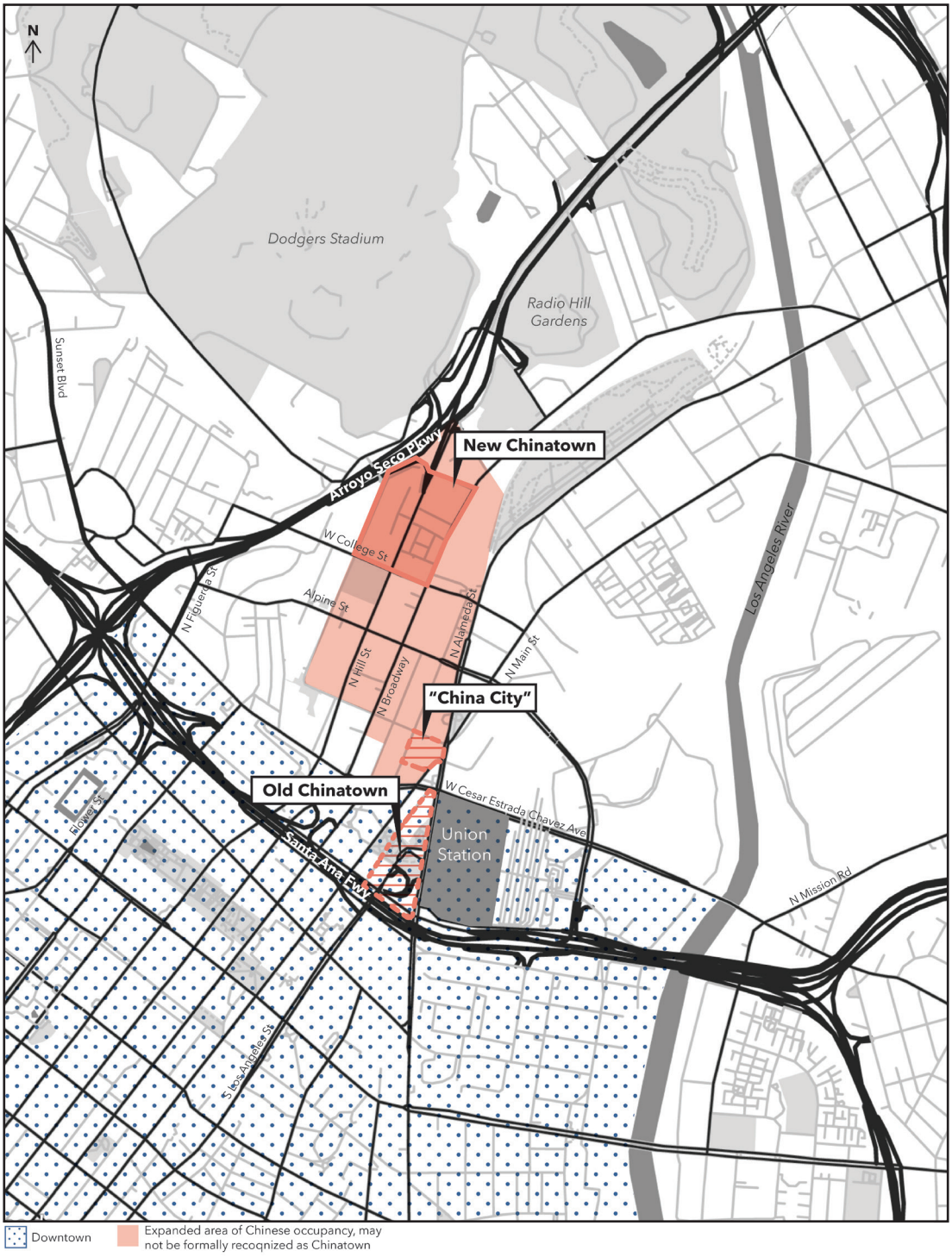


fig.2.27 The displacement of Los Angeles Chinatown

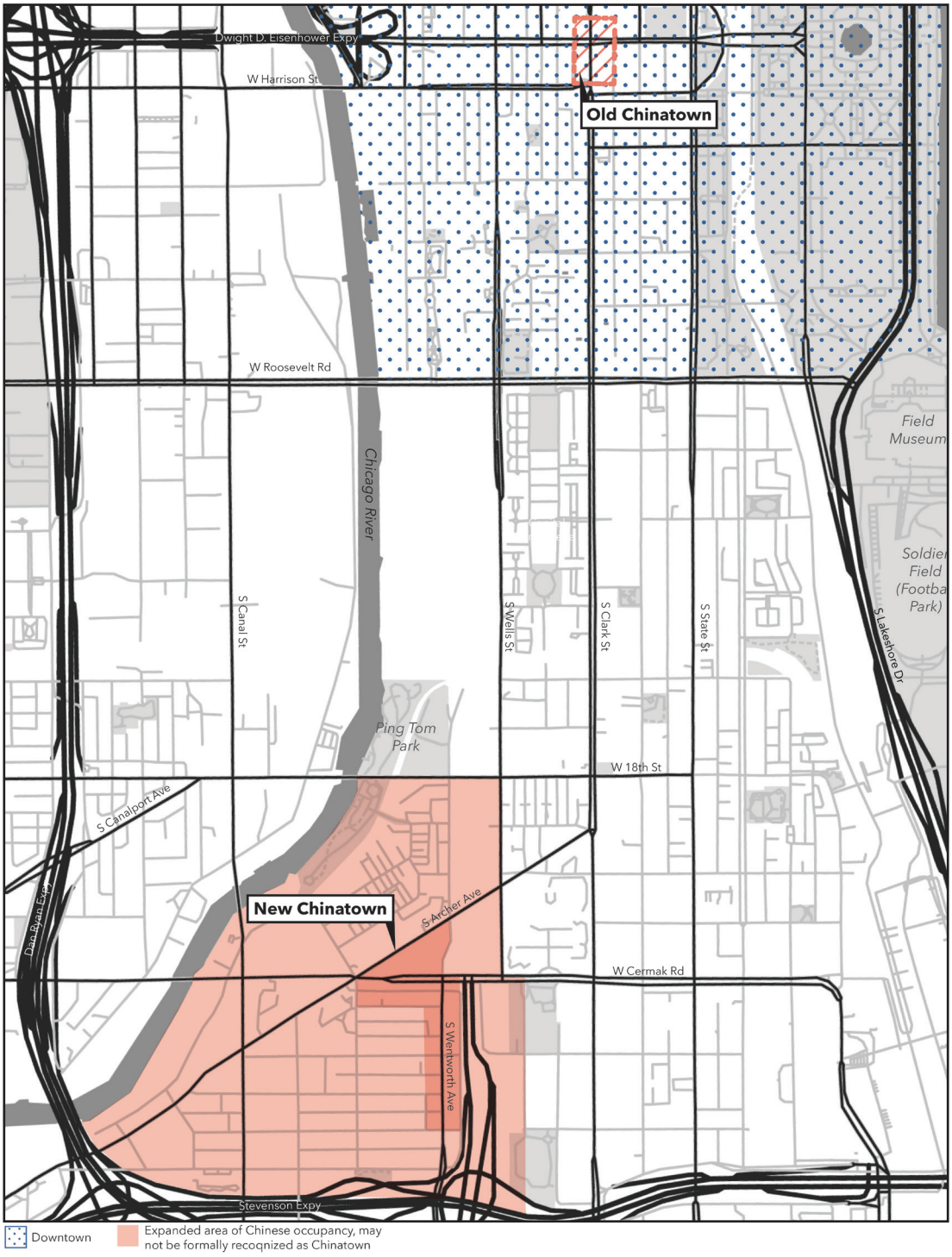


fig.2.28 The displacement of Chicago Chinatown

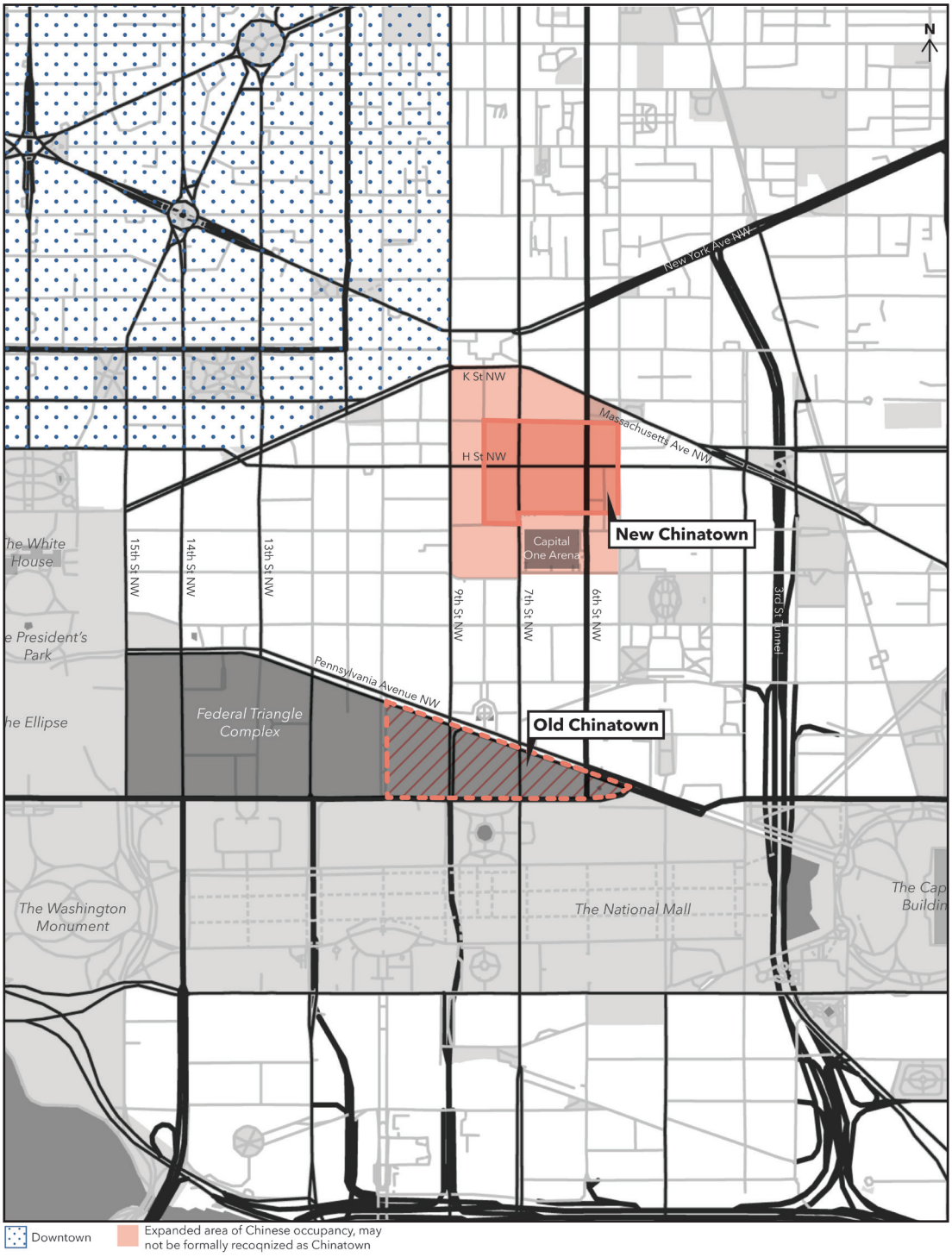


fig.2.29 The displacement of Washington D.C. Chinatown

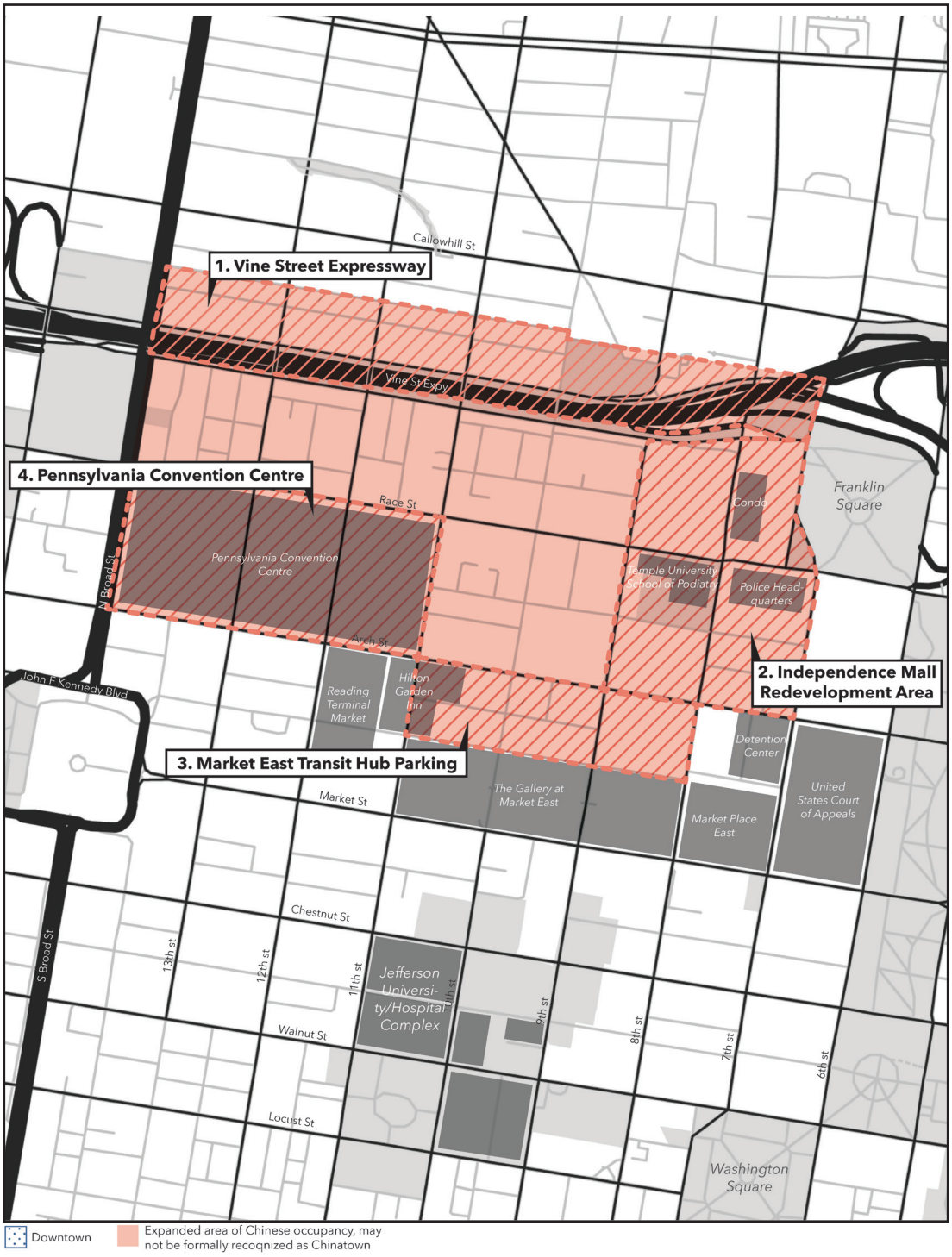


fig.2.30 The partial displacement of Philadelphia Chinatown

The Rise of Post-Industrialism

Following the 1960s in North America, the adoption of post-industrialization in cities put more power in the hands of cultural images and symbols to draw capital. The emergence of post-industrialism (1980s-present) affected Chinatown in two ways: Cities used cultural experiences and cultural industries to revitalize downtowns, which meant the construction of cultural projects (theatres, sports venues etc.) in downtown, which continued to displace Chinatown residents. On the other hand, Chinatown merchants and business owners used cultural branding and cultural symbols in streetscape improvements to brand Chinatown as definitively 'Chinese' to avoid displacement. Under post-industrialism, culture is used both to displace and as a form of resiliency against displacement. It encourages the development of businesses like ethnically packaged restaurants and entertainment venues (like karaoke bars) of which today's Chinatowns are famous for. In essence, the prominence of Chinatown's commercial streets, in all their manufactured 'exotic' glamour that continue to attract waves of tourists, is a product of post-industrialism, as it is only under this model of economy that these establishments flourish.

fig.2.31 Chinatown commercial vs residential area diagram.

An example that illustrates the effects of post-industrialism most clearly is Washington's Chinatown, who in the late 1920's, were displaced out of their original location on Pennsylvania avenue by the Federal Triangle complex. The On Leong Tong, who bought the first building on H street, recognized the building acted as an anchor to Chinatown and immediately made renovations to the original pre-civil war building by adding a distinctive pagoda tile roof over several of the floors[42]. This type of renovation soon spread to many of the other buildings as more businesses and institutions came to join the first building. Before long, the neighborhood had a distinctive, exoticized feel. DC's Chinatown underwent another aesthetic overhaul following the 1960's race riots and associated emptying of downtown by its residents that saw city makers attempt to lure residents back with themed cultural experiences only available in the city. Being a national capital city, D.C. is particularly subjected to various tax and city planning policies, forcing the city to more heavily rely on tourism to its various city districts.[43] This prompted D.C. to invest much more money on a municipal level to the streetscape preservations and modifications as well as conducting cultural design studies in order to draw the maximum possible tourist interest. For Chinatown, this meant heightened emphasis on the curation and maintenance

42. 'Downtown Historic District (Chinatown) Washington, D.C. (U.S. National Park Service)', accessed 6 October 2022, *https://www.nps.gov/places/dc-chinatown.htm.*

43. Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan, 'Commodified Language in Chinatown: A Contextualized Approach to Linguistic Landscape [1]', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 3 (June 2009): 332–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2009.00409.x.

fig.2.32 The Capital One Center is said to have displaced many Chinatown residents in Washington D.C's Chinatown. (Google Street View)

fig.2.33 The building at 241 Canal Street in Manhattan's Chinatown is an example of strategic self-orientalization. (Harvey Ngai)

of a consistent cultural image that would make Chinatown a highly desirable tourist destination. Through an investment of $200 Million from the city, the downtown was able to attract large businesses as vendors, such as Starbucks and Hooters[44]. Simultaneously, regulations were set in place controlling the way storefronts looked, from their signage to their doorways, regardless of whether a new business was Chinese. This was all controlled by a Chinatown Steering Committee whose main purpose is to "preserve" the Chinese character of the area. They even went so far as to publish a Chinatown Design Guide that sets guidelines on all facets of the storefront's presence on the street, from signage, to doorways to railings.[45] The "Friendship Archway" was erected in 1986 as a joint collaboration between D.C. and Beijing, and became an instant tourist sensation. Concurrently, in 1997 D.C. approved the construction of a massive sport entertainment venue now known as the Capital One Arena, at 7th and H St, which drastically raised the property values in the area and priced out many local Chinese businesses and residents. Washington D.C.'s Chinatown is an example of an enclave that has repositioned itself squarely to serve commercial interests through both a façade of ethnic culture and gentrifying cultural institutions.

Unpacking the Business Improvement Area/Business Improvement District

One institution that has arisen under post industrialism to uphold the interests of business owners by geographic area are BIA or BID's (business improvement areas/districts). These are public-private partnerships made up of a group of business owners in a geographic district that work closely with all levels of government to promote businesses in the area, which usually means promoting tourism[46]. The city collects levies based on property tax from a BIA's property owners and distributes it back to the BIA for community improvements like beautification, revitalization, promotion and special events[47]. BIA's and BID's are not exclusively connected to ethnicity however they often do when they represent an ethnic enclave. For example, in Toronto, the Gerrard India Bazaar BIA represents the interests of the businesses of the south Asian enclave on Gerrard street east. Ethnically tied BIA/BID often lead the push for 'ethnic packaging' of an enclave, as a technique to draw more investment interest in the neighborhood from outsiders. They do this through the use of ethnic symbols and imagery in signage, retail mix and architecture, thus commodifying culture. In partnering with the city they are able to make large scale

44. Leeman and Modan, 'Commodified Language in Chinatown'.
45. Laura Hayes, 'What the Restaurant Signs in Chinatown Actually Mean', Washington City Paper, 7 July 2016, http://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/195772/what-the-restaurant-signs-in-chinatown-actually-mean/.
46. Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities,* 1st edition (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), #.
47. 'Introduction to Business Improvement Areas | Business Improvement Area Handbook'.

visual changes in public space (like street signs and street lamps) and cities also benefit from the public display of multiculturalism as it gives the city credibility for being cosmopolitan and welcoming. Actions from ethnically linked BIA/BID's are often disguised as harmless celebrations of ethnicity and culture, that highlight and appreciate diversity, when in essence they are very intentionally done to draw capital and investment. Sharon Zukin has commented on the large role BID's play in the privatization of public space: "Even in poor and working-class neighborhoods, merchants' associations use design guidelines to strengthen their control of the shopping street. Like the owners of more expensive downtown property, they see the establishment of business improvement districts (BIDs) as a means of restoring security and civility. The negotiation of their property rights on the street is connected, once again, to the negotiation of ethnicity, social class and the public cultures they represent."[48] When considered in the context of what ethnic packaging can do to valorize real estate, BIA/BID's are also indirectly participating in class displacement. While there is great value in honouring and celebrating culture, it does not come without violence.

The suburbanization of ethnic enclaves

In this era, another factor at play is the outmigration of Chinese out of Chinatowns to the suburbs, attracted by greater affordability, space and the immigrant dream of homeownership. The reinvestment in downtowns that started in the 1960s has made historically lower and working-class neighborhoods in the inner cities (like Chinatown) increasingly unaffordable. This also reversed the phenomenon of 'white flight' that characterized post-war North America, resulting in a repopulation of downtowns by upper middle class whites, and an outward migration of the racialized immigrant groups that used to populate it.[49] Along with forced displacement, this voluntary outmigration was causing inner city Chinatowns to lose their Chinese community to the suburbs. For the commercial streets, this meant either less Chinese businesses or that the business who decided to stay would increasingly need to market to a community that was not Chinese.

48. Ibid., 211.

49. Andrew J. Pierce, 'Integration Without Gentrification', *Public Affairs Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2021): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.2307/27009632.

fig.2.34 A tourist map of Chinatown Manhattan, created by the Manhattan Chinatown BID showing points of interest and special offers in the neighborhood (Chinatown NYC)

Authenticity and the Rise of the Commercial Street

The modern version of Chinatowns are defined by their commercial streets. Often visually dense, and often sporting caricaturized 'Chinese' ornamentation, these streets are filled with a majority of Chinese or otherwise Asian themed restaurants, salons and stores selling various cheap 'Chinatown' toys and gifts to people who come from afar to experience something 'ethnic' and 'other'. Seemingly missing or underrepresented in these neighborhoods are residences, community services, grocery stores and other programs that help sustain a community. This is because Chinatowns have now become destinations that function on providing a cultural experience for outsiders, a tourist destination. This situation also encourages the purposeful ethnic branding and commodification of ethnic symbols in order to provide a unified and consistent ethnic image for tourists (also known as 'Disneyfication').

...hegemonic global urbanism is not only a source and symptom of economic crisis, it also connects to a crisis of authenticity... They share, in short, a perception outlined by the urbanist Jane Jacobs (1961) and, in a different way, by Lefebvre: that upscaling has brought about undesirable change in the urban imaginary, an unsettling feeling that the city is 'losing its soul' (Chan, 2007). – Changing landscapes of power, Sharon Zukin

The question of authenticity in these neighborhoods has become contentious. Today's major cities are experiencing a demographic shift – they are increasingly co-opted by the (often white) upper middle class moving in from small towns and suburbs looking for a downtown lifestyle, at the expense of the ethnic working class. As a result, Chinatowns are increasingly targeted by developers looking to build high rise, high density condos whose rents, even the "affordable" ones, are priced out of the range of working class Chinese in Chinatowns[50]. Of note, these developments are clearly not meant for the residents of Chinatown but still support and produce the "Chinatown" experience, with 'Chinese' decorations and art. Here the production of an 'ethnic experience' is used as a capital-generating market ploy to attract upper-middle class to the development. For example, the Blossom Plaza, a 237 unit condo building that opened in 2016 in Los Angeles' Chinatown district sports Chinese influenced red railings and a courtyard with a canopy of red lantern fixtures. In 2019, a 2 bedroom unit with typical amenities was $2600 a month. Here again,

50. Alana Semuels, 'The End of the American Chinatown', The Atlantic, 4 February 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/02/americas-chinatowns-are-disappearing/581767/.

fig.2.35 Lanterns decorate a highly orientalized street in New Chinatown in Los Angeles (Milo & Silvia in the world)

fig.2.36 An ornate *pai lou* (Chinatown Gate) decorates the entrance to Victoria's Chinatown. The street is further adorned by red exoticized street lamps and hanging red lanterns. (Oriol Salvador)

as Zukin has pointed out: culture is used to capitalize on a public space by private interests. As a result of these developments, Chinatowns are becoming unaffordable to the scores of Chinese working class and seniors that had built their lives around it and pushing them to move out in large numbers. They are losing the essential heart of what made the neighborhoods so vital and interesting – the community (which has been documented in many a heartfelt docu-films in recent years[51]). Although on the surface Chinatowns are still very visibly and purposefully "Chinese", Chinatowns (along with many other working class neighborhoods of the early 20th century) across the continent are experiencing a widespread "loss of soul"[52].

51. Ken Tsui, 'Julia Kwan On Her New Film Documenting Big Change In Chinatown', Scout Magazine, 25 September 2014, https://scoutmagazine.ca/2014/09/25/vancouverites-julia-kwan-on-her-new-film-documenting-big-change-in-chinatown/.

52. Sharon Zukin, 'Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 33*, no. 2 (2009): 543–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00867.x.

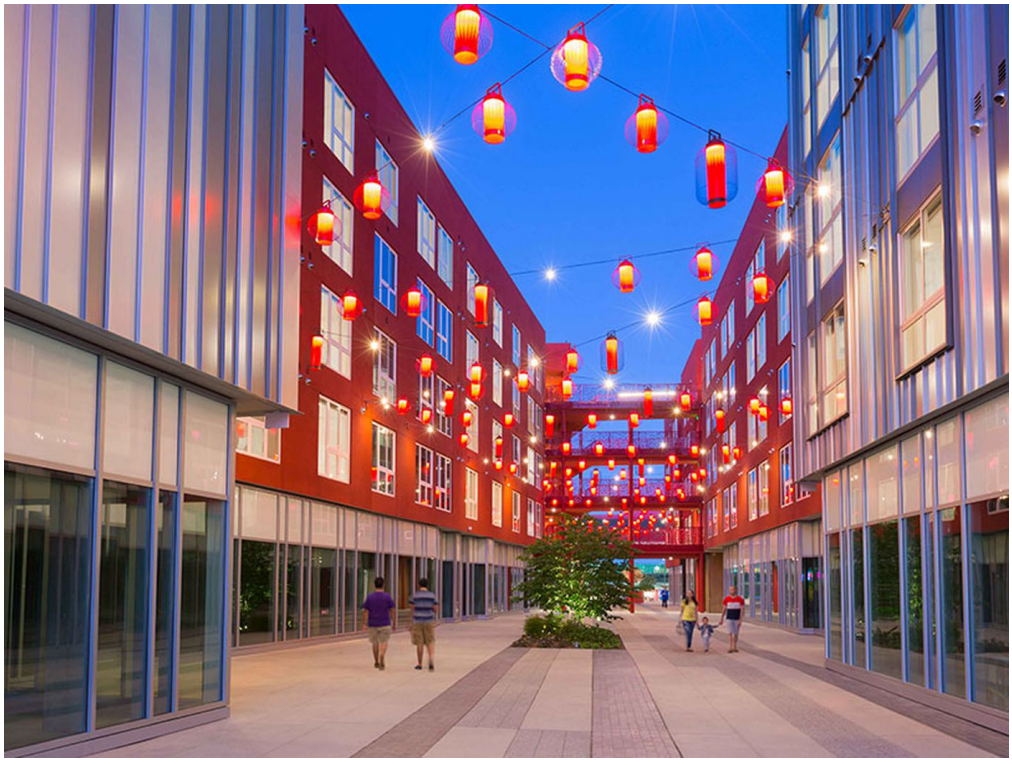


fig.2.37 The courtyard of Blossom Plaza is decorated with a permanent red lantern canopy and clad with bright cladding, reinforcing the manufactured culture of Chinatown (Eater)

Chinatown as an Apparatus for Self-Fulfillment

An analysis of Chinatown-related film released in the past couple decades has also showed a broad shift in the narrative use of Chinatowns, mirroring the commercial shift in real life Chinatowns. While the 'exotic' othering of Chinatown is still used en masse, there is an emphasis on what Chinatowns could help the main character (usually white) achieve, foregrounding Chinatown as a *supporting* device in a character's path to greatness.

For example, Woody Allen's 1990 film "Alice" uses New York City's Chinatown as a means to help Alice discover her true potential and desires. The conflict Alice battles is her own apathy towards her materialistic life and the circumstances that put her there. After noticing she was developing pain in her back, Alice approaches a Dr. Yang in Chinatown for some herbs that would 'magically' cure her backpain. Dr. Yang, knows immediately that Alice wants more from her life than just to be cured from back pain and proceeds to prescribe her herbs that would allow her to act on her impulses[53]. Alice goes back to Dr. Yang several times after that and each time he prescribes her with a different medicine that would help her accomplish out of body things like turn invisible or have a conversation with the ghost of her first lover. Her experiences on these various medicines allow her to see that she has lost touch with her original goals in life and decides to give up her cushy, luxurious lifestyle to do what she really desires, which is to go to Calcutta to work with Mother Teresa, her idol. The Chinatown exoticism shown in the magic of Dr. Yang provides the key to unlocking Alice's true desires and helps her live a more fulfilling life.

In a similar vein, Disney's "Freaky Friday" (2003) directed by Mark Waters, uses the device of "mystical powers" in Chinatown as the catalyst for the protagonists' self improvement and self-discovery. Mother and daughter, Tess and Anna, have a troubled relationship due to their differing personalities. After a visit to a Chinese restaurant in Los Angeles' Chinatown, where they both got cryptic fortunes, they wake up the next morning having switched bodies[54]. Living their lives in each other's bodies helps them develop empathy for the struggles of the other and their relationship is mended. Unlike the films of the early 20th century and the noir set, that cast Chinatown as the evil and unknown, both Freaky Friday and Alice frame the exotic nature of Chinatown as a tool to achieve personal greatness and perspective. These filmic Chinatowns existed only to service, beguile and lift-up its

53. *Alice* (Orion Pictures, 1990).

54. *Freaky Friday,* directed by Mark Waters (2003; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures), Online Video.

fig.2.39 Alice enters Chinatown for the first time in *Alice* (1990).

fig.2.38 As a result of Dr. Yang's herbs, Alice is flying high above New York City with the ghost of her former lover

white outside visitors with its life-affirming mysteries, revealing a shift in society's perception of Chinatown from that of fear and distaste to fascination with what Chinatown can offer them. This evidently mirrors the growth of real-life Chinatowns, which has evolved to become a tourist haven, providing cultural products and experiences to outsiders. In this way, the newly productive and capital generating cultural space of Chinatown is desired and legitimized into the city.

fig.2.40 Mother and daughter receive mysterious fortunes at a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown in *Freaky Friday*.

fig.2.41 Mother and daughter realize they have switched bodies the morning after they received their fortunes.

Theme Park Heterotopias, Simulation and Consumption

The commercially-dominated, exoticized Chinatowns of today continue to be heterotopias, but are no longer defined by their difference, but rather defined by their *manufactured* difference. It is important to note that the idea of a 'heterotopia of difference' necessitates there being a hegemonic society that 'others' a minority society. The opening up of North America to mass immigration in the late 20th century from all over the world (and not just Europe) in the decades starting 1960s combined with the increased ease in travel meant that the population in North America, especially in large cities, became increasingly heterogeneous. What began as a mostly white, Anglo-Saxon society, became increasingly mixed with immigrants from Asia, central and south America, Africa, etc. who all spoke and participated in vastly different customs. Certain policies (like Canada's points system introduced in 1967, as well as the CANIIP program in the 1980s[55]) also specifically targeted immigrants who were either very skilled or had a lot of money. This ensured that the arriving immigrants were not only poor and disenfranchised, like the gold miners and labourers from the 19th century, but had resources, skill and money to contribute to Canada's economy. This also allowed them more economic and social freedom to choose where they live instead of being automatically relegated to Chinatowns for ease and comfort. Of course, this is not to say that cultural hegemony as a framework of power, a concept introduced in the 19th century by incarcerated Italian political leader Antonio Gramsci, has become obsolete, it has just become less overt. Instead of being enacted in loud, obvious ways like racially exclusive immigration policies and violent raids, it is enacted in quiet systemic barring from opportunities on seats of power, media appearances and educational curricula, which is experienced on varying levels from group to group. Nevertheless, the diffusion of white hegemony, at least in major cities in North America, because of immigration makes the 'othering' a much subtler and difficult phenomenon, and one which has drained immigrant culture of its complex authenticity and reduced it to an easily assimilable caricature.

Present day, commercially dominated Chinatowns are *theme park heterotopias,* adapted from Kathleen Kern's heterotopia of the theme park street. It is a space that is carefully controlled to present an image of something for the purposes of consumption. In the words of Jean Baudrillard, it is a 'simulated' reality[56]. Disneyland is the de facto theme park heterotopia, a space where the dream of a safe and

55. Erica Allen-Kim, 'Condos in the Mall: Suburban Transnational Typological Transformations in Markham, Ontario: The Transnational Turn in Urban History', in *Making Cities Global*, 2017, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812294408-008.

56. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, The Body, in Theory (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

sentimental America is carefully maintained and upheld by employee-performers and caricaturized architectures, all for the purposes of touristic consumption and ultimately, capital gain. Theme Park heterotopias can also be conceptualized as being produced and upheld by opposing forces that reinforce the other in a cycle (see figure 2.41). These forces are *simulation*, the practice of manufacturing an image to represent something else, and *consumption*, for personal or financial gain, which justifies and reinforces the simulation. These forces can again be mapped onto differing exterior and interior perspectives of Chinatown.

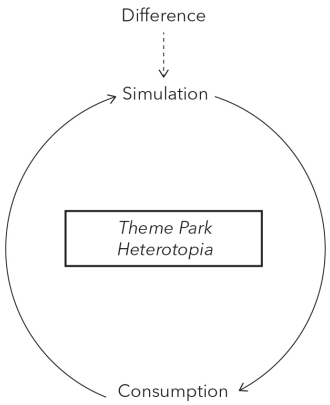


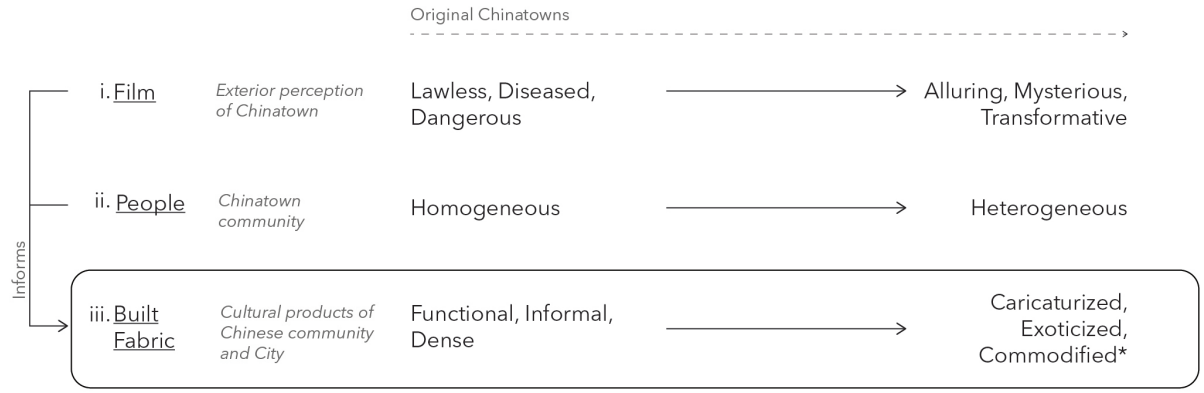
fig.2.42 A theme park heterotopia is upheld by Simulation and Consumption.

From an exterior perspective, present day Chinatowns are Theme Park Heterotopias informed by consumption. Filmic depictions and city planning bodies increasingly view Chinatowns as a desirable space for commercial consumption by the outside city due to its overt displays of culture and difference. This is seen in the shift of messaging to highlight personal gain in Chinatown filmic depictions, as well as the widespread privileging of Chinatown commercial spaces in city planning policy. From an interior perspective, present day Chinatowns are Theme Park Heterotopias informed by simulation. BIAs and BIDs, along with their Chinatown specific antecedents, traditional associations, and business associations, have increasingly policed the 'look' and 'feel' of the neighborhood to digestibly and consistently reflect a type of aesthetic to outside visitors, however representative of the real community it is. This public image control first took the form of Chinese exoticized architectural façade modifications that appeared to physically recreate an imperial China that never existed (such as those in San Francisco or Victoria), and more recently, has taken the form of more self-conscious public space art projects or the imperative inclusion of Chinese language signs across the neighborhood as an overt nod to the ethnic culture that existed in the neighborhood (such as in Washington DC).

Towards a Theory of Chinatown Evolution

Following the contrasting images of heterotopia described above, a theory can be derived that proposes North American Chinatowns evolve from a Heterotopia of Difference towards a Theme Park Heterotopia. This evolutionary pattern is made up by slightly differing parallel evolutions occurring in the interior and exterior perspectives of Chinatown. This chapter discussed these parallel strands of evolution using the three dimensions diagrammed in figure 2.42. The filmic dimension shows the evolution of the *exterior perception* of Chinatown in the city, by analyzing the shifts in filmic depictions of Chinatowns. The second dimension shows the *interior social evolution* of the Chinese community in Chinatown, which started as a tight-knit, insular and concentrated community of poor Chinese, and evolved to become a large, heterogeneous, disparate community with varying degrees of economic success. The third dimension can be seen as the cultural products resulting from the convergence of the previous two dimensions. The building fabric of Chinatown evolved into an exoticized, caricaturized display of Chinese ethnicity as a combined result of the negative early perception of Chinatown, and an increase in agency resulting from a diversifying population.

These three aspects are consolidated into a descriptive conceptualization of the interior and exterior parallel evolutions in figure 2.43. Notably, each Chinatown condition appears to inadvertently generate two opposite effects simultaneously (opposite pair condition). On the exterior, original Chinatowns were perceived on one hand as dangerous, diseased, and vice-filled places. However, this also inadvertently led to an exoticized intrigue and fascination with it, encouraging some to seek it out instead of avoiding it. On the interior, original Chinatowns are perceived as marginalized and excluded spaces, but because of this, become dynamic, resilient, and vibrant communities. Over time, the formerly contrasting exterior and interior perceptions are reconciled in response to both outside and inside forces. Displacement pressures and post-industrialism pushed unproductive residential portions out of the city while centering commercial interests, while mass immigration and with it, increased cultural exchange and increased tolerance for difference, diffused prevailing ideas of cultural hegemony. From the inside, strategic self-orientalization and commodification were used by the Chinatown business community to increasingly cater Chinatown to an outsider's experience. As a result, present day Chinatowns' exterior and interior



*Though building fabric has trended towards caricaturized, the specific way and intensity that this occurs varies depending on historic era and city-specific policies

fig.2.43 Diagram showing the evolution of three aspects discussed in chapter.

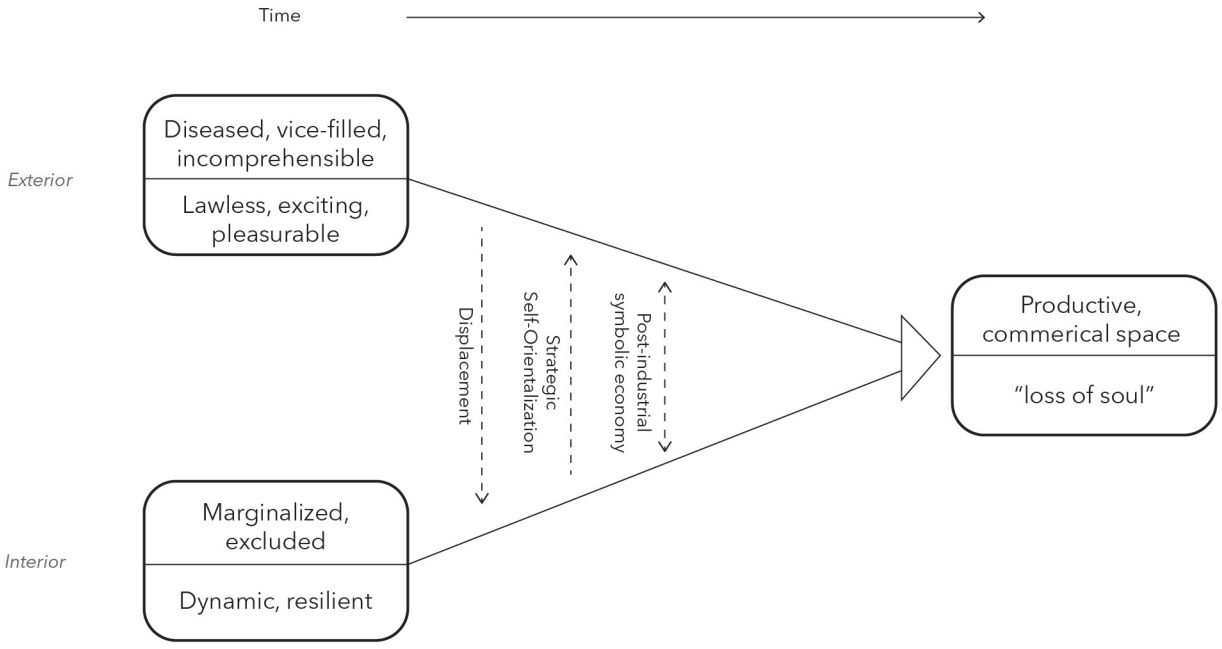


fig.2.44 Descriptive diagram of evolution of Chinatown, comparing interior and exterior growth.

perspectives are the same and can be represented by one opposite pair condition. On one hand they are a productive, commercial space; they are tourist districts that sell cultural products, sometimes in the form of caricaturized buildings, and other times in the array of food and drink options they offer. On the other hand, they are lamented for their widespread "loss of soul"[57], that resulted from a displacement of the original lower-class residential communities by the city and Chinatown commercial infrastructure. Chinatown increasingly recreated itself in the image of its exterior perception, and in doing so, excluded the once vibrant interior residential community who have always relied on it as a home.

Finally, how do these ideas of evolution relate to our established concepts of Heterotopia? Firstly, a connection between the two heterotopias is evident by placing the cyclical breakdowns in relation to each other (see figure 2.44). Simulation only thrives off something to simulate, which necessitates the presence of difference. Thus, in the development of Chinatowns, the difference that produced the Heterotopia of Difference is fed into simulation to create Theme Park Heterotopias. This transference of difference to be used for simulation and commodification might also be known as "exoticism". With this connection established, figure 2.45 illustrates altogether how each force that upholds the cycle of each Heterotopia is used to inform each condition of Chinatown. On the exterior, original Chinatowns are Heterotopias of Difference formed by exclusion, and in the present, they are Theme Park Heterotopias formed by consumption, which is itself informed by difference. From the interior, Chinatowns were originally Heterotopias of Difference defined by mutual aid, but are now theme park heterotopias defined by simulation. Heterotopia of Difference became Theme Park Heterotopia through the adaptation and transference of difference into something desirable via simulation. Both the negative elements of exclusion and marginalization as well as the positive elements of mutual aid and vibrancy present in the Original Chinatowns are lost, in service of presenting a commercially dominated place of consumption towards the exterior, which reads as an inauthentic place of simulation in the interior.

57. Zukin, 'Changing Landscapes of Power'.

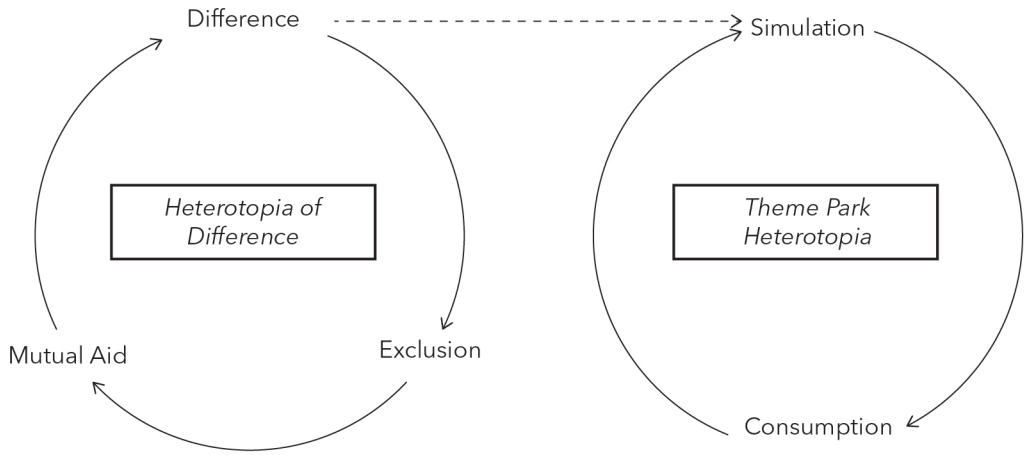


fig.2.45 Combined theoretical diagrams of two ideas of Heterotopia

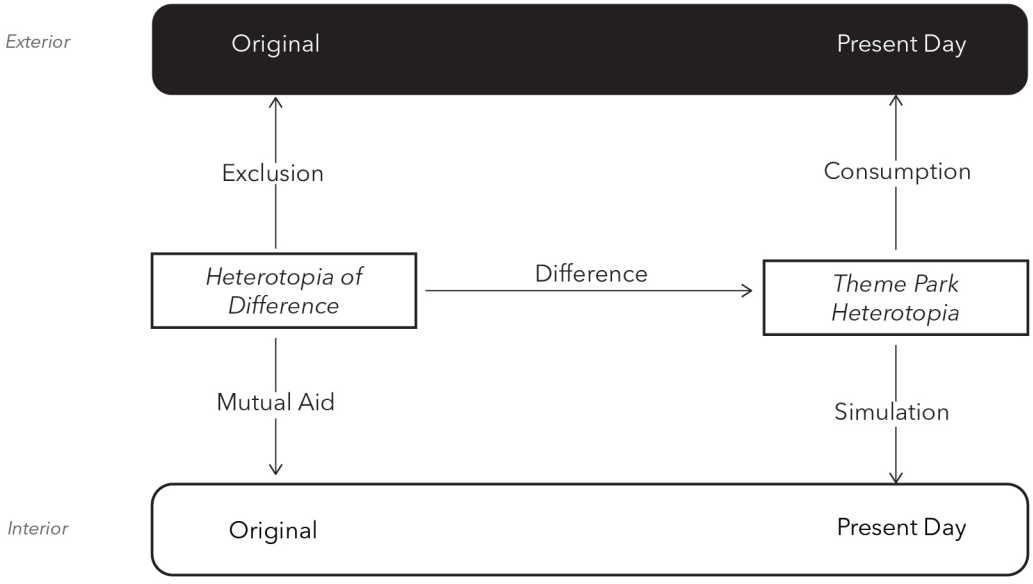


fig.2.46 Theoretical diagram relating Heterotopias to Chinatowns

Part 2

03 *The Evolution of Toronto's Chinatowns*

The following chapter will apply the theory described in the previous part into a critical historical narrative of the evolution of Toronto's Chinatown West. It will focus on both urban fabric and social evolution and discuss how each aspect informed the other in Chinatown's various eras. It will demonstrate how Toronto's Chinatown similarly follows a pattern of touristic evolution by remaking itself in the image of the outside, despite its seeming lack of exoticized building fabric that characterizes older West Coast Chinatowns like San Francisco or Victoria. Toronto Chinatown's exclusionary beginnings are demonstrated in the impoverished neighborhood of the Ward, where the First Chinatown was founded, the restrictive policies on Chinese jobs and businesses and the myriad of traditional associations that arose to support the community amidst the hostility. In a period of shifting immigration policies and economic change a touristic evolution begins and is evidenced in large landmark Chinese restaurants and both failed and successful Chinese cultural and commercial spaces. Today, a class displacement is quietly taking place which has many local businesses and lower-class Chinatown community being taken over by transnational corporate Asian businesses and speculative residential development, who are set on transforming Chinatown into a hyper economically productive area for consuming Chinese and pan-Asian cultural products – a de facto theme park heterotopia. This chapter will identify and trace four eras of evolution in Toronto's Chinatown: first Chinatown, displacement, 60s-90s and present day, to reveal how Chinatown has evolved from an excluded but vibrant tight-knit community to rapidly gentrifying tourist area over the span of a century.

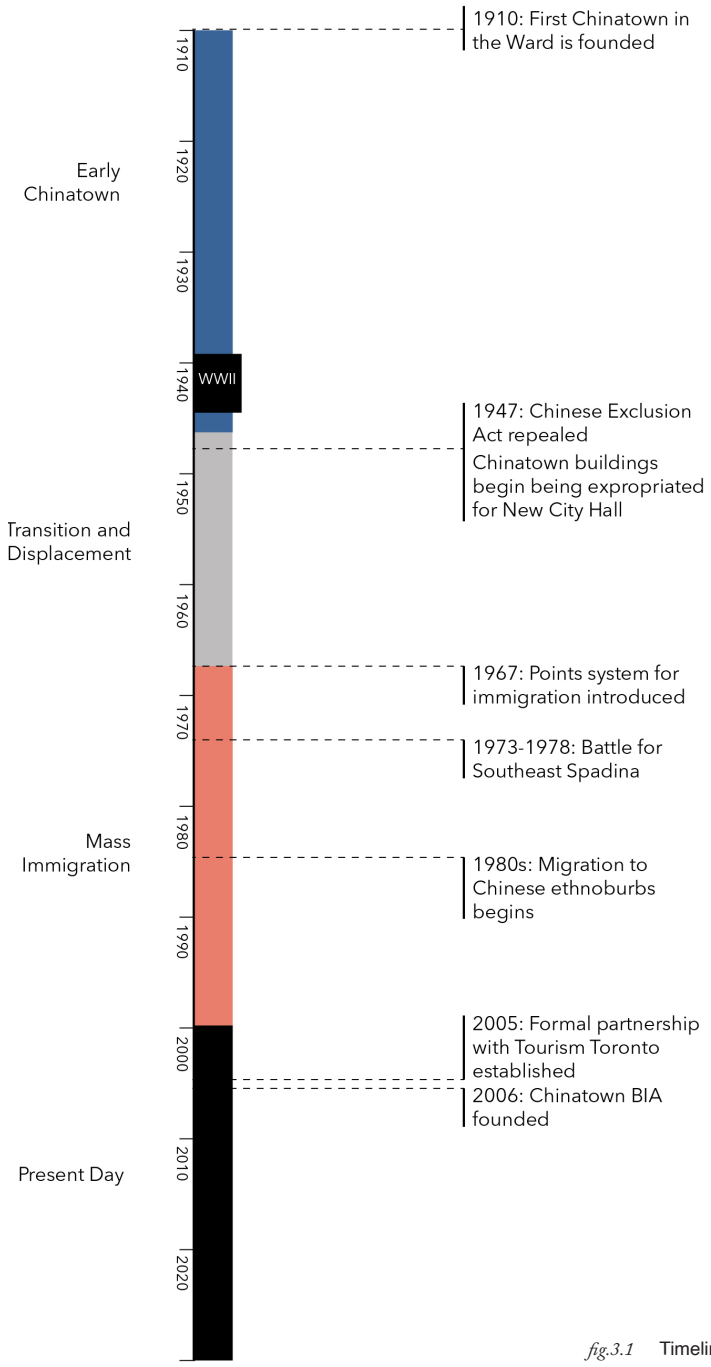


fig.3.1 Timeline of periods, and significant events in the evolution of Toronto's Chinatown(s).

Early Chinatown

The Ward

The earliest Chinese settlers came to Toronto from British Columbia in the late 1800s following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, fleeing harsh prejudice and discrimination in British Columbia.[1] The first Chinese community in Toronto was identified in 1915 located on York Street, near what is now Union Station. After moving around several times due to redevelopment plans from the city, they finally settled on Elizabeth St. near Dundas St. in a (now obsolete) neighborhood known as the Ward (or *St. John's Ward*), the city's most prominent immigrant neighborhood and most infamous 'slum'. The Ward was a rectangular area bound by University Ave and Yonge St on the West and East, and College St and Dundas St on the North and South. In the mid 19th century, decades before the Chinese arrived there, it was already a working class neighborhood with a 'distinct, diverse character that set it apart from the surrounding city'[2]. It was home to a thriving African-Canadian community as well as several institutions catering to the poor of Toronto, such as the Holy Trinity Church and the Poor House[3]. The outside city had already started to encroach in as several major Toronto institutions, University College, Ontario Legislator, the Victoria Hospital for Sick Children, began to appear along the borders. Squeezed between these large structures, the complex, ethno-diverse neighborhood continued to grow steadily through to the 1880s with pockets of poverty. It wasn't until Toronto witnessed a huge boom in immigration between 1871 and 1911 (with immigrants from Eastern Europe, Italy and China), that municipal infrastructure became strained and the area became characterized by slum-like conditions. Its location made sense to settle in as it lay just up York Street, where early concentrations of boarding houses, labour bureaus and low rent shops were[4]. It was also close to the train station, which was very convenient for travelling workers. As the growth pushed development outward and older residents moved out, new immigrants crammed into the Ward's "cheap, filthy rooms in crumbling stucco-and-wood cottages"[5]. Many rooms in rooming houses were said to have "lacked the most basic sanitary amenities". This was a turning point for the city, as John Lorinc describes: "It was the moment when 'Toronto the good', a staunchly Anglo outpost preoccupied with defending its Christian values, came face to face with concentrated ethnic diversity and grinding poverty, all in one place."[6] In the early 20th century, the Ward is a textbook Heterotopia of Difference amidst the homogenous

1. Arlene Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to Inside the Circle* (Toronto ; Tonawanda, N.Y: Natural Heritage, 2011).
2. John Lorinc, Michael McClelland, and Ellen Scheinberg, eds., *The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2015).
3. Ibid.,
4. Robert F. Harney, *Immigrants : A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930*, 1975.
5. Lorinc, McClelland, and Scheinberg, *The Ward*., 15
6. Ibid., 15

Anglo Scot Northern Irish hegemony. Furthermore, while the outside world responded to this difference with varying levels of repulsion and anxiety, a clear exoticism had set in as well, as documenters of every medium rushed to the streets to capture the striking conditions of the city's infamous slum. More daring city dwellers would also be drawn into the establishments of the Ward for a taste of the exotic. As John Lorinc describes: "intrepid diners ventured in The Ward for Italian ice cream or the 'chop suey' served in Chinese eateries."[7] In this way, the Ward started attracting the first of its tourist clientele.

Early Chinese Businesses and Social Organization

The Chinese community increasingly moved to the Ward after WWI as the Italian and Jewish community who previously occupied the neighborhood moved out. It eventually became large and established enough to become legitimized as the first Chinese ethnic enclave in Toronto, and the "First Chinatown" was born. The population was very homogeneous, with most settlers hailing from the Taishan county of Si Yi ("Four Counties") located just Southwest of the capital city of Guangdong, the capital city of Guangzhou province. Like other Chinatowns, the community was predominantly men, who came as gold miners or railway labourers, who were unable to bring their wives or children to the country due to the prohibitive immigration policy. Barred from higher professions like law or medicine, the Chinese immigrants opened businesses, of which laundries became the most prominent. (see figure 3.5). The hand laundry was a niche business opportunity that suited perfectly to the social and economic position of the Chinese community at this time. The laundry could double as a place of residence as well as a place of business, which meant more money saved to send back to families in China. It had low start-up costs ($500 approx.), allowing a few Chinese kinsmen to partner together to share the costs and the labour. Toronto labour leaders and trade guilds, anxious about the Chinese laundries crowding the white laundries out of business, spread fears about 'the awful menace lurking behind the partitions or screens of some of these innocent appearing laundries'.[8] This culminated in a municipal bylaw in 1902 that would impose a graduated licensing fee of $5-20 on all Chinese laundries. Soon after WWI, Chinese restaurants began to experience major growth. It had the same advantage of doubling as a home and workplace, however it had higher profit margins than the laundry, with a higher upfront cost ($1000-$2000)[9]. This higher profit is presumably due to restaurants being more successful with the wider Canadian community. As

7. Ibid., 17
8. Jack Canuck (September 16, 1911): 10
9. Richard H. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown: The Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community* (AMS Press, 1989).

fig.3.2 Context map showing boundaries of The Ward within the boundaries of the City of Toronto and former City of Toronto.

fig.3.3 (Also pictured on opposite page) Map of the Ward c. 1950s. A concentration of Chinese businesses exists along the South end of Elizabeth St.

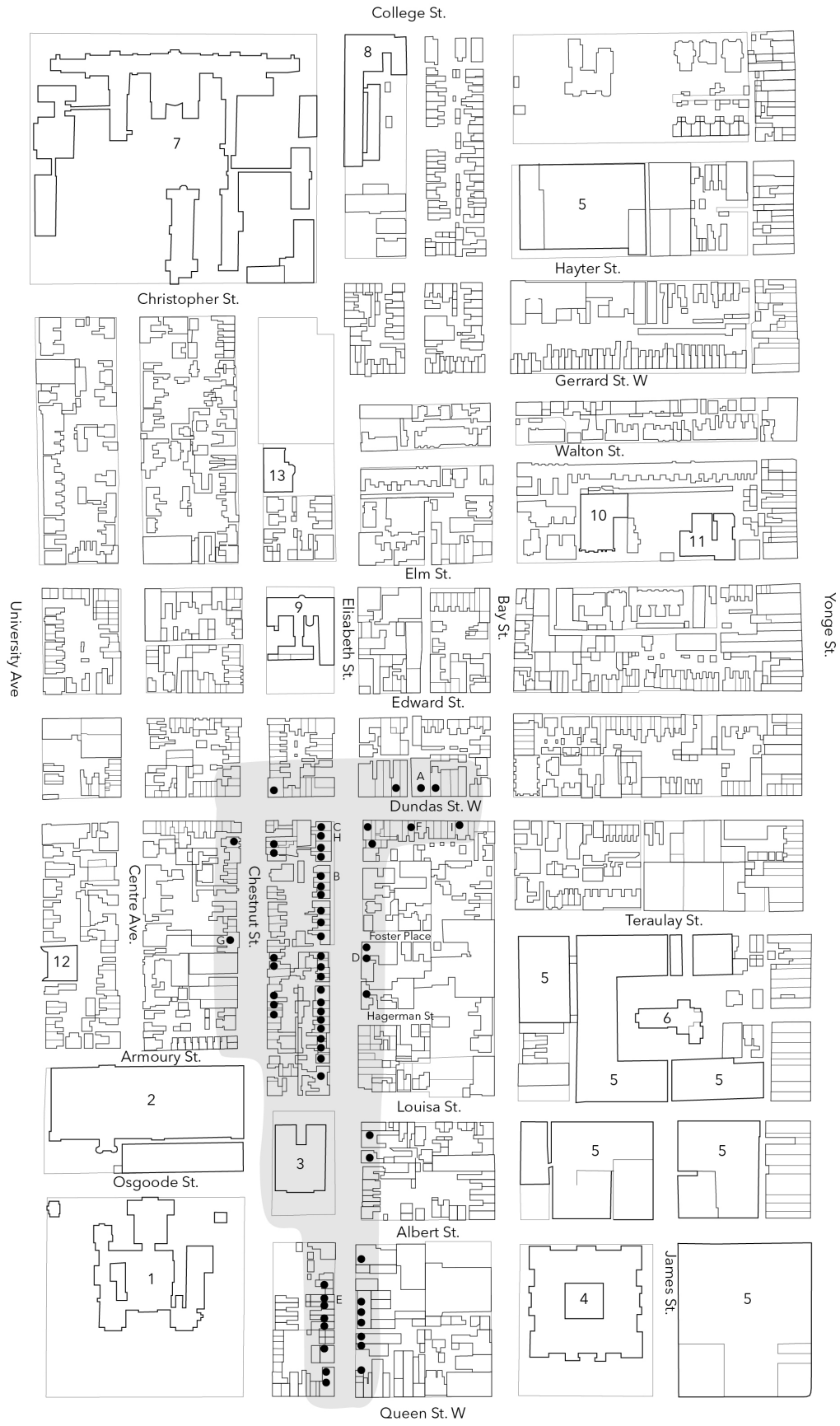
Based on Goad's Fire Insurance Map 1924

1 Osgoode Hall
2 The Armouries
3 Registry Office
4 City Hall and Court House
5 Eaton's Factories
6 Holy Trinity Church
7 Toronto General Hospital
8 Victoria Hospital for Sick Children
9 Poor House
10 Methodist Church
11 YWCA
12 Goel Tzedec Synagogue
13 Hester How Public School

A Sai Woo Restaurant
B Lichee Garden
C Kwong Chow Restaurant
D Nanking Restaurant
E Lung Kong Kung So Association
F Lem Si Ho Tong Association
G Chinese United Church
H Ship Toy Yuen Theatre
I Chinese United Dramatic Society

● Known Chinese Occupancy

General area of Chinatown


College St.
Christopher St.
Hayter St.
Gerrard St. W
Walton St.
Elm St.
Edward St.
Dundas St. W
Teraulay St.
Foster Place
Hagerman St
Armoury St.
Louisa St.
Osgoode St.
Albert St.
Queen St. W
James St.
University Ave
Elisabeth St.
Bay St.
Yonge St.
Centre Ave.
Chestnut St.
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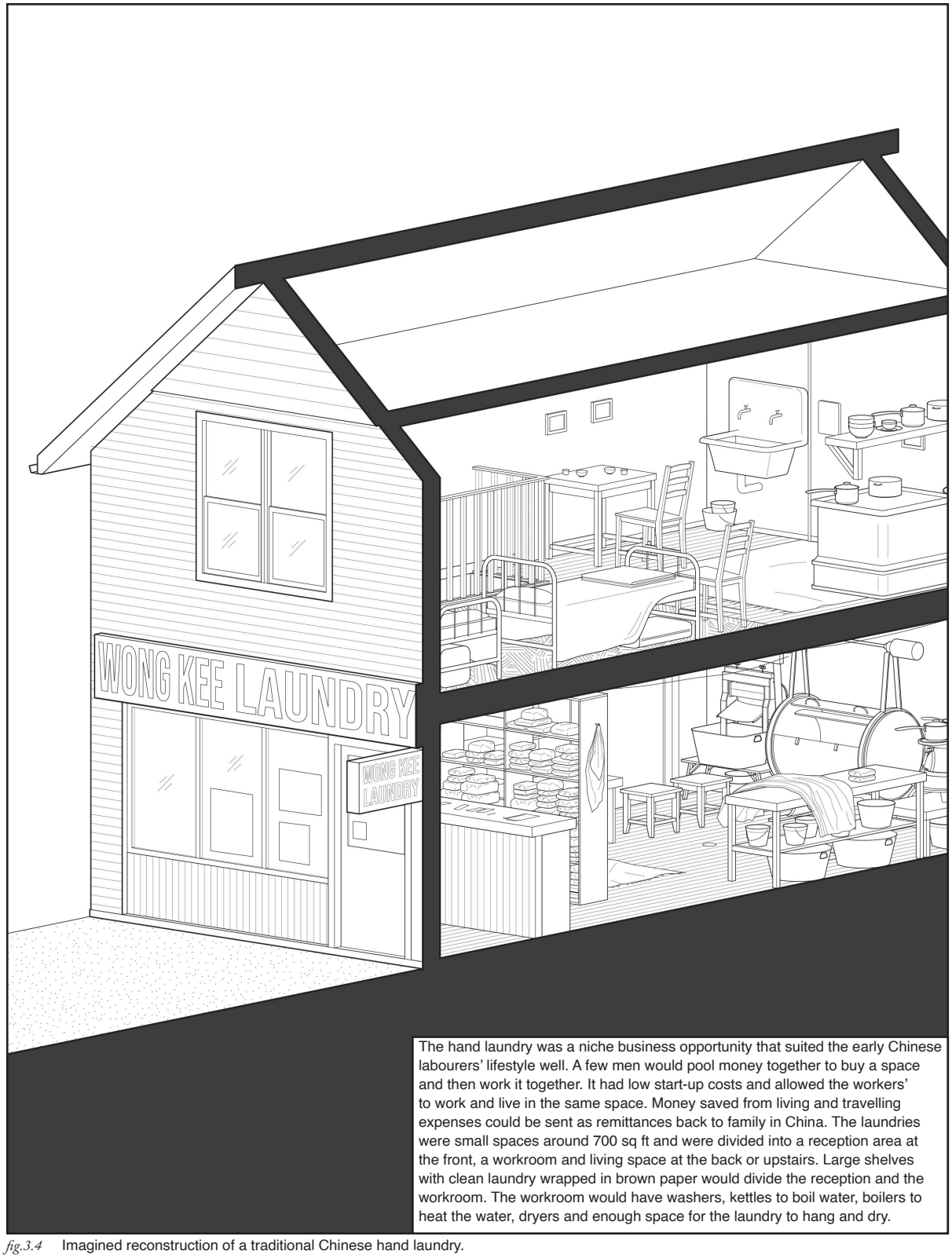


The hand laundry was a niche business opportunity that suited the early Chinese labourers' lifestyle well. A few men would pool money together to buy a space and then work it together. It had low start-up costs and allowed the workers' to work and live in the same space. Money saved from living and travelling expenses could be sent as remittances back to family in China. The laundries were small spaces around 700 sq ft and were divided into a reception area at the front, a workroom and living space at the back or upstairs. Large shelves with clean laundry wrapped in brown paper would divide the reception and the workroom. The workroom would have washers, kettles to boil water, boilers to heat the water, dryers and enough space for the laundry to hang and dry.

fig.3.4 Imagined reconstruction of a traditional Chinese hand laundry.

fig.3.6 Three children standing in the reception area of a Chinese laundry c. 1956. Finshed and wrapped laundry orders are visible on the shelf behind the counter (Eveline Chao)

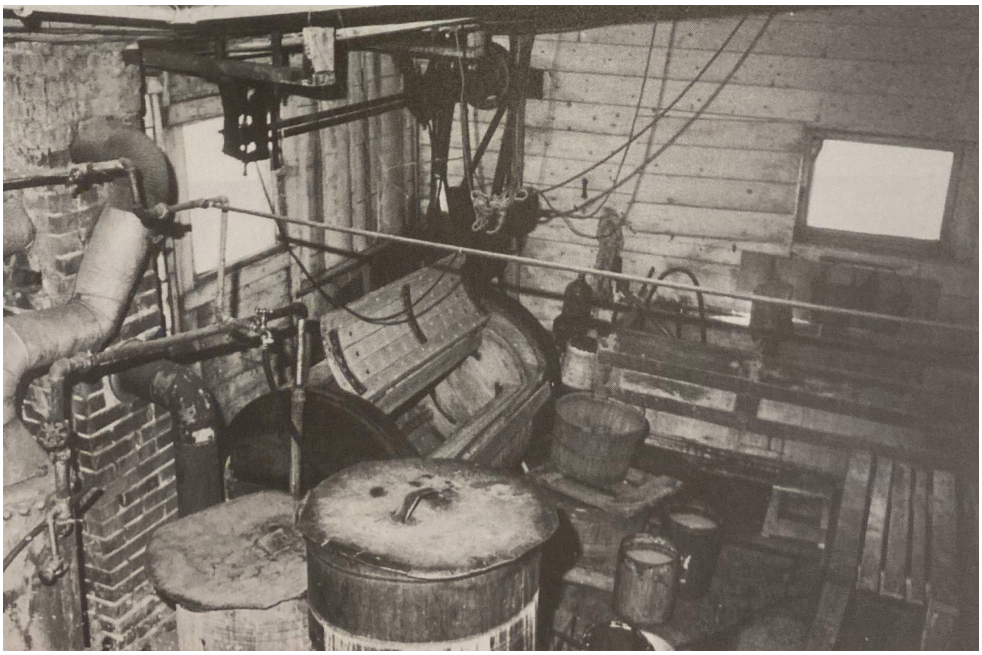


fig.3.5 Work room of a Chinese hand laundry. The manual belt-driven washer with a wooden cylindrical drum is pictured in the back. Also visible are buckets and barrels of water for the washing process. (Ban Seng Hoe)

fig.3.7 The corner of Elizabeth St and Louisa St (58-55 Elizabeth St) c.1937. Visible in the foreground is a Chinese pharmacy and cafe (City of Toronto Archives).

fig.3.8 88-98 Elizabeth Street c.1937. A Chinese cafe/restaurant is picture in the foreground (City of Toronto Archives).

restaurants exported a specific cultural product (Chinese food), which appealed to white residents' sense of exoticism rather than a universal service (laundry, which had competition from steam-powered white laundries).

Typical of most other Chinatowns at this time, traditional associations played a crucial role in the everyday functioning of the community. There was a great growth in traditional associations between 1900-1923 as the Chinese in Toronto began to settle in a concentrated area in the Ward. According to Thompson, there were thirteen clan and district associations in Toronto in 1910 (see figure 3.9). This number increased to twenty-three by 1950[10]. Unlike some of the larger Chinatowns in the United States, these associations did not follow the hierarchical structure as mentioned on page 27, with clan associations joining to form larger district associations. Instead, the structural relationship between associations is more accurately depicted in figure 3.6, with clan and district associations as equal and separate organizations that are overseen by a CCBA. Political associations also formed out of the Chinatown Chinese' keen interest in the rapidly evolving political situation in China[11]. Associations aided with crucial community functions like lodging, employment and providing loans. The latter item is important as the Chinese were denied loans from Canadian banks until the 1960s. This rich network of associations was a necessary result of the intense social, political and economic segregation the Chinese faced in the early years in Toronto. They fostered strong ethnic and community solidarity and helped limit their contact with the White host society, resulting in heightened resistance to assimilation.-

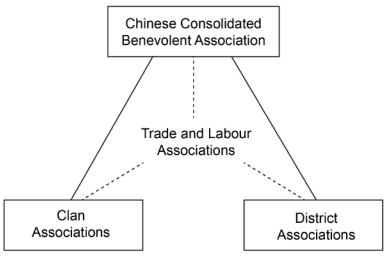


fig.3.9 Structure of traditional associations interrelationships Toronto's Chinatown (Richard Thompson)

The Great Depression and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 brought about a decline in both the Chinese businesses (laundries and restaurants) and associations. In addition to the harsh economic conditions, with no new immigrants coming into the neighborhood, associations and businesses could not replace ownership and membership, resulting in the closing of many institutions. The entire Chinatown community suffered a period of decline until 1947, when the exclusion act was lifted.

Transition and Displacement

The period between 1947-1967 was marked by a gradual diffusion of the all-male homogeneous society that defined the era before it, as well

10. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown.*

11. In the early twentieth century, China was poised to undergo immense political upheaval as the ruling imperial government was about to be overthrown to establish a new Republic, led by politician and physician Sun Yat Sen. In Toronto, political associations were formed both to support the efforts of the Guomintang (National People's Party) to overthrow the imperial government, as well as to support the "Chinese Empire Reform Association" who wanted to reform and modernize the Qing government. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown*.

Year	Population	Laundries	Businesses Restaurants	Others
1880	11(?)	4	n/a	n/a
1891	33	24	n/a	n/a
1901	159	95	n/a	n/a
1908	1000***	237	13	2
1917	1800	358	32	9
1923	2500	471	202	9

fig.3.10 Chinese Population and Chinese Businesses in Toronto, 1880-1923 (Richard Thompson)

Name	Type
Lung Kong Kung So	multiple surname association (Low, Kwan, Chong, Chow)
Soo Yuen Tong	multiple surname association (Lui, Fong, Kwong)
Lem Si Ho Tong	single surname - Lem
Li She Kong So	single surname - Lee
Wong Wun Sun Kung So	single surname - Wong
Mark Chee Hing Tong	single surname - Mark
Low Kong Kung So	single surname - Ng
Wong Min Shing Kung So	single surname - Wong
Kwan Lung Si Tong	single surname - Kwan
Hong Tong Kung So	single surname - Hong
To Cheng Tong	composition not known
Kong Chow Hui Kuan	district association - Canton
Kwong Hoi Hui Kuan	district association - Kwong Hoi, south of Toisan
Added after 1950	
Chu Family Association	single surname - Chu
Chu Lun Kon Sol	multiple surname (Tam, Hui, Tse, Yuen)
Fong Lun Society	multiple surname (Seto and Sit)
Chan Wing Tong	single surname - Chan
Eng Suey Sun Society	single surname - Eng
Ho Loo Kung So	single surname - Ho
Kwong Pon Association	district association - Kwong Pon county
Sing Buck Association	district association - Pun Yee county
Lung Kong Tin Yee Association	multiple surname
Yee Association	single surname - Yee

fig.3.11 Clan and District Associations in Toronto (Richard Thompson)

as further legitimization of Chinese establishments within the city. The lifting of Chinese Exclusion Act did not immediately open immigration to all Chinese, rather, it only allowed for family reunification (spouses and children under 18), and later after a 1962 amendment, the addition of siblings and married children[12]. The introduction of a new generation of Chinese children however, raised and educated in Canada, started to break the homogeneity of the community as they became assimilated into the community. Census results point to Canadian born Chinese adults choosing to work in different jobs and having different education levels than their rural raised restauranteur or laundry running parents[13]. Further breaking of the unified mindset was the political upheaval in China in the late 1940s that pitted the Communist Party (led by Mao Zedong) against the Nationalist Party (led by Chiang Kai Shek). Toronto's Chinatown had supporters on both sides of the political divide, which would cause some tensions, specifically within politically minded associations. Associations' power also began to diminish as increasingly, its functions were becoming obsolete. The PRC's closing off of China phased out the function of sending remittances back to family, and its role as a credit association was not needed once banks started to lend to the Chinese in the 1960s. Furthermore, the growing generation of Canadian born Chinese did not need the aid of the associations, having been already culturally accustomed to the host society.

Chinatown restaurants in this era saw the most growth of any of the other Chinatown businesses, growing from 89 in 1950 to 174 by 1966[14]. While most of the restaurants were small, humble 20-seater establishments mostly catering to the Chinatown residents, four landmark restaurant openings (known as 'The Big 4') in this era began to redefine this relationship. These four were the Nanking Tavern, Lichee Garden, Sai Woo and Kwong Chow restaurants. These four restaurants had much larger banquet hall dining rooms and (especially in the case of Sai Woo and Kwong Chow) were frequented by many outside the Chinatown community (see figure 3.13). One resident recalls the grandeur at Lichee Garden with "its expansive ballroom-style dining room fitted with a grand piano, delicious ethnic food, and exotic drinks"[15].

12. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878.*
13. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown.*
14. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown*, 108.
15. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878*, 107.

A new civic square

Toronto began it's formal city planning efforts far later than many

other major North American cities. In 1943, the first Master Plan of Toronto was created, and in it was the long-contemplated plan of constructing a new 'civic square' for the city. This follows on the ideas of City Beautiful decades prior, as well as plans of urban renewal that had been sweeping cities across the U.S. The 1949 Official Plan went so far as to designate 'redevelopment areas': which were defined as areas where "the assessed value of buildings was less than double the assessed value of the land"[16] and were thus uneconomic. Being the slum that it was, the Ward was a natural target for such a revitalization. The city approved plans (without public consultation) to expropriate two-thirds of the area for the construction of Toronto's New City Hall in 1947. At this time, Chinese people owned 55% of the property in Chinatown. According to several accounts, compensation for the expropriated buildings was much less than what the Chinese owners had paid for[17]. With much of the building fabric slated for demolition, the existing Chinese businesses and residents had no choice but to move. They eventually settled a little bit further west at the intersection of Dundas St. and Spadina Ave. the location of today's Chinatown West. A subsequent plan to widen Dundas St. W was also proposed, which would have displaced all the businesses on one side. However, due to aggressive activism by the Save Chinatown committee (a united group of representatives from many of Chinatown's associations and interest groups), city council tabled the plan. Interestingly, what remained at the Old Chinatown or "Chinatown Proper" were the businesses that were known to belong to the tourist market. Those included the "Big Four" restaurants, as well as emporiums and gift shops. This led the old Chinatown to be considered "tourists Chinatown" while new business owners in Chinatown West would increasingly market Chinatown West as the more "authentic Chinatown" by contrast, hoping to lure more discerning tourists there.[18]

Also in this era, as a result of the intense displacement pressures, Toronto Chinatown's business leaders engaged in explicit strategic self-orientalization to maintain space for Chinese in the city. In the mid 1950s, an association of "responsible Chinese citizens in the City of Toronto" called the Chinese Community Council proposed the construction of a new square, tentatively titled "Cathay Plaza" that would become the center of Chinese commercial and cultural activity. In the application proposal, the Chinese Community Council stated this square would be compensation for the "loss of the old China Town which is presently disappearing in the Elisabeth Street area"[19]. It was

16. Richard White, *Planning Toronto: The Planners, The Plans, Their Legacies, 1940-80,* Illustrated edition (Vancouver ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2016).
17. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878,* 105.
18. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown.*
19. "Chinese Community Council" from Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 723, File 303

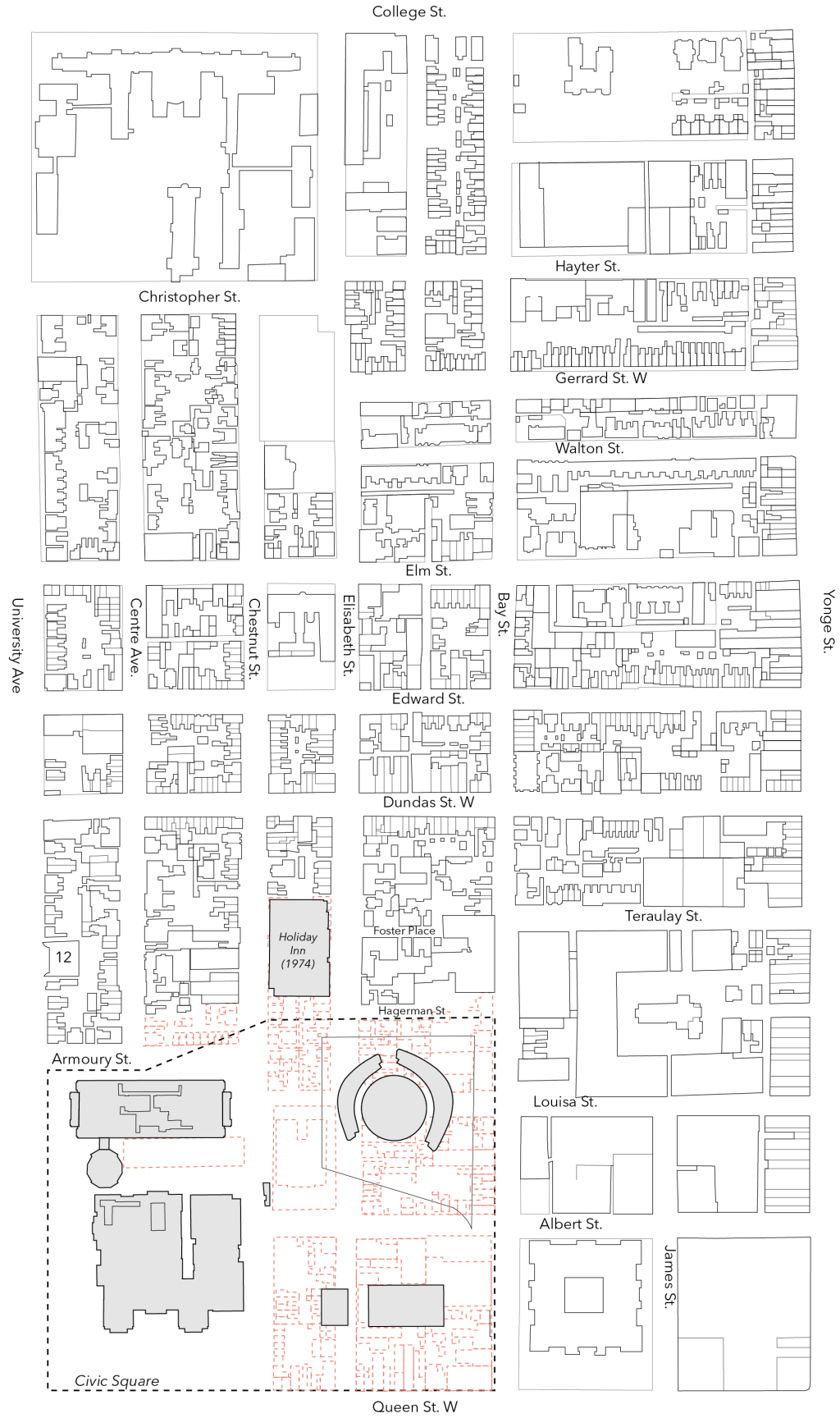
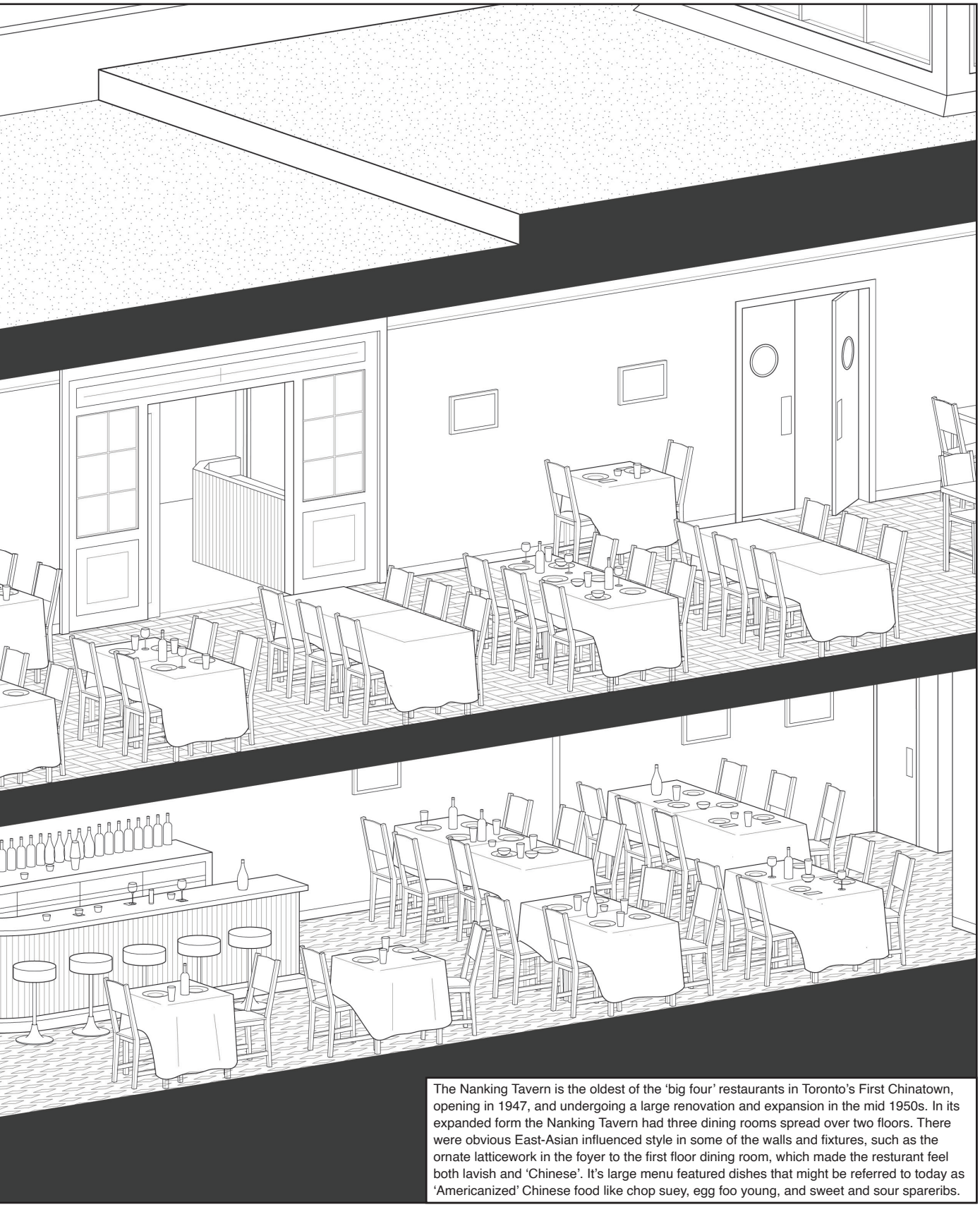


fig.3.12 The extent of land expropriated for the construction of New City Hall and square.

fig.3.13 Map showing the location of new Chinatown West in relationship to the Ward, the proposed civic square and the original Chinatown

fig.3.14 Aerial Photograph of Chinatown West, 1969, City of Toronto

fig.3.15 Visual reconstruction of Nanking Tavern showing the front elevation and two levels of dining rooms on the south end of the building



The Nanking Tavern is the oldest of the 'big four' restaurants in Toronto's First Chinatown, opening in 1947, and undergoing a large renovation and expansion in the mid 1950s. In its expanded form the Nanking Tavern had three dining rooms spread over two floors. There were obvious East-Asian influenced style in some of the walls and fixtures, such as the ornate latticework in the foyer to the first floor dining room, which made the resturant feel both lavish and 'Chinese'. It's large menu featured dishes that might be referred to today as 'Americanized' Chinese food like chop suey, egg foo young, and sweet and sour spareribs.

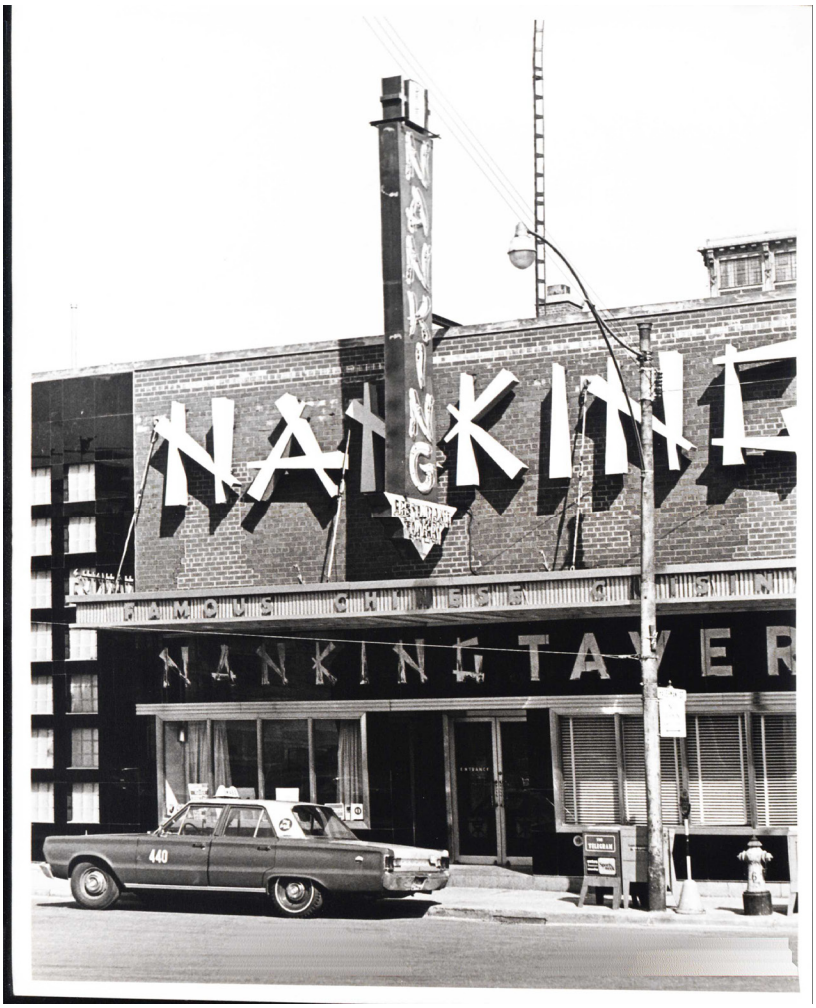


fig.3.16 Nanking Tavern c.1950 (City of Toronto Archives)

fig.3.17 An ad for Lichee Garden that ran in the Toronto Daily Star in August 28 1948.

fig.3.18 Another ad that ran almost a year later on June 10, 1949. The language has been shifted to target "discrimating" people searching for 'authentic' Chinese food. (Counter Culture Network)

sited to be in a central downtown location close to the newly proposed Toronto Civic Square, be around 360,000 square feet and would contain "a hotel, an office building or buildings, stores, a community hall and all of the recreational facilities and restaurants which have been displaced by the proposed construction of the new civic square on Elisabeth Street."[20] Already evident in the touristic programming of the square and the use of the old poetic Eurocentric word for China in the name (Cathay), this square was to be both a community space and a tourist spectacle. The proposal made clear the inspiration for this square was taken from the example of New Chinatown in Los Angeles whose success as a tourist destination, according to the Community Council has "given [the Los Angeles Chinese Community] a central community organisation that is second to none on this continent." It is unclear as to why exactly this proposal was never realised, although opinions expressed in a 1962 memorandum from the Commissioner of Planning expresses that city officials did not see buildings with "Chinoiserie" as compatible with the office development taking place in the area. In fact, a chronological analysis of the various iterations of the plaza shows a gradual lessening of the "Chinese" elements of the square and a greater presence of modern office buildings (see comparison between figure 3.17 and 3.18). After this proposal was shelved, there continued to be interest in self-orientalization with smaller scale buildings on Elisabeth Street, with plans to replace buildings with "a pagoda-type restaurant, an old-style Chinese theatre, tea houses, temples and Chinese gardens"[21], which never quite became realized either. However, it is clear that these techniques developed out of a need to save what was left of Chinatown. George Chow, liaison director of the Chinese community said: "Unless we make Chinatown more attractive, we will be squeezed out by the City."[22]

20. Ibid.,
21. 1962 Memorandum from Planning Department, Fonds 2032, Series 723, File 303
22. Ibid.,

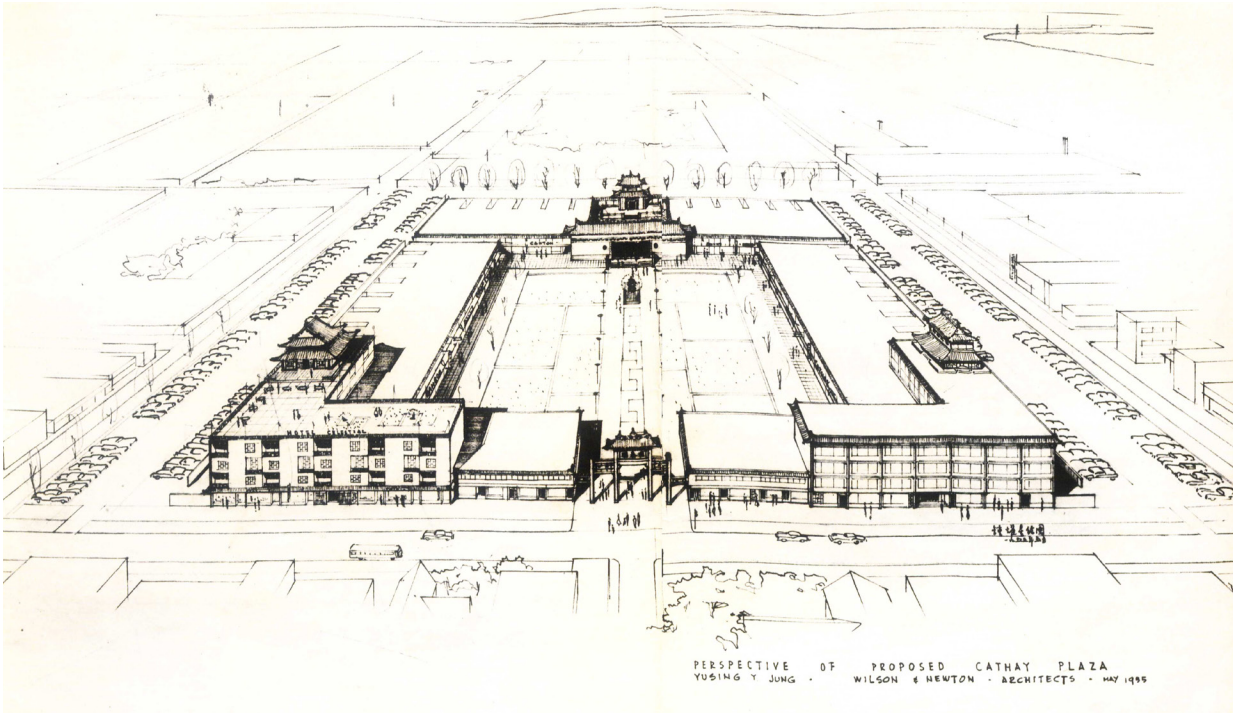


fig.3.20 Perspective of a proposed Cathay Plaza from May 1955 by Wilson and Newton Architects. This was the initial visualization submitted with the proposal of Cathay Plaza to the city by Chinese Community Center (City of Toronto Archives).

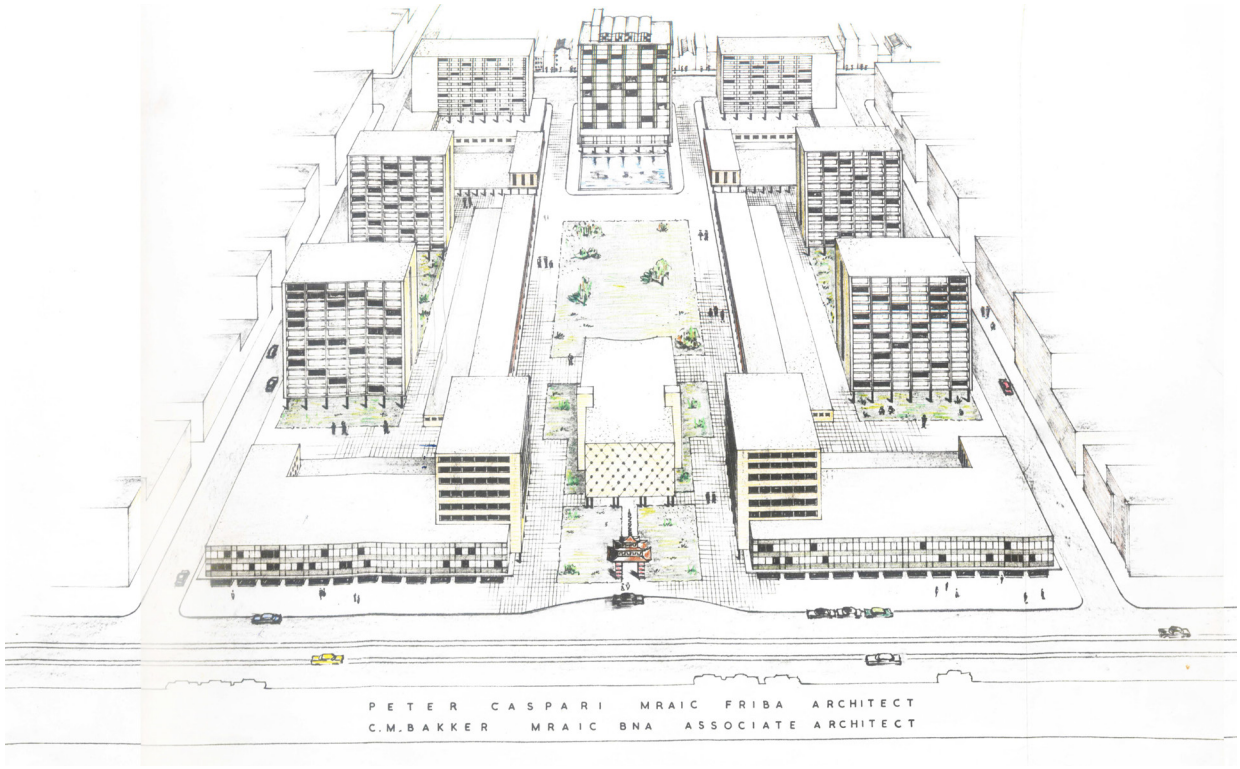


fig.3.21 An updated perspective of Cathay Plaza from 1956 by Peter Caspari Architects. Note the added modern-style office buildings and the lessening of visually 'Chinese' elements to just a singular ornate doorway at the main entrance to the plaza ((City of Toronto Archives).

Mass Immigration and Chinatown West

The period starting 1967 and extending through to the late 90s is characterized by great diversification and growth, spurred by a huge increase in immigration (see figure 3.19). The introduction of the points system in 1967 opened immigration to people based on skillset and perceived ability to contribute to Canada's economy. This attracted immigrants that were higher skilled, with higher education levels and higher income. Several other world events also contributed to the boom in immigration. After the death of Mao Ze Dong, the CCP's second generation leadership opened mainland China's doors to family reunification, which led many women and children to join their families in Canada. Ongoing tensions between Mainland China and Taiwan also encouraged many Taiwanese immigrants to come to Canada[23]. After the end of the Vietnam War, many thousands of refugees from South-East Asia, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, found a home in Toronto. Some of these new immigrants would settle in Chinatown, but some chose to settle in the suburbs of North York and later in the newly forming ethnoburbs in the GTA. In any case, Chinatown emerged from the 90's a vastly more complex and heterogeneous society than before.

At Spadina and Dundas, a new dynamic 'Chinatown West' was forming. As had happened at first Chinatown, the Chinese community took over brick two-three story shophouses that were being vacated by the Jewish community in the 1960s[24]. Commercial activity was concentrated on Spadina Ave and Dundas St. W with residential streets surrounding it. Dundas St. W had buildings sporting split-level retail, a short-lived commercial building type popular in the 1960s that allowed two levels of commercial activity to front the street. This type was phased out in the zoning bylaws due to its inaccessibility, however it did allow small, resettling Chinese businesses to occupy smaller spaces and save on rent. This typology would later become symbolic of the Chinatown West neighborhood 'character' and preserved in planning policy by the city. Commercial property contrasted greatly with the residential fabric in the area in that it was extremely costly, valued at $75000 - $125000.[25] Residential side streets had majority single-family Victorian style homes, which were offered for relatively low rent (two-thirds of Chinatown were renters) but were also quite affordable to own, valued at around $50 000 to $70 000. Due to the expensive commercial property at Chinatown West, some business owners started opening shops on Gerrard St and Broadview Ave on

23. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878.*
24. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878,* 133.
25. Ibid.,134.

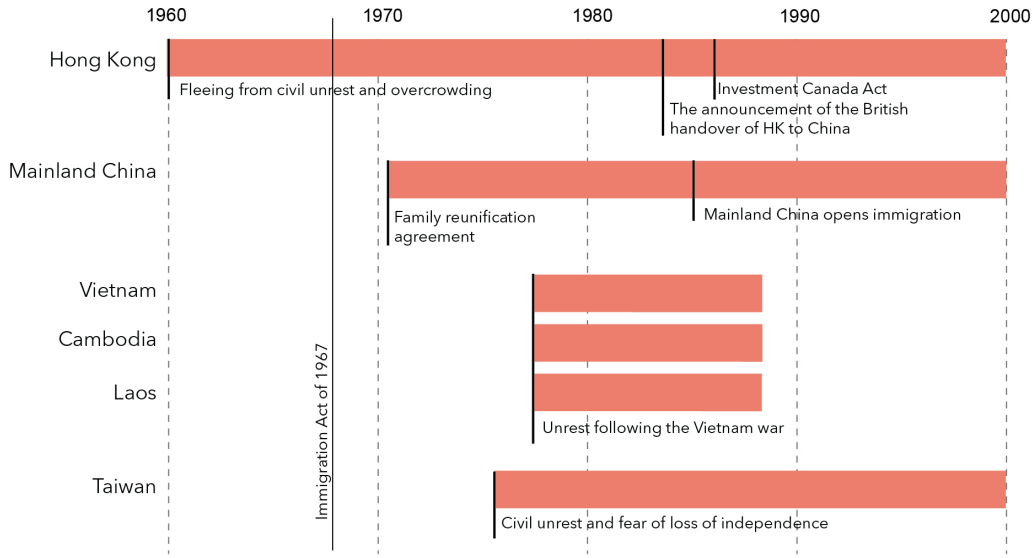


fig.3.22 Chinatown West absorbed many waves of immigration from East and Southeast Asia from the 60s-90s

the east end of the city starting in the 1970s, by successfully rezoning the formerly residential area into low density commercial. Within a few years, there was a small but concentrated Chinese community and commercial presence there, which became known as Chinatown East.

It is worth noting that the area at Dundas and Spadina is also home to significant affordable housing projects within its vicinity, most of which were built during this era. According to David Hulchinski, professor of housing and urban development at University of Toronto, the period between 1964-84 was characterized by a great commitment by the federal government to building inclusive social housing[26]. This is demonstrated by the approval of *Regent's Park* in 1964, the first and largest social housing project in Canada on the city's east end. A few minutes walk away from the intersection of Dundas St and Spadina Ave is a comparably sized public housing project called *Alexandra Park*, built in 1968. Like Regent's Park, it fell into decline and experienced many social problems. Due to residents' frustration with the public housing system, the project was converted to a housing co-op (Atkinson co-op), managed by the residents, between the period of 1992-2003.[27] Another project is the Beverley Place Hydro Block, located at 6 Henry Street. It was built in 1978 as a project of CityHome, the city's not-for-profit housing provider, and designed by A.J. Diamond (of Diamond and Schmitt). It successfully provided homes to low-income individuals and families, notwithstanding the many newly

26. John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 9

27. Jorge Sousa and Jack Quarter, 'Converting a Public Housing Project into a Tenant-Managed Housing Co-Operative: A Canadian Case Study', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment 19*, no. 2 (1 June 2004): 187–98, https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOHO.0000030675.41440.f0.

The split level retail was a short lived typology that flourished before the development of accessibility guidelines in zoning bylaws. Outside of Chinatown, it was also present in locations like Yorkville, where it has since been phased out due to inaccessibiility. In Chinatown however, this typology is now being preserved in planning policy for a short section of Dundas St W as it has come to define the special character of Chinatown West. This typology was helpful for Chinese community members resettling from the first Chinatown in the 70s to 80s as it allowed small businesses more affordable rent for smaller spaces, which suited the structure of their businesses. The shaded staircases also provided space for further streetside vending and/or display of merchandise (see figure 3.24).

fig.3.23 Visual reconstruction of an imagined split level retail building on Dundas St. W.

fig.3.24 476-480 Dundas St W split level retail entrances. Restaurants and stores line the bottom two levels while offices occupy the upper floors. Photo taken November 2022.

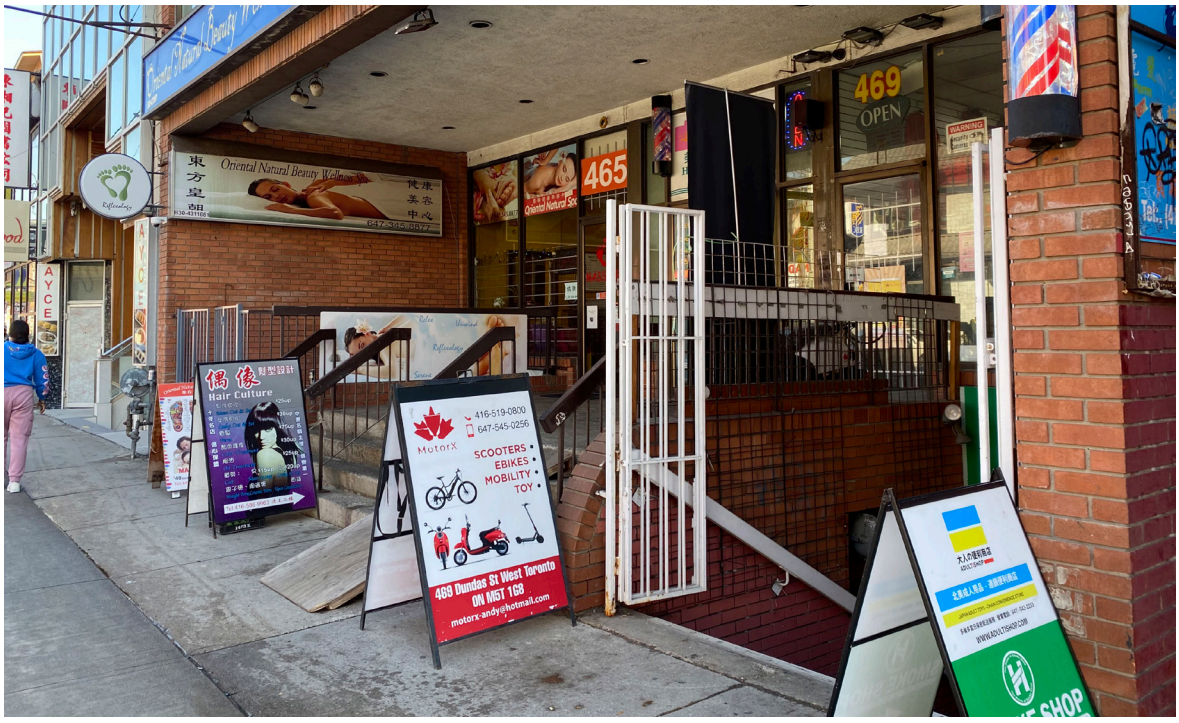


fig.3.25 Double levels of retail access from the street make for more intense density of signage at street level.

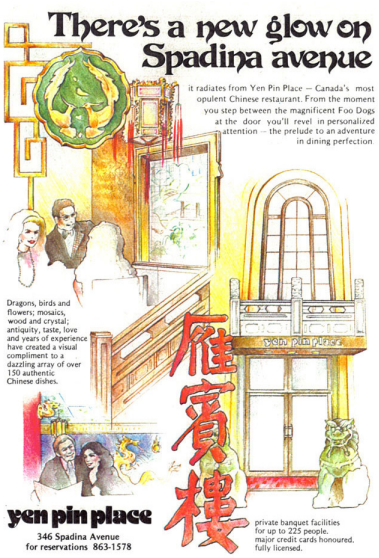


fig.3.26 Yen Pin Palace Advertisement (Jamie Bradburn)

moving in Chinese immigrants in the area. Yet another public housing project is located on Larch St., directly off of Dundas St. W, completed in 1996 as part of the Federal/Provincial Non-Profit Housing Program to support people with low and moderate incomes.[28,29] This Larch St. development consists of two buildings that are three storeys high, one of which wraps around a central courtyard. Undoubtedly, the heightened presence of social housing in this neighborhood, at precisely the time when Chinese immigrants and businesses were relocating as well as during a boom of new immigration from China and Southeast Asia, helped transition the newcomers as well as establish the neighborhood as firmly working class.

A few new restaurants opened up in Chinatown West that would use the same type of strategic self-orientalization that characterized the Big 4 in the old Chinatown. One example is Yen Pin Palace, the first of several Chinese banquet style restaurants that would occupy the building at the intersection of Spadina Ave. and St. Andrew Street. It was renovated inside and out in a 'Chinese style' including one wall of detailed ceramic reproductions of the Nine Dragon Wall. Another development completed in 1974 is China Court, a richly decorated shopping complex on 208-210 Spadina Avenue and replaced the former General Motors truck sales and shopping centre. It was complete with a central garden, pagodas, restaurants, groceries and several other retailers. It was developed by large Hong Kong based developer Manbro Holdings, who decided to replace the traditionally decorated place less than a decade later with a modest, concrete and glass shopping center that would cater to the taste of more wealthy Chinese shoppers[30] (see figure 3.24 and 3.25).

The roles and responsibilities of the traditional associations by this point had significantly declined due to lack of need, as progressive social and economic reform in the Canadian government and society increasingly recognized Chinese rights. Traditional associations now served not much more than social clubs that would hold space for the declining membership to socialize and play games. However, new associations formed that would represent the increasingly disparate voices of the Chinatown community. Thompson's 1989 study separated the Chinatown Chinese into four groups divided by class (see figure 3.29). These groups, particularly the Chinese Bourgeoisie and the Chinese Proletariat, have highly contrasting ideas about the future of Chinatown. While the bourgeoisie seeks to bring in large properties and develop Chinatown into a highly desirable

28. Jamie Bradburn, 'The Backstreets of Toronto: Larch Street', *JB's Warehouse & Curio Emporium* (blog), accessed 6 October 2022, http://jbwarehouse.blogspot.com/2007/01/1064-backstreets-of-toronto-larch-st.html.
29. Delegated Approval Form, City of Toronto, https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/97e7-2017-154-7-20-Larch-74-78-and-80-Grange-Rd.pdf
30. Bradburn, 'Past Pieces of Toronto'.

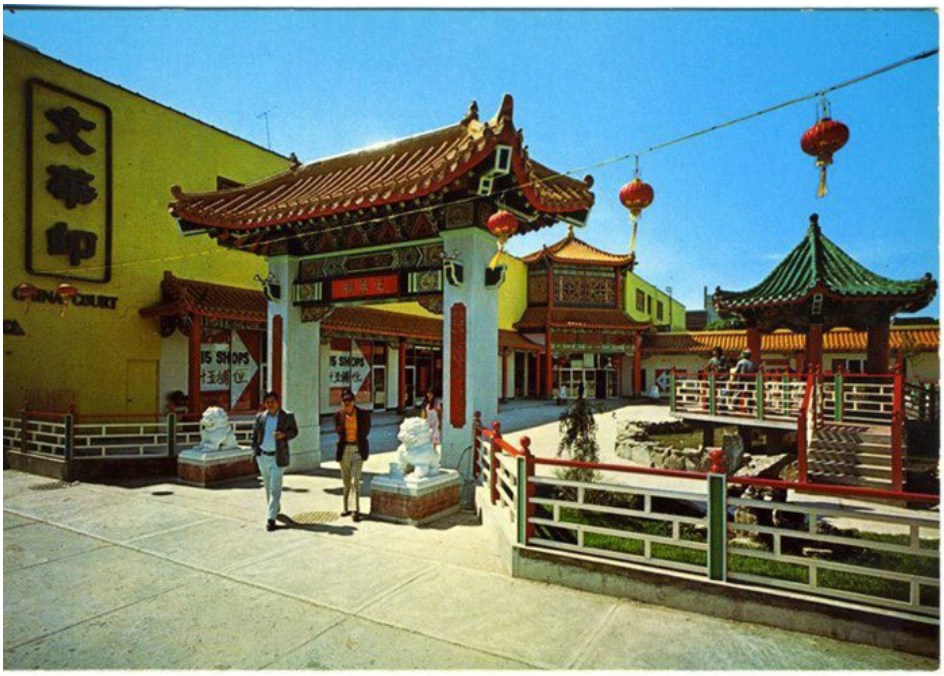


fig.3.27 China Court, developed by Manbro Holdings taken circa 1980s (Jeff Low).

fig.3.28 A concrete and glass condo mall called 'Chinatown Center' replaced China Court in 1995. Photograph taken in November 2022.

fig.3.29 Garment stores and factories fill the Reading Building at 116-124 Spadina Ave in 1984, just south of Chinatown West. The south end of Spadina Ave was the center of Toronto's once booming garment trade. In the 1980s and 1990s, these garment factories would employ many immigrant women, including Chinese immigrant women, who would work long hours for a modest income. (City of Toronto Archives)

fig.3.30 Two and three storey shophouses on the east side of Spadina Ave near Dundas St W in Chinatown in 1984. A Chinese hair salon is visible on the far left, followed by a Chinese restaurant, jewelry store, clothing store and linen store (City of Toronto Archives).


GOLDEN HARVEST THEATRE
皇家銀行

fig.3.31 The North East corner of Dundas and Spadina in 1984 was home to an RBC and the Golden Harvest Theatre, a theatre that specialized in showcasing cinema from east Asia in both Cantonese and Mandarin and was highly popular with the growing population from Hong Kong in this area (City of Toronto Archives).

tourist area, the proletariat fear development will price them out of their homes and jobs. Members of the Chinese "New Middle Class" made up of predominantly students and Chinese Canadians, formed activist groups that advocated for the rights of the working class, who due to busy schedules and language barriers, could not protest for themselves. They successfully fought back against many attempts at urban renewal in the neighborhood including a land expropriation attempt by the University of Toronto and the extension of the Spadina Expressway. Perhaps the most contentious fight however, was against members of the Chinese community themselves in an impassioned and long-drawn out battle for zoning changes to the Part II plan of Southeast Spadina, or what came to be known as the "Chinatown Plan"(see figure 3.30).

The Part II plan was tentatively drafted by the Southeast Spadina planners after seven years of consulting with the Chinatown Steering Committee, which was an open-door committee of any residents, workers and/or property owners who showed up to the meetings. Over the years, the Steering Committee developed a dedicated membership of Chinatown social workers and activists advocating for the rights and stability of the Chinatown working class[31]. Based on their input, the Part II plan protected the existing character of both the commercial and residential areas, as well as the garment factories, which would prevent future high-rise residential development from encroaching on the neighborhood and driving up rents and property prices. However, Manbro holdings, a highly wealthy investment firm formed by the Man brothers, proposed a multimillion dollar shopping and high-priced residential complex in the heart of downtown. Under the Part II plan, this proposal would not pass. However because the Plan had not been finalized into policy yet, the firm entered into an intense fight against the social workers to change the Part II plan for their favor. As the firm had to demonstrate the changes were a reflection of popular support in the community, they established an association, the Toronto Chinatown Community Planning Association (TCCPA) which supposedly represented 11 480 Chinese from several associations. Two major associations involved were the Toronto Chinese Businessman's Association and Chinese Community Centre of Ontario. In response, the social workers also formed their own coalition (the Grange Community Coalition) made of various Chinese and non Chinese groups representing the interests of the working class. After a series of meetings, in which both groups argued

31. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown*, 340.

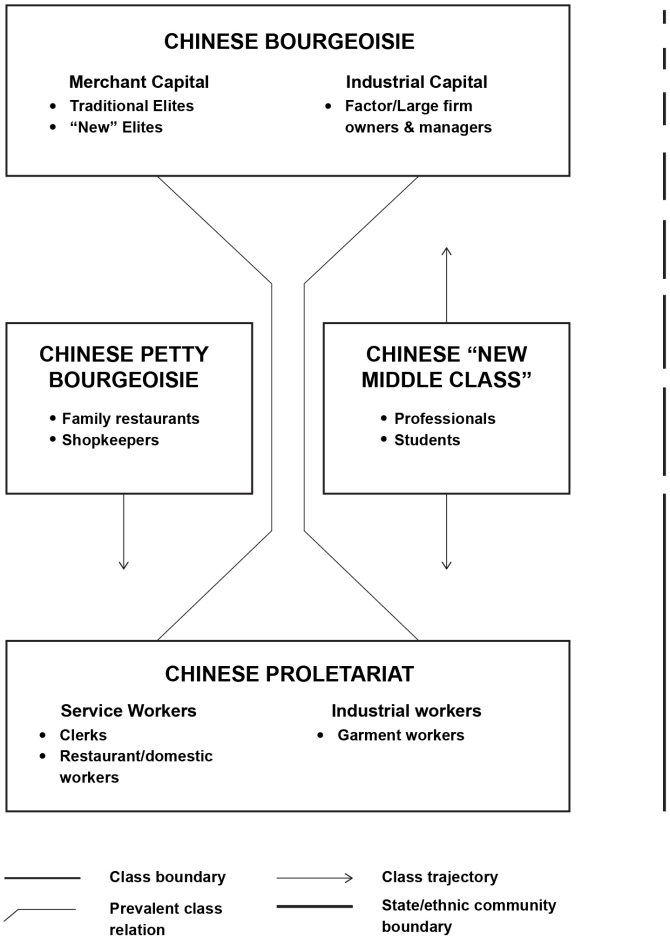


fig.3.32 Socio-economic breakdown of Chinese community from c. 1980s. (Richard Thompson)

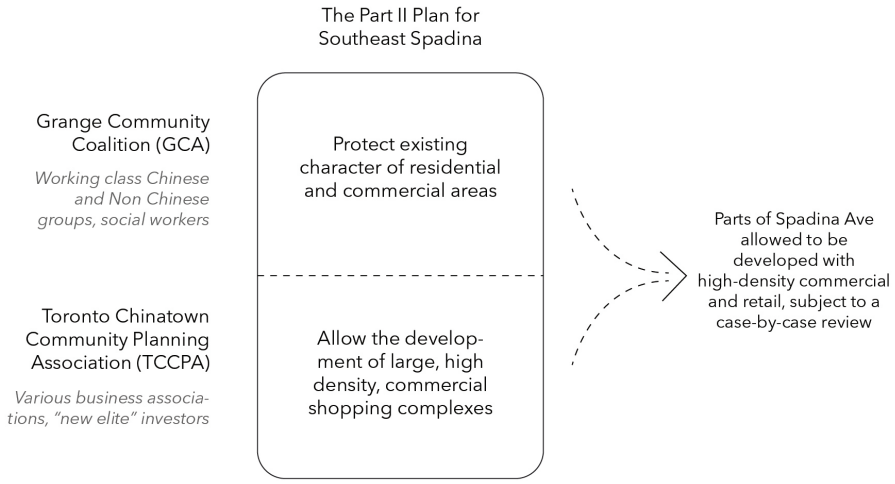


fig.3.33 Visual diagram explaining the discussion around Part II Plan for Southeast Spadina

tirelessly and passionately for their position, as well as, in the case of the entrepreneurs, with some petty intimidation tactics[32]. The result from the planning board was a measly compromise that both groups were unsatisfied with. A specific portion of Spadina would be allowed for high-rise, high density development, but would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the planners, with no guarantee of approval. The basic guideline for approval was that the development should have no more than 100 units per acre. The residential character as well as the low-rise commercial area on Dundas St W would be protected as per the original plan. More than any other event, this zoning fight demonstrated how class-based divides in the Chinatown community can become wound up in the negotiation of character and building fabric of the neighborhood. Moreover, this clash of working class and business class interests in Chinatown continues to present day represented by the Chinatown BIA and grassroots groups like FOCT (Friends of Chinatown).

Ethnoburb Expansion

In the late 1980s it was clear Chinese immigrants to Toronto were no longer looking at just Chinatown as a place to settle as several Chinese ethnoburbs started forming in Scarborough, Markham and Mississauga (see figure 3.31). This was spurred by the development of the condo mall in the suburbs. The introduction of the Canadian Immigrant Investment Program (CANIIP)[33] attracted a wave of more affluent Hong Kong investors who began developing the condo mall following a style of retailing seen prominently in East Asia (especially Hong Kong) with small spaces that were owned condominium style and thus promised infinite levels of freedom in terms of store design and retail mix. Pacific Mall in Markham is a foremost example of this type. These malls offered many of the same services and goods offered in Chinatown, in a suburban setting where there is a lot of space and more affordable housing. New immigrants began settling here, while some existing Chinatown residents were attracted to move there, which caused the Chinese growth in Chinatown to stagnate.

32. Thompson notes that "surly Chinese men roamed the auditorium threatening individuals who dared vote for the GCC's candidate with 'being traitors to the Chinese race' and 'you will be shot'. He also notes that while unverified, it was speculated the entrepreneurs brought in two charter buses of Chinese from other areas to swing the vote to their favor. Thompson, *Toronto's Chinatown*, 355.

33. Erica Allen-Kim, 'Condos in the Mall: Suburban Transnational Typological Transformations in Markham, Ontario: The Transnational Turn in Urban History', in *Making Cities Global*, 2017, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812294408-008.

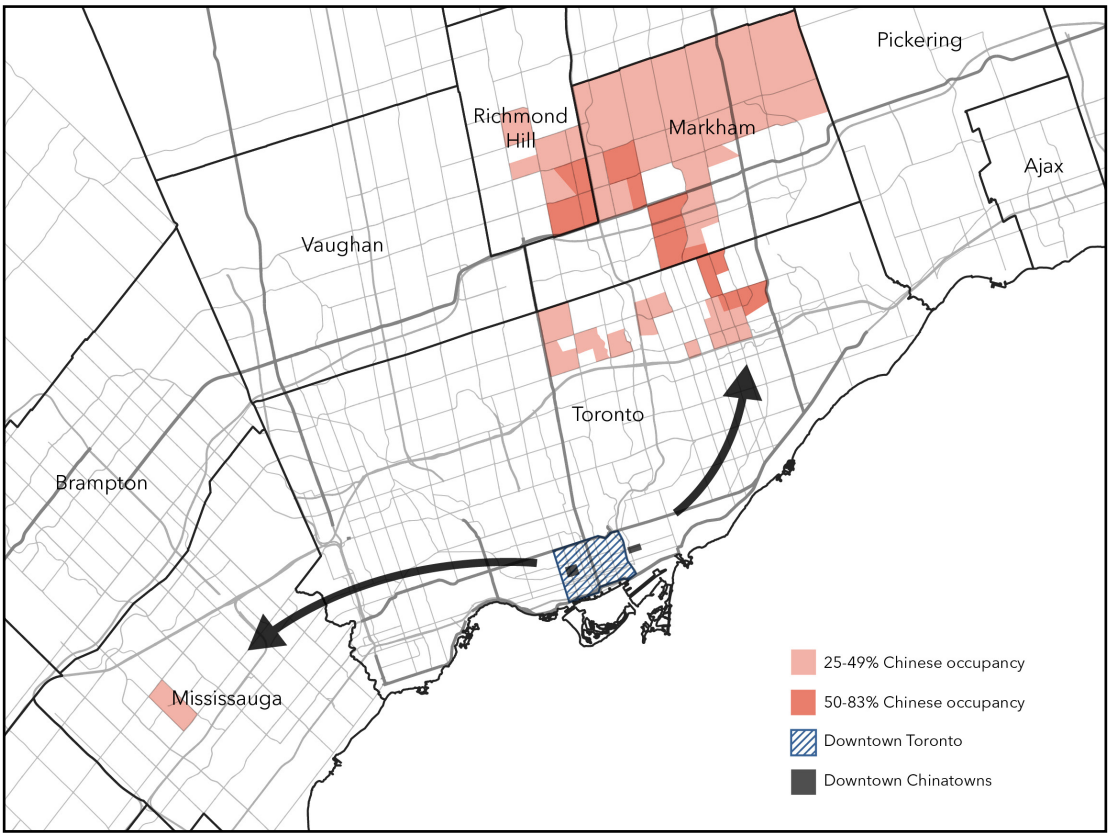


fig.3.34 Distribution of Chinese ethnic enclaves in the GTA (Adapted from diagram by Qadeer and Agrawal).

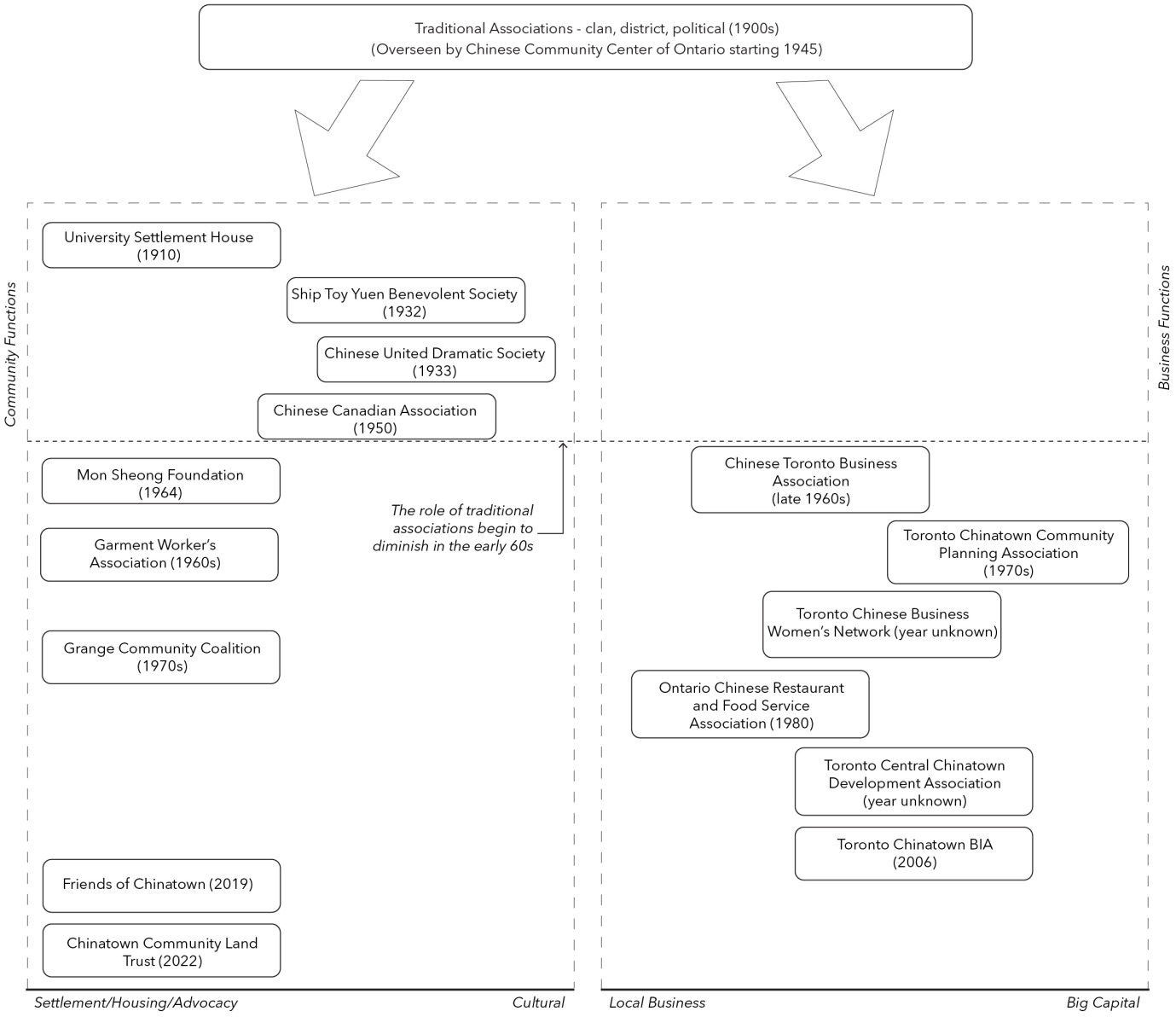


fig.3.35 The evolution of social organizations in Toronto's Chinatown(s). Over time, there is a gradual diffusion of responsibility from the traditional associations towards newer, independently formed associations.

Present Day

Today, a high-level look at Toronto's Chinatown will show that it differs from many other major Chinatowns in that it is distinctly lacking the familiar 'exotic' flourishes that grace other more 'thematic' Chinatowns in the states, or even Vancouver. It lacks a traditional *Pai Lou* or Chinatown Gate (although a much more sculptural and minimal take on the pai lou is present on Spadina Ave) that symbolically marks the entrance to Chinatown, nor does it have the typical curved pagoda roof protrusions found on buildings. However, the built environment in Chinatown West's commercial street is nevertheless distinct and different from the rest of the city due largely to its intense density of signage. The narrow parcelization, split level retail and micro street vending create a very crowded and dense retail environment, each business vying for attention with protruding signage of all kinds, which communicates a sense of authenticity.

Indeed, previous architectural literature has noted extensively the informal and thus 'authentic' qualities present in this neighborhood. In "Learning from Chinatown", Li Ting Guan studies the informal architectures present in a series of key buildings and locations in the neighborhood[34]. Furthermore, in her thesis "Learning from Commonplace: Designing Diversity" Natalie Lok Yan Hui cites Toronto Chinatown West as "one of the prime examples of the commonplace city" due to its abundance of signage[35]. The proliferation of signage, in this case, is a design instrument that reflects authentic, informal, bottom-up expressions of culture, one that highlights the vibrancy of everyday life. This supports the idea that Chinatown West's commercial environment is, at least currently, an authentic reflection of the mosaic of cultures in the neighborhood.

What contributed to Toronto's Chinatown West retaining this informal quality and avoiding most of the iconographic cliches that other Chinatowns still bear? I hypothesize that the answer lies in its relatively recent displacement and corresponding architectural reset – the late 1960s, which coincides with the opening of mass immigration to Toronto. This timeframe subjected Chinatown West to three conditions that other, older Chinatowns did not face. Firstly, pushed along by the opening of immigration, traditional associations, who had traditionally overseen businesses and the community as a united front, had lost much of their previous significance. Recall that in Chicago and Washington DC, traditional associations led

34. Li Ting Guan, 'Learning from Chinatown' (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, University of Waterloo, 2013).

35. Natalie Lok Yan Hui, 'Learning from the Commonplace: Designing Diversity' (Waterloo, University of Waterloo, 2016).

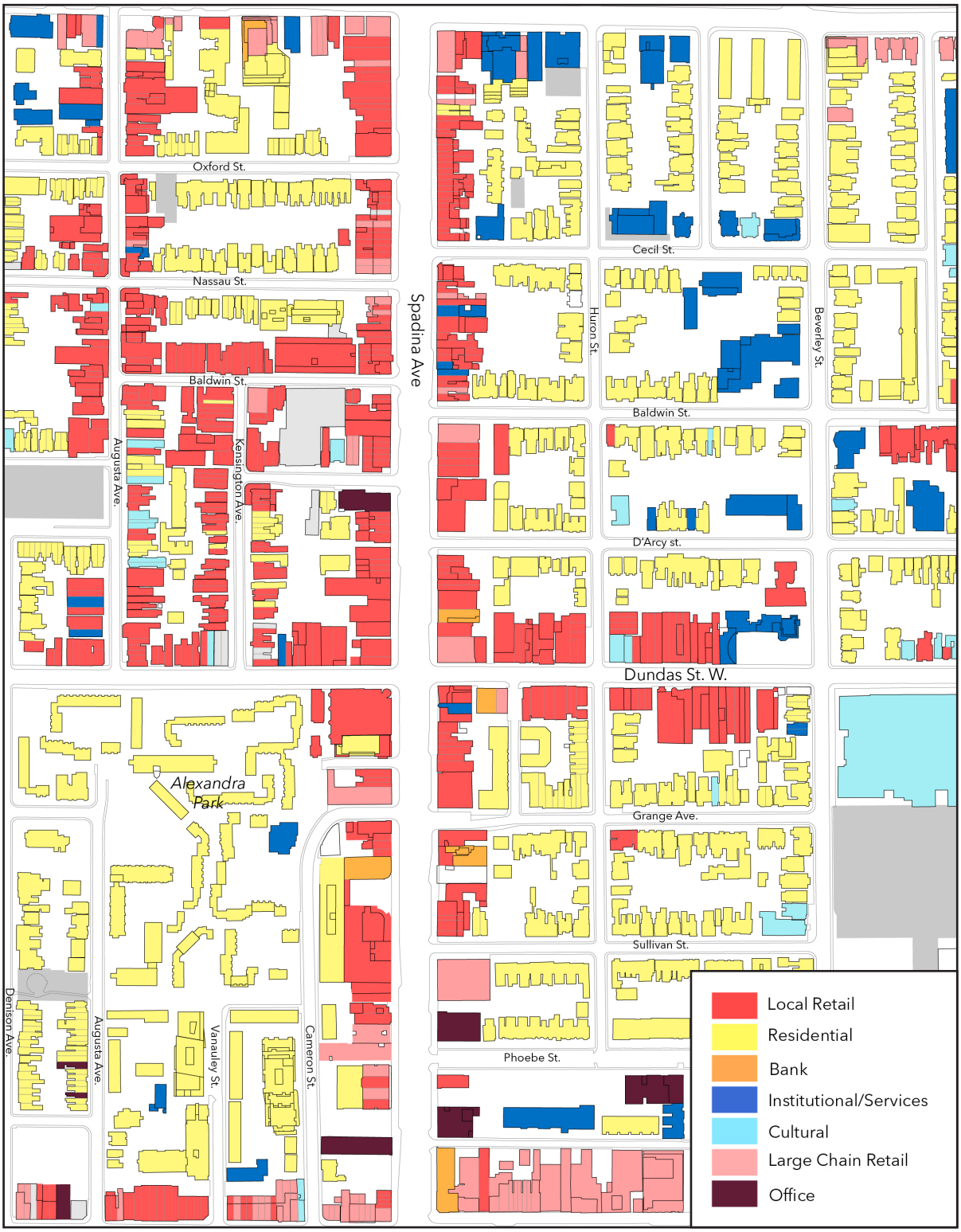


fig.3.36 Chinatown West ground floor land-use distribution today. It appears to a 'complete community' with a virbant mix of programs withiin a close distance from eachother.

the move in finding new buildings and a new area to resettle[36]. They also led the movement in making 'Chinese' building modifications which likely rippled through the whole united business community. Or in LA, where a small group of community leaders planned a new community from the ground up for businesses and residents to settle into. In Toronto, the now fractured and individual businesses thus lacked an overarching plan and consistent strategy in resettlement, each business fending for itself, naturally resulting in an organic and informal environment. Not to mention, making the kind of exoticized building façade upgrades as an individual small business can be quite costly without support from an organization. Secondly, the opening of immigration meant that many businesses were being opened by new immigrants, who were not familiar with the traditional methods of self-orientalization used by traditional associations in the past. The largest group of immigrants to Chinatown West at its conception were immigrants from Hong Kong, whose retailing style reflected that of a dense and bustling Asian metropolis with tight, functional micro retail spaces and signage, which became recreated in the commercial street of the new Chinatown. Lastly, the influx of a class of wealthy Asian "new elites", mainly developers from Hong Kong, helped to construct a neighborhood that reflected the modern retailing tastes of the newly arriving Hong Kong immigrants. This is seen most clearly in the case of the previously mentioned China Court (see figure 3.24 and 3.25), that had its traditional caricaturized Chinese space quickly replaced for a modern concrete and glass condo mall. Manbro Holdings, the developer, seemingly recognized that the modern style would be more popular with the immigrant population in this neighborhood. Recall that Chinatown West also left behind a small but surviving 'tourist Chinatown' at the original location which was increasingly seen as inauthentic by the wider society whose tastes for the authentic became more discerning with more cultural exchange, another result of mass immigration. In this way, Chinatown West's beginning is shaped by and for the tastes of a new and fast-growing demographic of immigrants and a more culturally aware host society, rather than the unified power of the traditional associations in earlier Chinatowns.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, following the exodus of many Chinese immigrants to the suburbs, particularly Scarborough and Markham, and noted decline in commercial activity in Chinatown, both the city and business community in Chinatown West began to ethnically package the neighborhood as a form of revitalization. Following the

36. Domenic Vitiello and Zoe Blickenderfer, 'The Planned Destruction of Chinatowns in the United States and Canada since c.1900', *Planning Perspectives* 35, no. 1 (September 2018): 143–68.

fig.3.37 *Asia: the East: Spring* and *Europe: the West: Autumn* by Shirley Yanover and David Hlynski.

reopening of the Spadina Streetcar line in 1997, the city of Toronto launched a city-wide competition for public art commissions along Spadina Ave. Two art commissions were awarded in the vicinity of Dundas St. W and Spadina Ave. One was *Asia: the East: Spring* and its companion *Europe: the West: Autumn* by Shirley Yanover and David Hlynski at Sullivan St (see figure 3.34) showing a blending of Asian and European cultural traditions in its dual windows. The other was *Gateway* by Millie Chen at the Dundas St intersection that showed animals winding around red poles, physically creating the character for door in Chinese (see figure 3.35). This interpretative gateway seems to take inspiration from the pai lou that traditionally marks other Chinatowns and has become a de facto icon for Chinatown West. This is part of a wider trend of the City using public art, in this case transit art, as a means of placemaking and establishing itself as a leader in cultural urban spaces among global competition[37]. Theresa Enright describes this era of city making in her analysis of Toronto's transit art: "As the management of urban space became increasingly tied to image-making and urban development within a global cultural economy, the art of the TTC served several objectives: it rebranded the transit network as a world class amenity; showcased cultural products; and cemented the city's "creative" status."[38]

Chinatown officially became a part of Tourism Toronto marketing in 2005[39] and later, in 2006, the Chinatown BIA was founded and took over responsibilities to market the neighborhood. They made several permanent updates, one of which was to install a bilingual highway exit sign for Chinatown on the Gardiner Expressway[40], overtly promoting Chinatown to commuters travelling in from further outskirts of the Greater Toronto Area.

The commercial fabric of today's Chinatown West can be further understood through its palimpsest of signage. Signage are illuminating indicators of age and business type, as well as more broadly, power and wealth in today's information economy according to Leeman and Modan's study of signage and linguistics in Washington DC's Chinatown[41]. They note several indicators of gentrification through analysis of signage, including the relative prominence of English vs Chinese/other language on signs and where the non-English language is located, whether it is only on the façade or located inside the store as well. For example, they note pre-gentrification businesses as having signs with predominantly Chinese texts, that's targeted for Chinese clientele with minimal English, while post-gentrification businesses

37. City of Toronto, 'Culture Plan for the Creative City', 2003.
38. Theresa Enright, 'A Platform for Art: Infrastructural Citizenship Beyond Monumentality in Toronto's Transit Art', Antipode n/a, no. n/a, accessed 14 November 2022, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12892.
39. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878*,176.
40. Ibid., 176.
41. Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan, 'Commodified Language in Chinatown: A Contextualized Approach to Linguistic Landscape [1]', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 3 (June 2009): 332–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2009.00409.x.

fig.3.39 Gateway by Millie Chen. The animals intertwining the poles at the top are four mythological figures found in East and Southeast Asian mythology: (the pheonix, dragon, monkey king, and qilin). Together, their hybridization and transformations symbolize the transition of one culture into another, reflecting the cultural heritage of the Dundas Spadina neighborhood.

(see the Starbucks pictured in figure 3.35) as having Chinese text for purely symbolic purposes, and therefore only exist on facades, as support to the dominant English text.[42] This type of analysis can be similarly applied to Toronto's Chinatown's facades. Unlike Washington DC's Chinatown, Toronto's Chinatown does not have as many chain corporations (like Starbucks or Walgreens) entering the neighborhood. Thus, the use of Chinese language and ornamentation as commodified symbols to evoke Chinese 'character' happens very little here. There has, however, been a marked presence in recent years, of large, multi-national, chain Asian businesses, 'trendy' spots hailing from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong etc. replacing smaller local businesses. These businesses often reflect the latest Asian food trends like bubble tea or hotpot and cater to a younger demographic of students and young professionals, Chinese and otherwise. These storefronts differ greatly in style and signage than pre-gentrification local Chinese businesses, one reflecting a more modern aesthetic that envelopes the entire façade, evident of dedicated marketing and design teams and significant dollars, and the other reflecting a more functional and information-based façade, of which typically one large text-based sign dominates. See the comparison between MeetFresh and Taste of China Seafood Restaurant, both located on the same stretch on Spadina Ave (figure 3.37). This shift in Chinatown

42. Ibid.

fig.3.38 Walgreens in Washington DC Chinatown (Google Street View).

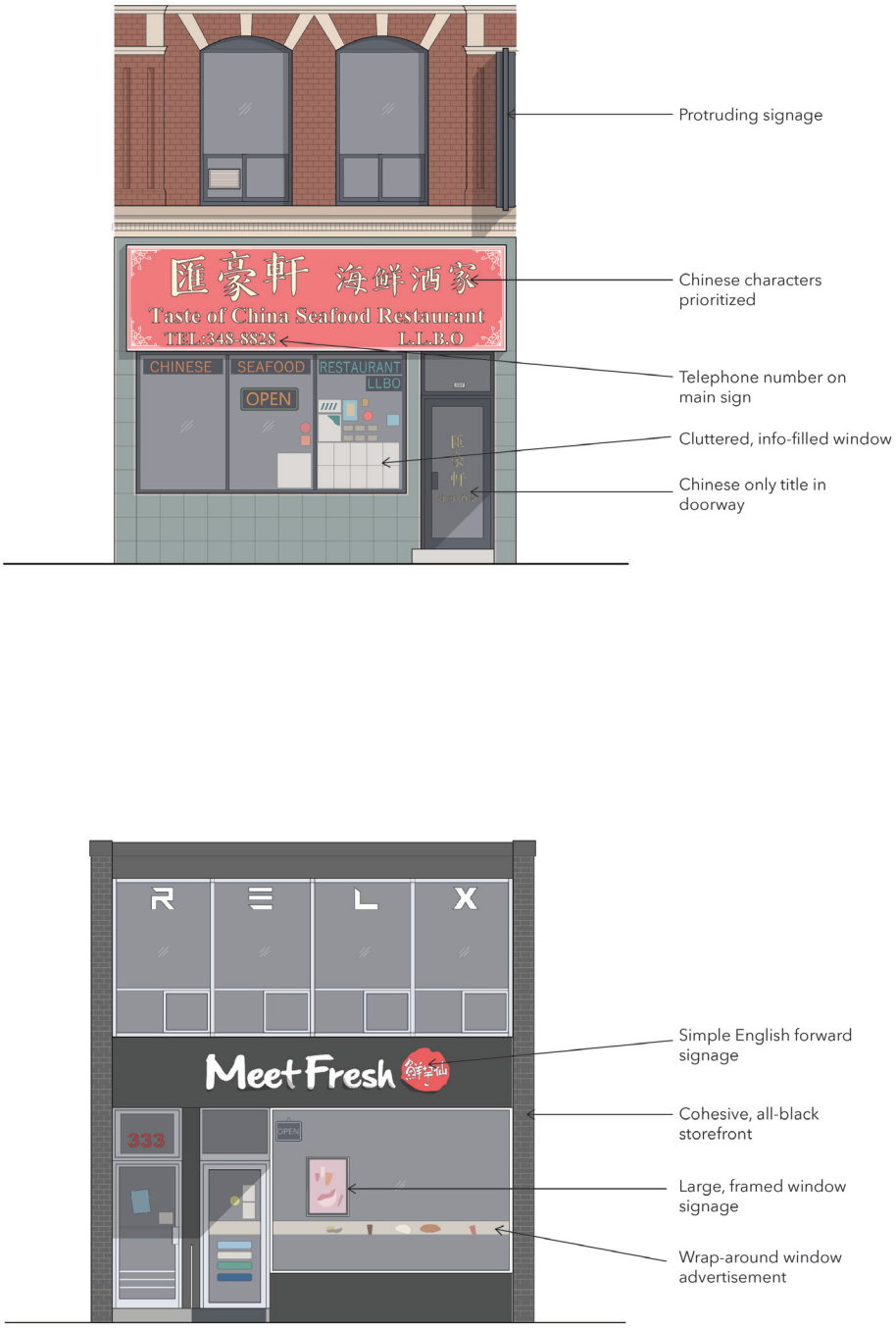


fig.3.40 Elevation comparison between an older, locally owned Chinese business (Taste of China) with a new, multinational Chinese business (MeetFresh)

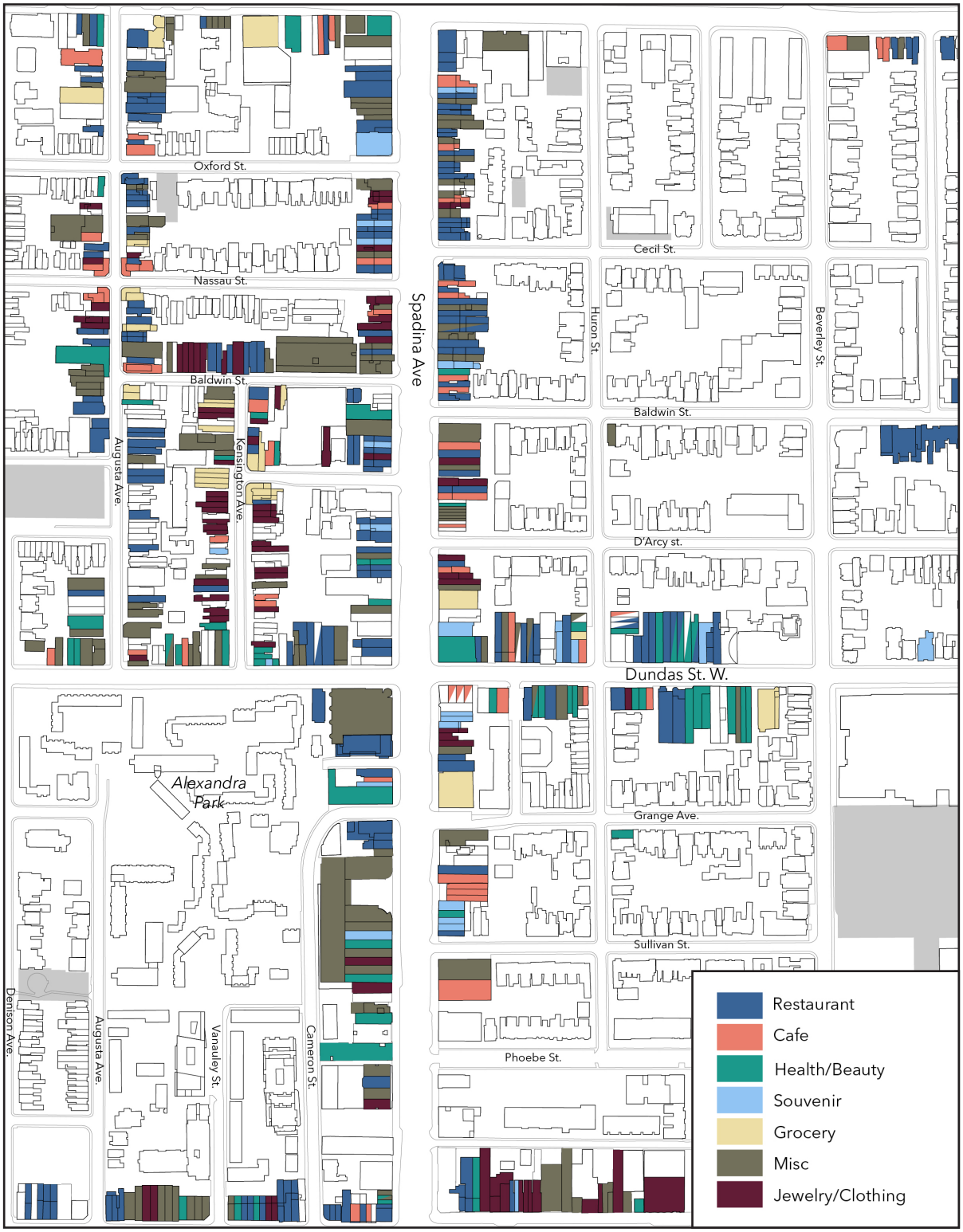


fig.3.41 Chinatown West ground floor retail type distribution

Demographics

Kensington-Chinatown Immigration Statistics

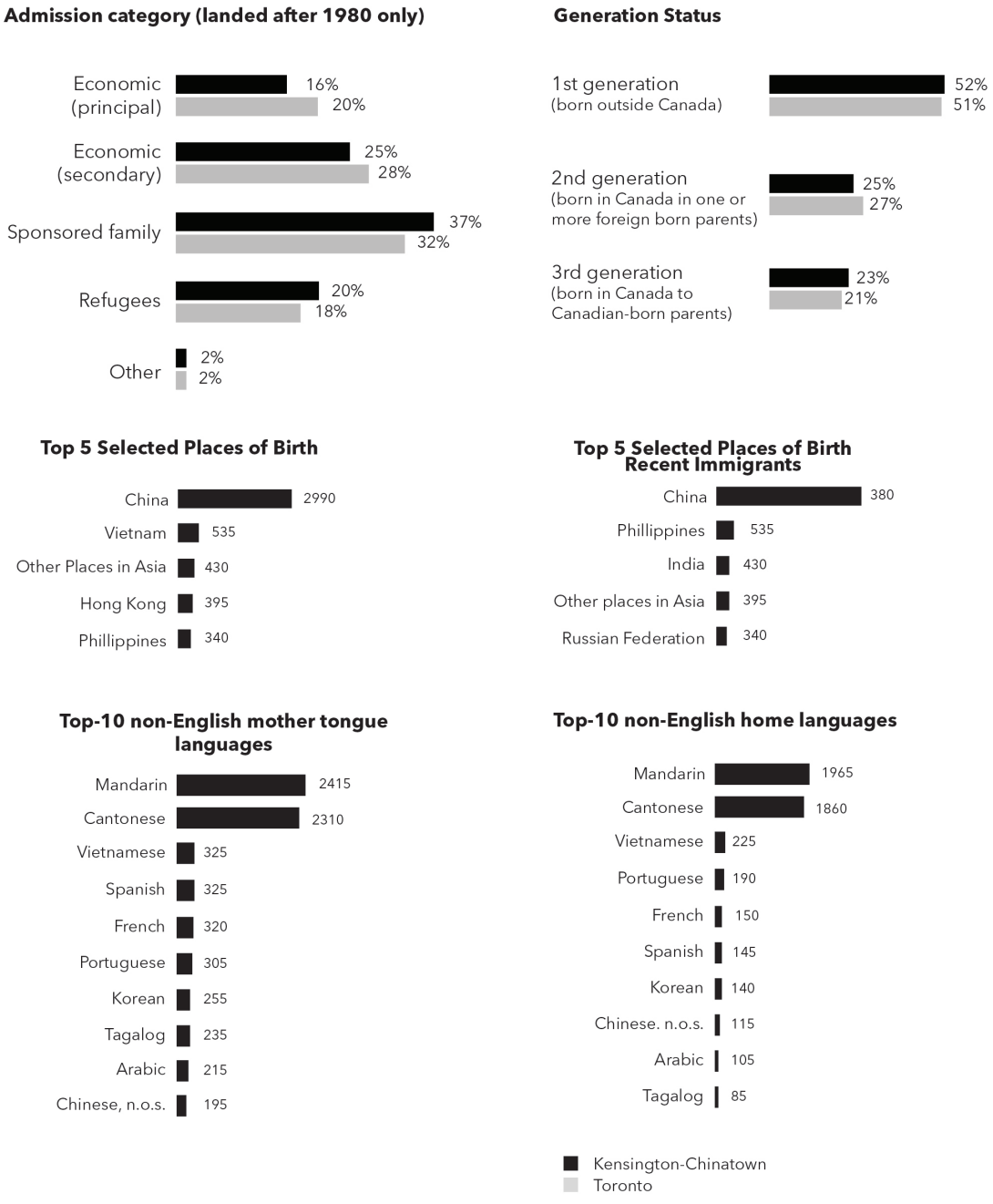
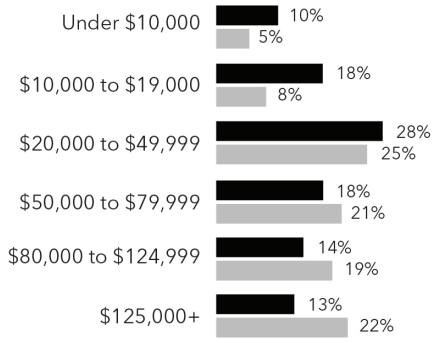


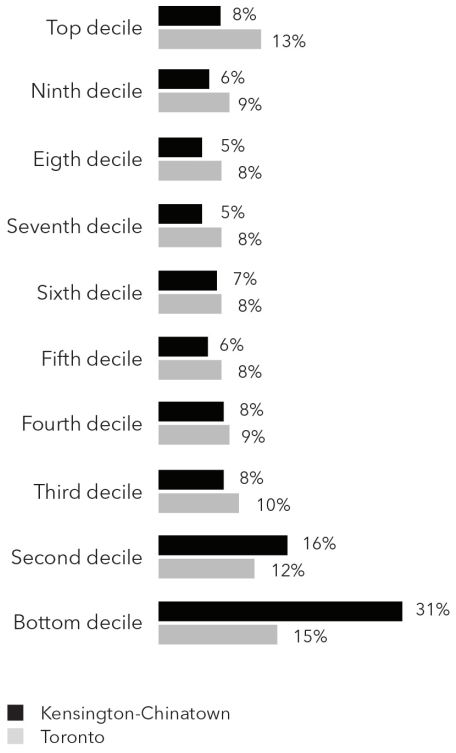
fig.3.42 Adapted from City of Toronto neighborhood profiles: Kensington-Chinatown

Kensington-Chinatown Income Statistics

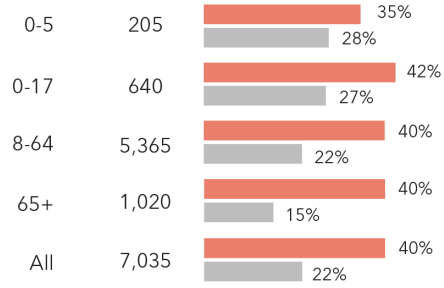
Total household income (% by groups)



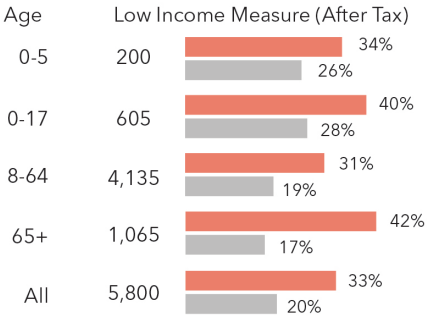
Economic family income by decile group



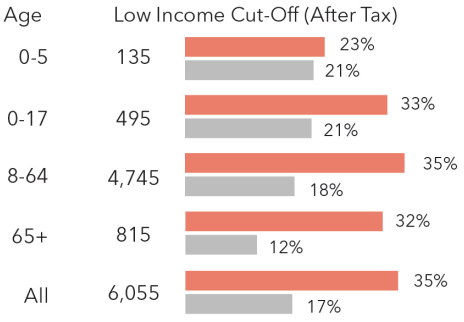
Poverty, population and rates (by age groups)



Low income, population and rates (by age groups)



Annual after-tax income thresholds for LIM-AT
1 person: $22,133 4 persons: $44,268

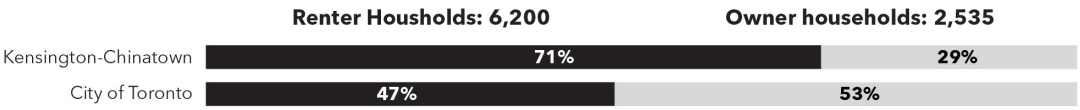


Annual after-tax income thresholds for LICO-AT
1 person: $20,386 4 persons: $38,544

fig.3.43 Adapted from City of Toronto neighborhood profiles: Kensington-Chinatown

Kensington-Chinatown Housing Statistics

Households by tenure

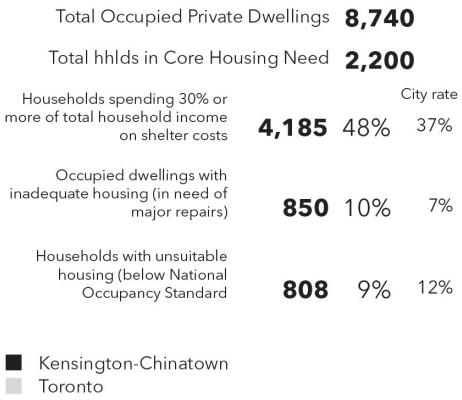


Shelter costs

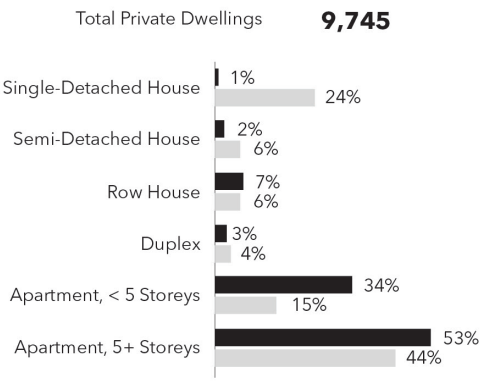
Renter Housholds		*City Avg.*
Median Shelther Cost	$1,122	*$1,201*
Mean Shelter Cost	$1,181	*$1,242*
Unaffordable Housing	51.1%	*46.8%*
Subsidized Housing	30.1%	*15.1%*

Owner Housholds		*City Avg.*
Median Shelther Cost	$1,414	*$1,496*
Mean Shelter Cost	$1,704	*$1,682*
Unaffordable Housing	41.0%	*27.4%*
With a mortgage	34.6%	*57.5%*

Core Housing Need



Private dwellings by structure type



Main mode of commuting to work

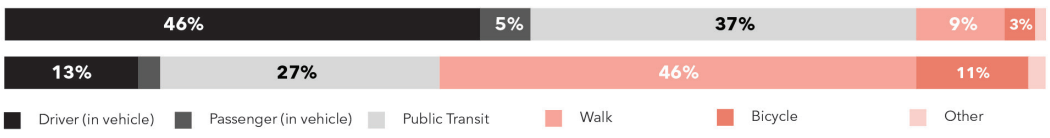


fig.3.44 Adapted from City of Toronto neighborhood profiles: Kensington-Chinatown

West's retail offerings reveals a class displacement where small, local Asian businesses are quietly displaced by large, multinational Asian businesses, which on the surface, still reads as an 'authentic' neighborhood with distinctly Asian food offerings.

Demographically, Chinatown West differs from the Toronto average on several aspects (see figures 39-41). Firstly, far from being populated by a single ethnic group, other populations (specifically various South East Asian groups) have a sizeable presence here in both the residential and the commercial street. A walk down Spadina Ave will reveal many small Vietnamese shops and restaurants. Luk and Phan have observed that Chinatown West experiences co-ethnicity, in which large numbers of both Chinese and Vietnamese businesses and residents reside there[43]. This is presumably due to Chinatown absorbing various waves of refugees following the Vietnam War in the 1980s. In terms of immigration, the neighborhood is also home to more immigrants of refugee and sponsored family status and less immigrants of economic status than the Toronto average. The neighborhood is also home to a much higher percentage of people with low income, with a markedly high population experiencing poverty as defined by Market Basket Measure. This is also closely related to the proportion of rental housing in the neighborhood, which is significantly higher than the city average (almost 30% higher). Even more revealing is the fact that a quarter of the total occupied private dwellings is in *core housing need*, as defined by the CMHC. This means that housing does not meet any of the three criteria of *affordability, adequacy* or *suitability*. A significant difference in lifestyle is seen in the main mode of commute taken to work, which in Chinatown is overwhelmingly by walking, compared to driving in the Toronto average. Taken together, these demographic patterns indicate a neighborhood that continues to welcome and absorb low-income residents and immigrants who work in the immediate vicinity of their residences. This might be a Chinese senior who lives alone in subsidized rooming house and runs a Chinese souvenir shop on Spadina Ave. Or it might be a recent immigrant grocery worker from Vietnam with precarious status who lives in an aging apartment with two roommates above the Dragon City Mall. Like other Chinatowns, the Chinese population growth has stagnated, but it remains an attractive location for low-income minority groups of various other ethnicities to live. The combined precarity and declining housing stock experienced in this area, though much more ethnically diverse, is reminiscent of the dynamics of original Chinatowns, whose

43. Chiu M. Luk and Mai B. Phan, 'Ethnic Enclave Reconfiguration: A "New" Chinatown in the Making', *GeoJournal* 64, no. 1 (1 September 2005): 17–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-005-3920-7.

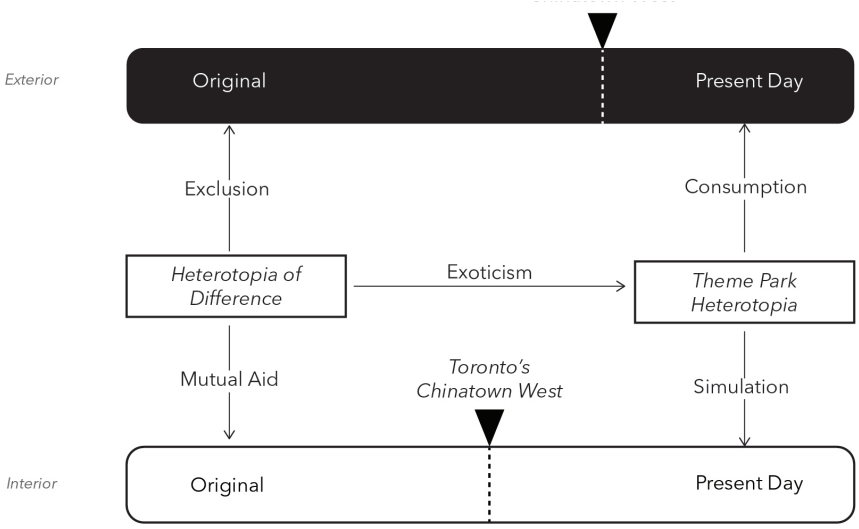


fig.3.45 Toronto Chinatown's place as a heterotopia within the evolutionary spectrum established in Chapter 2.

vastly different demographic (and with it social rules, customs and iconography) defined its heterotopic quality.

Where does Chinatown West sit in terms of a heterotopia? From the exterior, Chinatown has become absorbed as a cultural shopping/food destination in a city that prides itself on multiculturalism. Distinctively, the City of Toronto is quick to recognize and preserve informal expressions of culture in planning policy and use it as a placemaking strategy for tourism. For example, the specific "eclectic" and "gritty" urbanism of Kensington Market is used on the Destination Toronto website to market it's various small retail establishments.[44] This is evidence that Toronto's city-making structure is welcoming to bottom-up expressions of culture in the built environment, such as that of Chinatown. However, the trend of small retail displacement by larger Asian retail institutions in Chinatown West suggests that there is still potential for this retail environment to become more productive in the eyes of the city. From the interior perspective, as evidenced in the previous section, the community that lives in the Chinatown West neighborhood still holds onto some aspects of difference due largely to the lower income residents. It continues to contain pockets of poverty and precarity owing to the social housing in the neighborhood, while most of the rest of the 'official city' are wealthy. However, the disconnect between the new commercial landscape slowly displacing the small locally owned retail and the lower class residential community signal an increasing trend towards catering for the exterior visitor. Here again, as in the previous examples, the commercial portion of the enclave is shifting away from the immediate interests of the community, towards the interests (and dollars) of the exterior tourists. Toronto's Chinatown West is not yet a theme park heterotopia, but it is certainly moving that way.

44. 'Kensington Market | Explore Toronto Neighbourhoods', accessed 14 November 2022, https://www.destinationtoronto.com/neighbourhoods/westside/kensington-market/.

04 *Future Chinatown*

Despite having resisted numerous threats to the neighborhood over its history, Chinatown West at Spadina and Dundas is currently standing on the precipice of major changes, as different interest groups all attempt to assert their own vision for Chinatown's future. This chapter will draw on city policy and grassroots movements to present and compare three visions for a future Chinatown at Spadina and Dundas[1]. On one hand, the City of Toronto's mandate for growth as laid out in the official plan will allow much of Spadina Ave. as well as Dundas St. W (west of Spadina) to be up-zoned into mid-rises, following similar developments on St.Clair Ave. This mandate allows speculative developers, both within the Chinese community and out, to propose and build high density luxury and market-rate condominiums within the neighborhood, displacing the current lower and working class as well as swallowing the existing low-rise and historic building fabric. Another vision sees Chinatown West becoming a cultural district, a new program proposed by the city in response to calls to protect and preserve the culture of existing dynamic neighborhoods. However, seeing as many existing examples of cultural district programs heavily favor the economic tangible cultural products of neighborhoods (restaurants, music, festivals) and not the often lower-class communities that live there it is questionable that cultural districts will do much to slow the process of gentrification. It becomes increasingly problematic considering cultural districts' frequent partnership with neighborhood BIA's which have a vested interest in presenting a sterile and tourism-safe image to the public. A third vision, increasingly used by similar neighborhoods in the city and other Chinatowns across North America, calls for control of the neighborhood to be placed into the hands of the community through a community land trust. This method ensures that housing, first and foremost, is kept accessible in perpetuity to the groups that Chinatown has historically supported and who depend on Chinatown the most. In this way, Chinatown West can continue to be an authentic reflection of its community, rather than a makeshift, manufactured version of its former glory. In comparing these visions, the chapter exposes the contrasting ways different groups view the value of Chinatown.

1. This future envisioning practice is inspired by Reimagining ChinaTOwn, edited by Linda Zhang, which presents an anthology of short stories exploring different ideas of what a future Chinatown Toronto in 2050 might look or feel like according to each writers' perceptions of heritage and 'Chinatown-ness'.

Turning Red

The depiction of Chinatown West in Pixar's 2021 movie release *Turning Red* (it's major motion picture debut!) is perhaps a vision for how Chinatown should be, told from the point of view of someone raised within the community. Set in Toronto in the early 2000's, the story is loosely based on director Domee Shi's childhood growing up in Toronto and depicts many familiar Toronto landmarks, like the CN Tower and the Sky dome (see figure 4.2 and 4.3). It follows 13-year-old Meilin "Mei" Lee as she navigates her family's ancestral red panda curse, as well as the pains of going through puberty.[2] Although the characters never distinctly mention Chinatown, familiar elements from Toronto's Chinatown West are sprinkled in sets throughout the film and thus it is implied that the events of the movie are happening in a pseudo-'Chinatown West' environment. Several qualities of Mei's Chinatown instantly set it apart from real life Chinatown and other Chinatown movies. First, while the Chinatown has had it's 'Chinese' qualities boosted (Chinese lanterns hang on the streets, a Chinese temple is added to the neighborhood etc), the characters in Chinatown remain richly diverse, in many different dimensions. This is evident in Mei's group of friends, to the Sikh security guard, to the insulin pump wearing passerby. Second, while the film uses the familiar device of associating Chinatown with the mystical and supernatural, it is not framed as a one-off occurrence to a clueless outsider with no contextual background, the "magic" in Turning Red is depicted to have rich contextual history and feels like an authentic part of Mei's family, one that she has to learn to understand and wield. In this sense Turning Red's Chinatown depiction has evolved a long way from films like *Alice*, or *Year of the Dragon*. Furthermore, the distinctly Chinese iconography is connected with community and family, rather than as a cultural product to consume. This is best exemplified in the Chinese temple (the most overtly "Chinese" element of the neighborhood). Rather than just be a tourist destination, this is where Mei's family pays respects to their ancestors, perform sacred rituals and have large family dinners. While it is publicly operated as a Chinese cultural center, it also acts as a community space, where people often come to spend an afternoon and play chess. Third, Mei's Chinatown is clearly not set in present day but rather in the late 80s to early 90s. This is evidenced in obvious non Chinatown specific ways like the Skydome having not yet changed to the Rogers Centre, or the presence of the old streetcars. Logically, the movie is set in this time because it is loosely

2. *Turning Red*, directed by Domee Shi (2022; Richmond, CA: Pixar), Online Video.

based on director Domee Shi's childhood in the 90s. However as a depiction of Chinatown, this time setting can be seen as a deliberate choice to show Chinatown at its most nurturing and stimulating time. Chinatown West in the 80s and 90 had just finished its move from Elisabeth Street, and was still welcoming in many new immigrants. Importantly, it was not yet a victim of class displacement, businesses were still mostly local, neighborhoods still very diverse and working class. As a film about personal growth and family, this is the vision of Chinatown that supports those themes the best. Turning Red presents a rare, endearing and authentic perspective of Chinatown *as a home* rather than a destination. Its vitality and rich diversity is a vision for what real Chinatown West could and should strive for in its careful future development.

fig.4.1 Scene in Turning Red that takes place on a makeshift Dundas St. W, indicated by the intense use of signage, Victorian building fabric and split level entrances. Mei's family temple is visible on the left.

fig.4.3 A view of the Toronto Skyline from a rooftop

fig.4.2 Interior of Mei's family temple. The family's ancestral red lion connection is represented in the play on the traditional Chinese guardian lions-turned-pandas guarding the doorway.

City Mandated Growth and New Development

What will the neighborhood of Chinatown West look like in 20 years according to the City? A reliable image can be constructed following the guidelines set out in the Official Plan, associated mid-rise studies and extrapolating from current development proposals. The City of Toronto's Official Plan forecasts the population to grow by 537 000, and for employment to grow by 544 000 by the year 2031[3]. In order to absorb that growth, the plan outlines strategies regarding where and how the growth should be allocated within the city. Much of the growth will be occurring within the downtown Toronto Urban Growth Centre (outlined in figure 4.5). Within this area, the regions zoned 'mixed-use' will be absorbing "most of the anticipated increase in retail, office and service employment in Toronto in the coming decades, as well as much of the new housing"[4]. These mixed-use areas are then broken down into numbered categories signifying their intensity. For example, 'Mixed-use Area 1' will absorb the most growth (high density, high rise) while Mixed-use Area 4' (low change, low rise) will absorb the least. The major commercial streets running through Chinatown West have been zoned Mixed-use Area 3 – Main Street which will have development "in the form of mid-rise buildings, with some low-rise and tall buildings permitted based on compatibility"[5] (see figure 4.6). In addition, the city has also designated "Great Streets" and "Priority Retail Streets" throughout the city that have additional guidelines pertaining to street scaping and/or building grade programming. Great Streets are designated places with great civic importance and characterized with 'landmark buildings, historic fabric and important public spaces' while Priority Retail Streets are regulated to have retail at grade that is accessible from the streets, in order to increase interaction between public realm and built fabric. Both Spadina Ave. and Dundas St. W. along with some smaller streets around Kensington Market are designated Priority Retail Streets. Furthermore, two areas within the immediate proximity of Chinatown West have specific 'Site and Area Specific Policies (SASP), which mandates new development to match existing site specific character. These two areas are Kensington Market and a portion of Dundas St W (East of Spadina). This mosaic of guidelines are compiled to form a portrait of the various future building types that are likely to make up Chinatown (see figure #).

Due to this city-wide mandate for growth as well as the fact that the neighborhood is relatively unregulated (as opposed to many other areas

3. City of Toronto, 'Chapter 2 Shaping the City', in *Official Plan* (Toronto, 2022).
4. Ibid.,
5. Ibid.,

in downtown, which have some sort of heritage or arts designation) Chinatown West has attracted many speculative developers to build market rate condos in the area. In addition, Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act also allows cities to permit developments that exceed the density and height requirements in exchange for 'facilities, services or matters (community benefits) set out in the bylaw"[6]. While Section 37 is meant to improve the local community quality of life, the tool has been leveraged by developers to provide contributions which only appeal to wealthier groups, further exacerbating the class divide. This has been noted in Little Jamaica, an area that has similarly been under threat of gentrification, spurred primarily from the Eglinton LRT. Jasmine Mohamed describes Section 37 as being "used to support gentrification processes by attracting new, wealthier residents with Metrolinx transit passes and public art improvements, instead of affordable units for local tenants to remain in the community".[7]

Being one of the few neighborhoods in the downtown core that continues to have a decidedly low-rise building fabric, the neighborhood around Dundas and Spadina Ave represents a previously disinvested area that is now a highly desirable location for speculative development. The new developments would dramatically upzone the building fabric from about two-three stories on average to around 6-10 stories. (4-6 story podium with 10-20 stories). These developments will increasingly attract an upper middle class demographic to the presently working class neighborhood as well as accelerate the commercial takeover by large corporate retail tenants from small local owners. By 2050, the social and commercial landscape of the neighborhood will have completely changed, taken over by a wealthier, more educated demographic – a neighborhood swallowed by class gentrification.

6. 'Section 37 - Policies and Implementation Guidelines', accessed 6 October 2022, *https://www.vaughan.ca/projects/policy_planning_projects/Pages/Section-37-Policies%20and%20Implementation%20Guidelines%20-%20Archive.aspx*.

7. Jasmine Mohamed, 'The Impact of Transit Development on Racialized Neighborhoods in Toronto: A Case Study of Little Jamaica' (Toronto, York University, 2021).

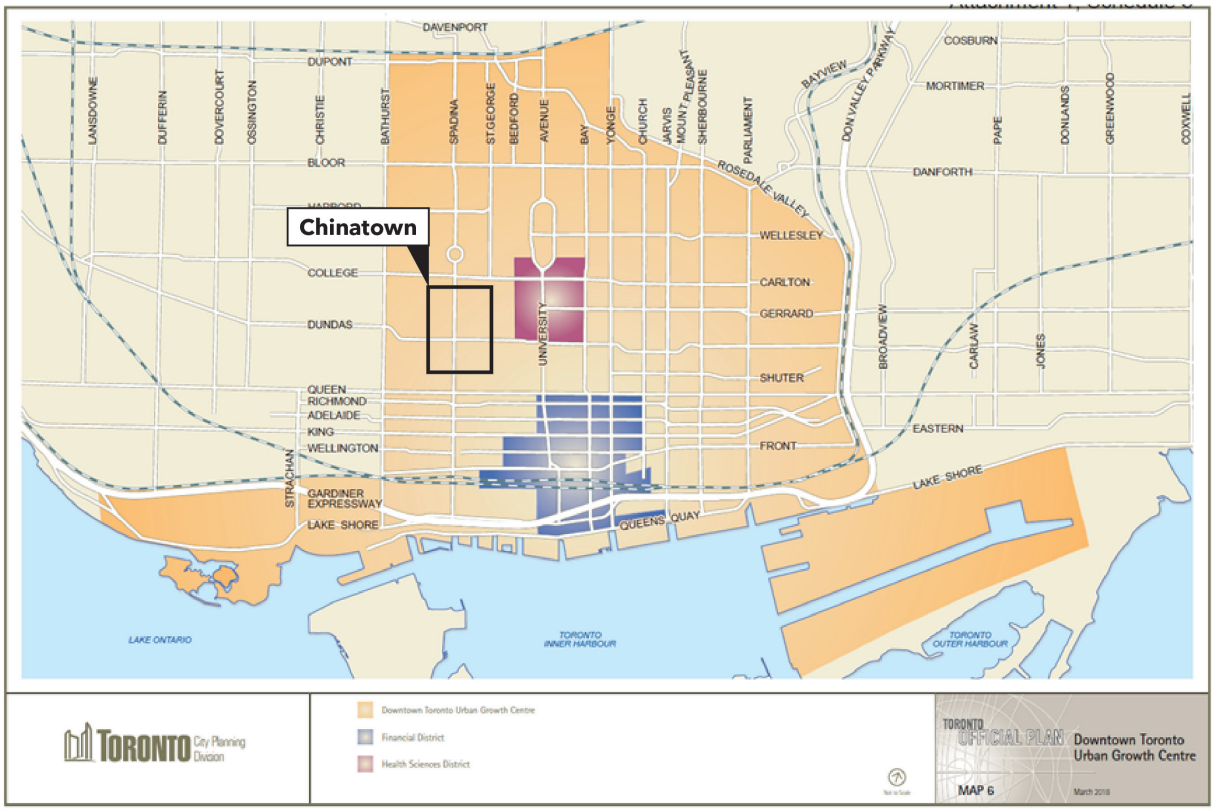


fig.4.4 City of Toronto Official Plan Map Outlining Downtown Urban Growth Centre (City of Toronto)

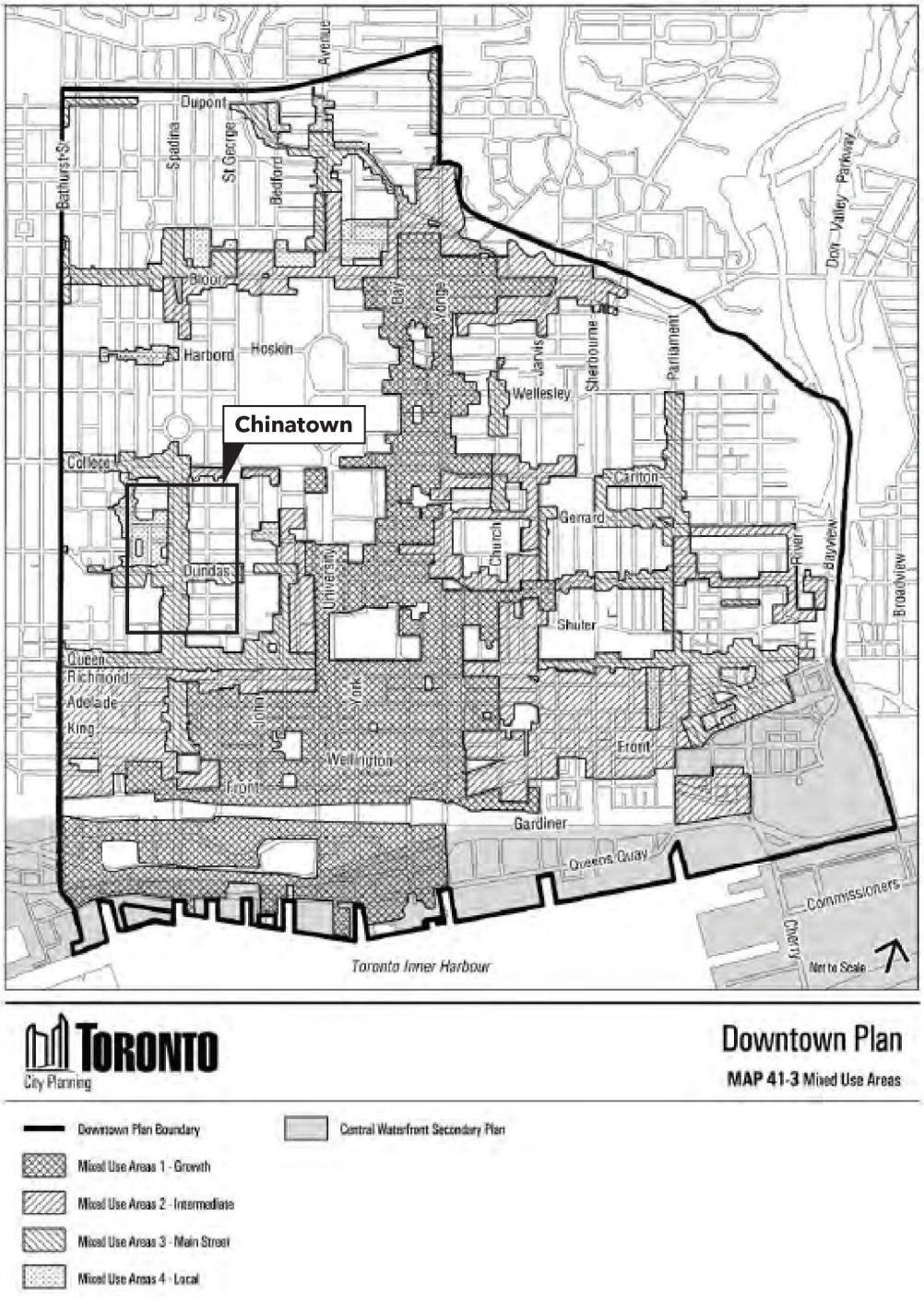


fig.4.5 City of Toronto Official Plan Map Outlining Mixed Use Areas (City of Toronto)

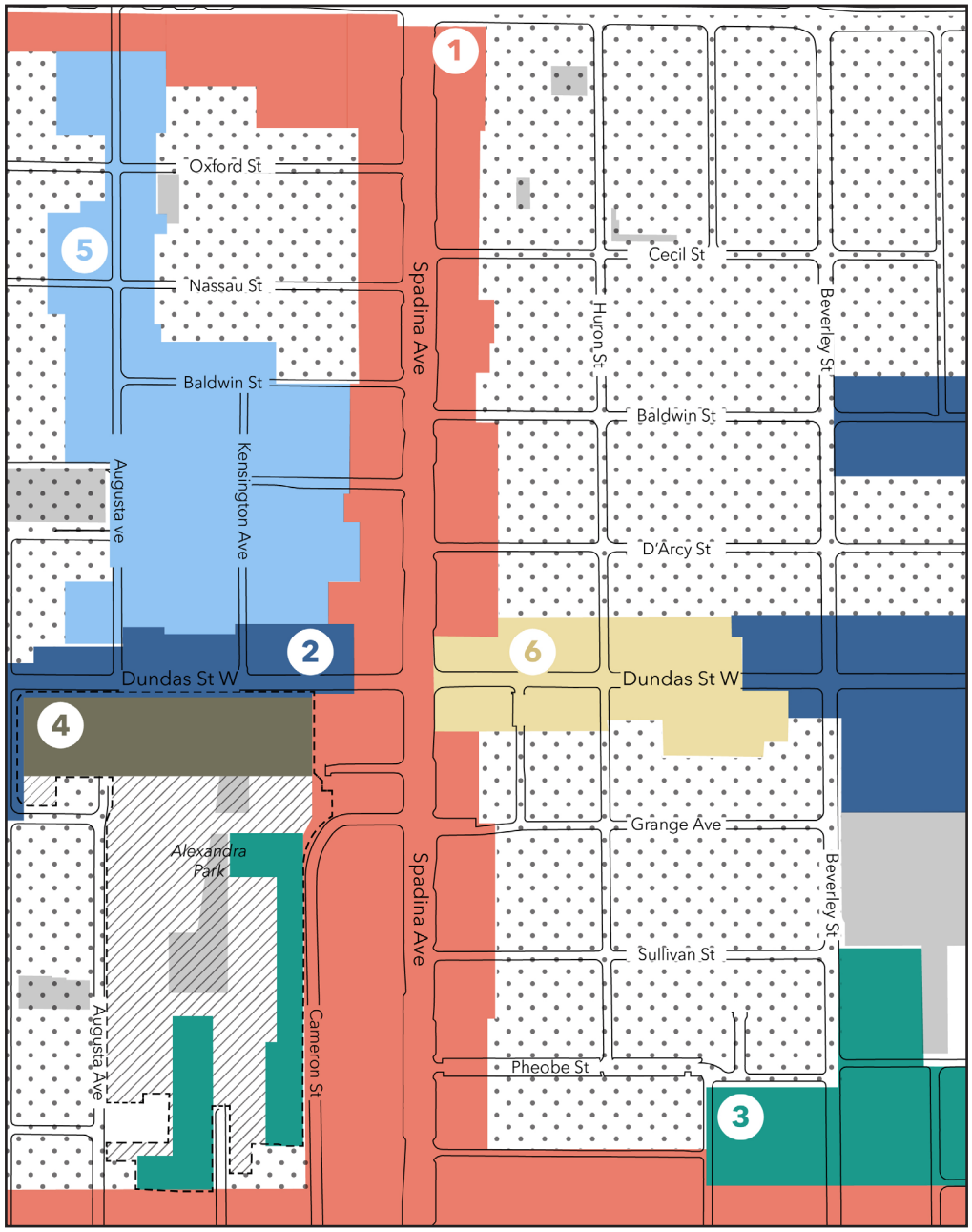
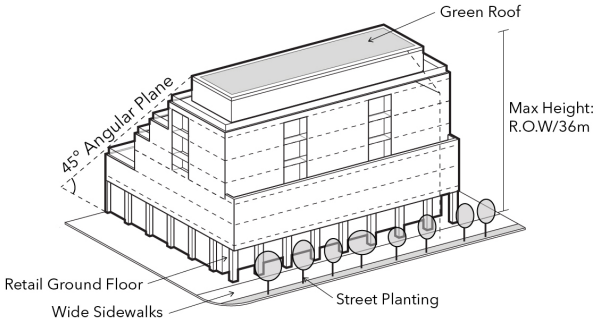


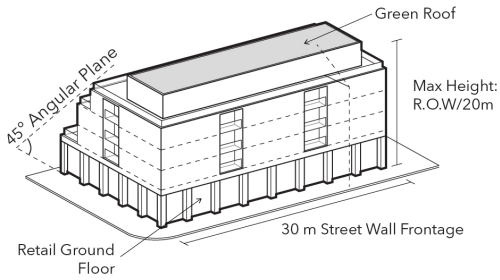
fig.4.6 Map breaking down future typology type distribution in Chinatown West neighborhood

fig.4.7 Typology in each area

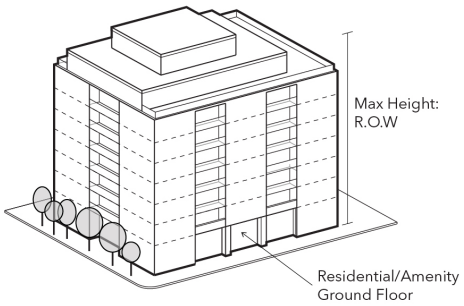
1 Mixed-Use
Midrise
Great Streets



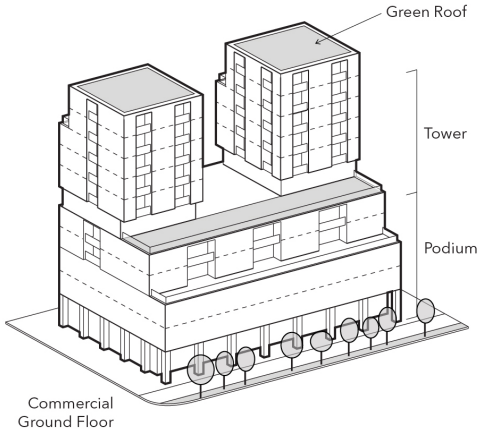
2 Mixed-Use
Midrise



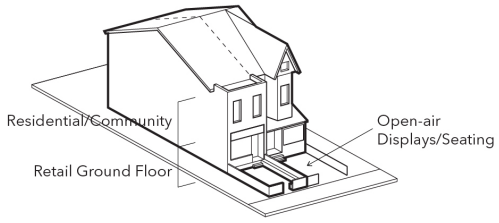
3 Residential
Midrise



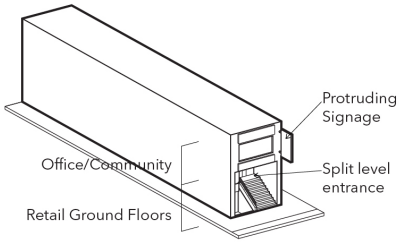
4 Mixed-Use
Midrise
Alexandra Park



5 Mixed-Use
Lowrise
Kensington Market



6 Mixed-Use
Lowrise
Dundas St Protection Zone



New Development

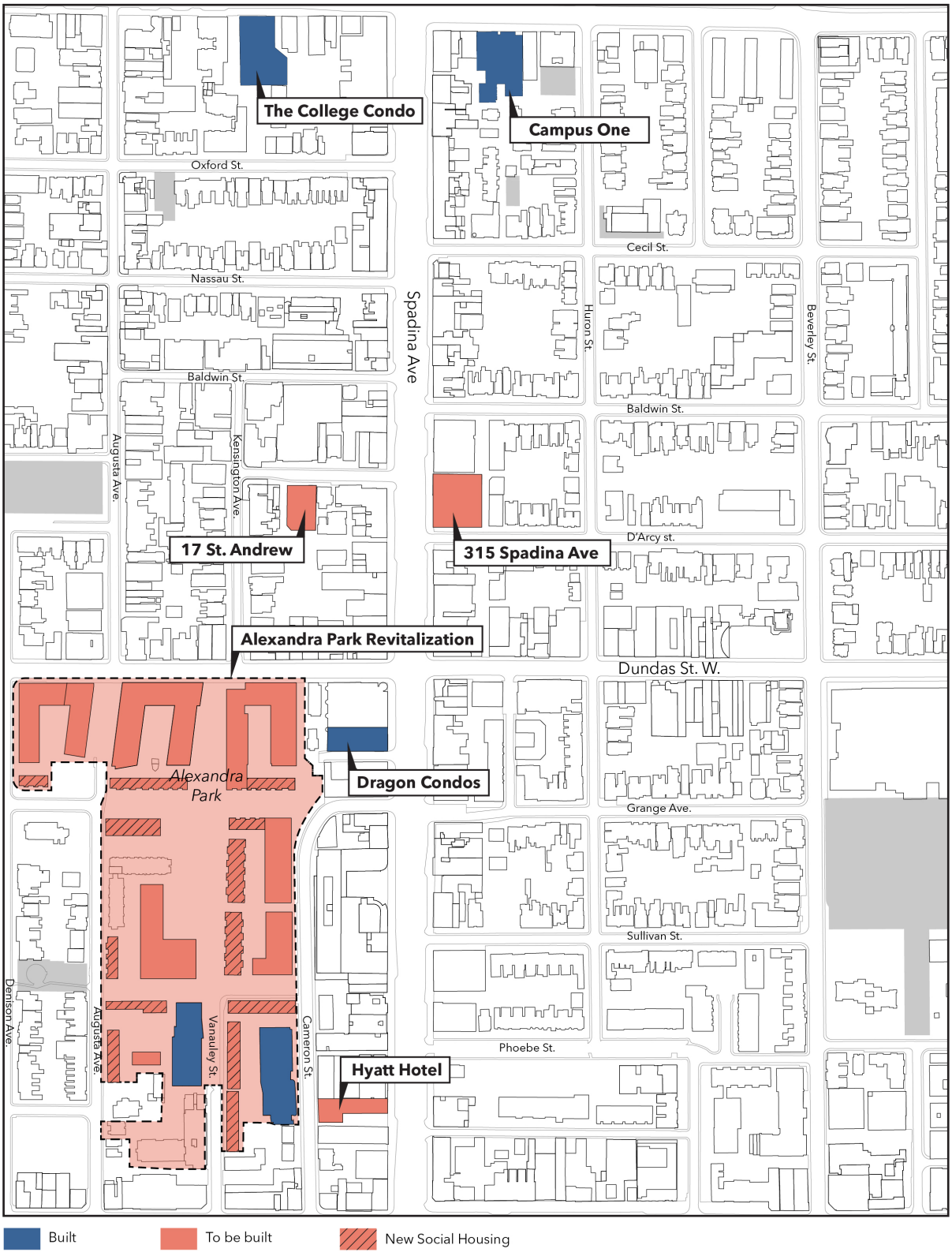


fig.4.8 Map showing location of recent and ongoing mid-high rise development

MRKT, SQ, SQ2 (part of Alexandra Park Revitalization)

Year: MRKT-Ongoing, SQ-2017, SQ2-2019
Developer: Tridel
Storeys: MRKT-15, SQ-14, SQ2-14
Affordable Units: 806
Market Rate Units: 1812

315 Spadina Ave

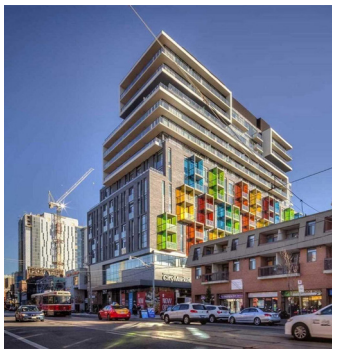
Year: Ongoing
Developer: Podium Developments
Storeys: 13
Affordable Units: 22
Market Rate Units: 219

Dragon Condos

Year: 2017
Developer: Ideal Developments
Storeys: 10
Affordable Units: 0
Market Rate Units: 95

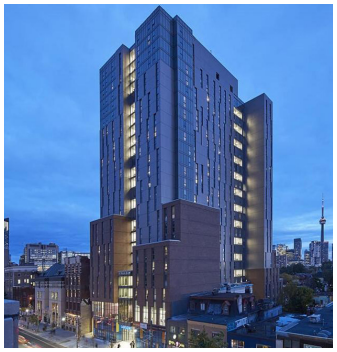
Hyatt House Toronto

Year: Ongoing
Developer: Manga Hotels
Storeys: 15
Hotel Suites: 250



The College Condominium

Year: 2016
Developer: Tribute Communities, Greybrook Realty Partners
Storeys: 15
Affordable Units: 0
Market Rate Units: 226



Campus One

Year: 2017
Developer: Knightstone Capital Management
Storeys: 25
Student Units: 298

17 St. Andrew

Year: Ongoing
Developer: Impressions Group
Storeys: 5
Student Units: 72

fig.4.9 New development detail breakdown

Cultural Commodification and Cultural Districts

Another vision for Chinatown, touted by the City and BIAs alike, involves the revitalization of Chinatown through ethnic packaging. This vision seeks to 'clean-up' Chinatown and bring investment into the commercial neighborhood through cultural tourism. The city of Toronto published the Culture Plan for a Creative City in 2003, where it repeatedly hammers home the message that sociologist Sharon Zukin has already discussed in her various critical discussions on the role of culture in the city – it pays to invest in arts and culture. The Culture Plan recommends Toronto realize its latent cultural potential as a diverse and cosmopolitan city by investing much more heavily into the city's key cultural institutions and cultural programming. While it does not make any recommendations around the ethnic neighborhoods, it is clear Toronto has a vested interest in the presence of culture in the city and the economic cultural products that they come with.

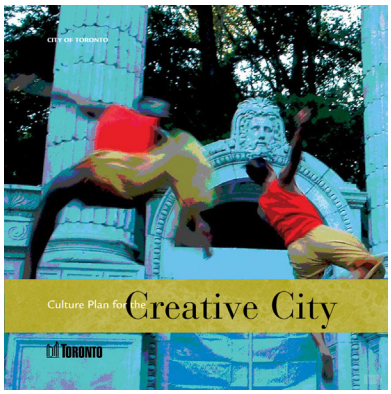


fig.4.10 Toronto's Culture Plan for the Creative City, released 2003

One of the major institutions that have risen to help the city establish this cosmopolitan image on the world stage is the Business Improvement Area/District (BIA/BID). Toronto has 83 BIAs, the highest number of any urban centre in the world[8] (see figure 4.11). On a cursory glance of the map, it appears that virtually every major thoroughfare in Toronto is managed by a different BIA. The Toronto Chinatown BIA advocates for the interests of the business owners in Chinatown West and promotes business to the area. Besides running an expansive online repository of all the businesses in the neighborhood, the Chinatown BIAs actions involve creating a consistent ethnic image through neighborhood festivals, special events and increasingly, public space interventions. The BIA has been behind a series of colourful murals decorating several alleyways along Dundas and Spadina depicting famous Chinese myths and landmarks in China, as well as other interpretive murals celebrating the specific cultural history of this immigrant neighborhood (see figure 4.12 – 4.15). Additionally, in sanitizing and packaging the neighborhood to be fit for tourist consumption, some interventions have been frequently hostile at the expense of lower working classes. The CBIA have commissioned the creation of a public square (Huron St. Square) filled with bright red lamps and seating elements containing dragon motifs and zodiac animals, Chinese influenced pavement patterns, and is flanked at the entrance by bronze Qilin sculptures (see figure 4.16 and 4.17). As tourist eye-candy, this square has purposely displaced the flower

8. City of Toronto, 'Business Improvement Areas', City of Toronto (City of Toronto, 14 July 2017), Toronto, Ontario, Canada, *https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-operation-growth/business-improvement-areas/.*

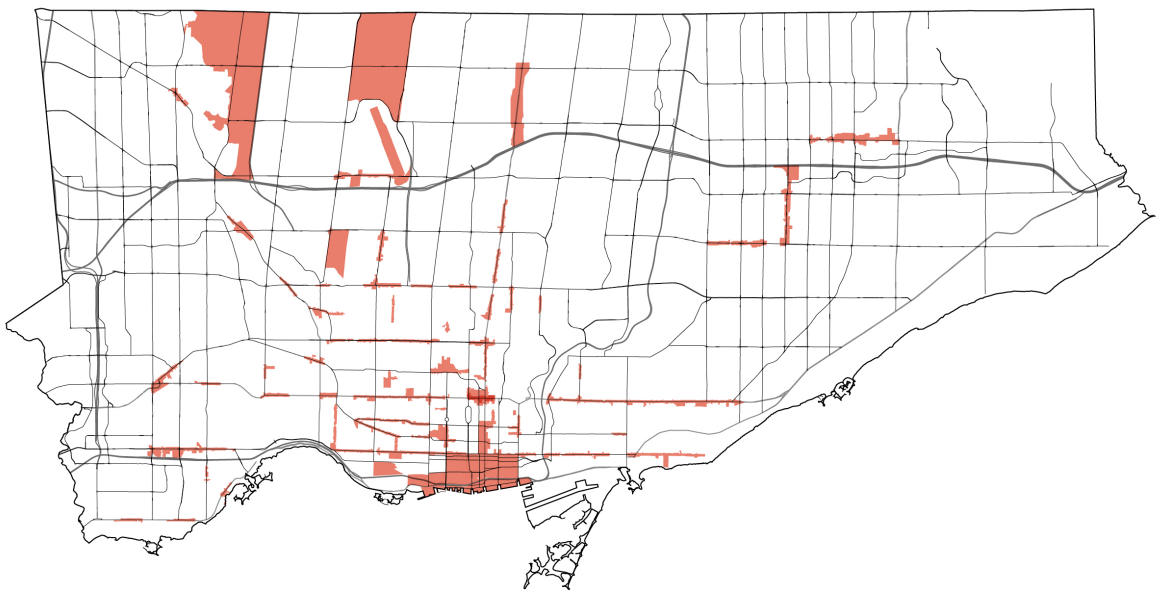


fig.4.11 Toronto has the most BIA of any urban area in the world, with 83.

fig.4.12 *Dragon's Gate Mural* by Blinc Studios, done as a commission for the Chinatown BIA in 2018. It depicts the Chinese myth of the Dragon's gate in which carp that can swim over the waterfall are transformed into dragons.

fig.4.13 Chinatown Milky Way Mural by Blinc Studios, done as a commission for the Chinatown BIA in 2017. It depicts the myth of the Herd-Boy and Weaver-Girl, a famous Chinese love story.

street vendors that used to frequent the area. A recent CBIA motion called for street patrol services to "defuse and resolve minor issues and contact police where necessary"[9], which will likely disproportionately target lower class individuals.

In 2021, the City of Toronto announced that it will be moving forward with the creation of a 'Cultural Districts' program to which Chinatown West, along with Little Jamaica, Church-Wellesley and Geary Avenue will be considered. This is following rising calls to support culture in disappearing neighborhoods across Toronto. The program aims to "strengthen local culture and communities [and] support small businesses and retail."[10]

However cultural districts vary widely around the world in their focus and scope. According to America for the Arts, they can have several focuses, ranging from promoting major cultural institutions, entire city downtown areas, to arts and entertainment, to community. This means that depending on the policy, a Cultural District designation could just be another BIA like program that seeks only to promote outside tourism to the area's commercial establishments without regard for the community that live there. The city intends to undergo extensive consultation with "local city councillors, community members, stakeholders, BIAs and relevant Council Advisory Bodies"[11], clearly demonstrating a desire to cast a wide net and make the program as beneficial as possible to many groups of people. Still many urban planners are apprehensive about it due to the ambiguity around how it will be conducting consultations and implementing the ideas of community members, arguing that it can become a very top-down process that values the cultures of some over others.[12] Other are concerned that the very formalization of the neighborhood into a district through government polices "hinder the natural evolution of culture across a city."[13] Indeed its likely that a cultural designation will only formalize the mission of the BIAs making the area more fertile for cultural commodification.

A report put together by the city identified nine cities with cultural district programs and who's population density, diversity and urban planning processes were similar to Toronto (see figure 4.18). These nine were analyzed side-by-side. Some commonalities across the nine included a grant of some sort that were provided to designated districts, as well as increased investment in art, artists and arts related programming. Of these nine, only one (Boston) specifically addresses

9. Chinatown BIA, 'Call for Tender: Street Patrol Services in Toronto Chinatown', *Chinatown BIA* (blog), 4 March 2022, https://chinatownbia.com/announcements/call-for-tender-street-patrol-services-in-toronto-chinatown/.
10. City of Toronto, 'Cultural Districts Program', City of Toronto (City of Toronto, 17 November 2021), Toronto, Ontario, Canada, https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/cultural-districts-program/.
11. City of Toronto, 'Cultural Districts Program'
12. Samuel, 'Toronto Is Introducing "Cultural Districts," but Who Gets to Determine the Culture?', thestar.com, 7 December 2021, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/12/07/toronto-is-introducing-cultural -districts-but-who-gets-to-determine-the-culture.html.
13. Ibid.,

fig.4.14 Mural by Alexa Hatanaka and Aaron Li-Hill completed for a City of Toronto and Chinatown BIA commission. It shows everyday scenes in Chinatown West collapsing together.

fig.4.15 *The Hope in Chinatown* by Li Wenting, completed in 2021 and done in collaboration with the Chinatown BIA and STEPS. It intends to evoke feelings of hope and courage in the face of an uncertain future, depicting the red crested crane , a symbol of luck and longevity in many Asian cultures, flying forward through a line of intergenerational migration and hardship. This comes during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time where both small businesses and the Asian community were struggling admidst new waves of anti-asian hate.

fig.4.16 Intersection of Huron Square and Dundas St. W, c.2013.

fig.4.17 Huron Square, May 2022

affordable housing for the community. This is problematic as many of the areas slated to become part of the program are specifically struggling from gentrification, and in this respect, affordable housing and the right to stay in place is a crucial aspect of any program that intends to support the community. Therefore, it is a recommendation that the Cultural District program direct any federal or provincial grants into a fund for community members to improve the conditions of their homes or towards a fund that helps maintain affordability of existing homes (like in a Community Land Trust discussed in the next portion). Consultation with community groups should reflect the entire spectrum of people in the neighborhood, not just the CBIA, which almost unilaterally represents higher class business interests. Additionally, Cultural District designation should grant both residential and commercial renters first right of refusal and other negotiation tools to large development proposals. This will also help maintain the micro retail frontage that keeps Chinatown vibrant.

City	Number of Districts	Current Designation Process	Eligibility Criteria	Policy Tools
San Francisco	9	Application-based	• Must be a well-defined geographic area • Must possess high concentration of cultural resources, activities	• Application based 14-month grant of up to $ 230,000 USD • Cultural Districts are required to prepare a Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategy (CHHESS) report every three years.
Los Angeles	2	Application-based	• Must be a well-defined geographic area • Must possess high concentration of cultural resources, activities	• Yearly stipend of $5,000 USD • Consulting team aids district year-round • State government pairs districts with strategic partners (i.e. Caltrans)
Seattle	4	Application-based	• Must be contiguous and be located within the Met Council's definition of Areas of Concentrated Poverty (ACP50). Areas of Concentrated Poverty are defined as census tracts where 40% or more of the residents have family or individual incomes that are less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold. • The district must be walkable, accessible and have access to public transportation, which contributes to prioritizing individuals living with physical disabilities.	• Access to a Creative Place-making Toolkit, which contains information on programs, strategies, and resources for districts to use. These include right of way district identification, pop-up spaces, and Art Historic markers.
Minneapolis	4	Application-based	• Proposed district must be located in a low-income community (Area of Concentrated Poverty), and geographical bounds and cultural assets must be outlined in application	• Possibility for People of Colour (POC) and LGBTQ+ businesses to be partnered with public grants, funding • Increased promotion as prime areas for ethical tourism (aligning funding and programs with each district's initiatives and needs)
Sydney	1	Awarded	• Location can be clearly defined • Cultural venues should be no more than 1.5 km apart in walking distance • Have a cluster of cultural assets and institutions	• Incorporating Indigenous history into cultural districts • Based on surrounding arts and cultural institutions to boost tourism • Renew aging assets through cultural precincts
Singapore	2	Awarded	• Significance in national history, such as religious, education, and multicultural institutions dating back to the 1800s	• Programming and space for community gatherings • Access to arts sector funding through National Arts Council and National Heritage Board
Mississauga	6	Awarded	• Local cultural assets, geographical bounds must be identified	• Funds and private grants directed to community artists and cultural leaders • Small business support programs (grants, marketing strategies, etc.)
Boston	4	Application-based	• Proposed geographic bounds, walkable and accessible, with cultural facilities and assets	• Funding for cultural districts through federal grants • Collaborations with local programs such as libraries to create relevant cultural programming • Using pre-existing infrastructure to create affordable housing • Real estate interventions to retain relevant businesses • Partnerships with artists to create public art
Houston	7	Application-based	• Awareness that cultural resources to stimulate economic development and community revitalization • Unique and authentic identity as determined by an area's specific characteristics, but can include its history or communities	• N/A – Government plays a limited role in development, including in programming and funding

fig.4.18 A review of Nine Municipalities' Cultural Districts Program, conducted by the City of Toronto. Note only Boston's cultural district program addresses affordable housing. (One column of table has been omitted for clarity)

fig.4.19 Speculative visualization of Spadina Ave in 2050 according to city visioning and the cultural district program


staples
Shawn
Cakery

Community Control

A third vision for Chinatown, increasingly advocated by anti-displacement minded planners and scholars seeks to put control, especially in terms of housing ownership, availability and affordability in the hands of those that live in the community. A report titled "Community Power for Anti-Displacement" put together by graduate students at the University of Toronto details ways to establish this power, the foremost of which is through a community land trust.[14]

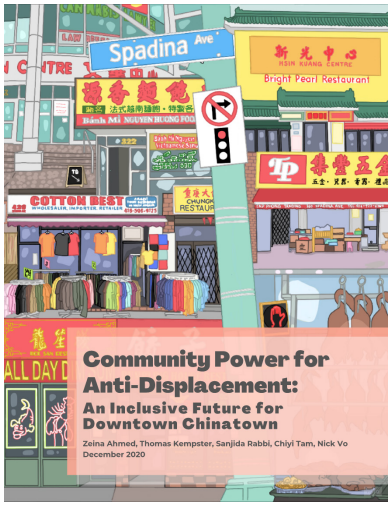


fig.4.20 Report by University of Toronto Planning Students advocating Community Power in Chinatown (Ahmed et al).

A community land trust is a planning tool that allows communities to keep ownership of land which allows them to control and maintain the affordability of the properties on the land. The CLT is represented by a non-profit board of directors that are made up of a combination of CLT residents, community representatives and other community residents. They lease the land to prospective buyers of property on the land, which is kept affordable in perpetuity[15](see figure 4.21). Several restrictions keep the affordability of these properties intact: the properties must be occupied by the owner/family and subletting is strictly prohibited, the CLT retains the first right of refusal, or the first right to purchase the home if the owner wants to sell, and the resell price must be calculated by a predetermined formula, and thus not privy to the swings of the local market.

Community Land Trusts have had varying degrees of success over its short history in North America. The Champlain Housing Trust, established 1984 and located in Burlington, Vermont is the largest CLT in the US with total assets valued at $144 million in 2018[16]. This success is presumed to have been predicated on the supportive municipal leadership in Burlington and the fact that relatively cheap property was available in spades in 1980s Vermont, allowing the organization to quickly acquire property. The same cannot be said for the Toronto Metropolitan Area today, where property is often prohibitively expensive, especially for a non-profit organization. However, community land trusts have nevertheless been appearing as an increasingly adopted strategy for anti-displacement. The Boston Chinatown Community Land Trust (formed 2016) has found success in preserving and introducing new affordable housing to the neighborhood, both in physical property acquisition and lobbying for policy changes. They acquired two row houses for preservation in 2019 which provides 7 permanently low-income homeownership units[17]. On a policy level they have released planning documents

14. Zeina Ahmed et al., 'Community Power for Anti-Displacement – An Inclusive Future for Downtown Chinatown' (Toronto: University of Toronto, December 2020).
15. Dina Tranze-Drabinia, 'A Home for Urban Families - An Alternative Approach to Housing in Downtown Toronto' (Waterloo, University of Waterloo, 2017).
16. Benjamin Schneider, 'How Community Land Trusts and Co-Ops Work: An Explainer', *Bloomberg.Com*, 29 April 2019, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-29/alternative-homeownership-land-trusts-and-co-ops.
17. 'New Affordable Homeownership Opportunities Celebrated in Chinatown', Boston.gov, 17 August 2021, https://www.boston.gov/news/new-affordable-homeownership-opportunities-celebrated-chinatown.

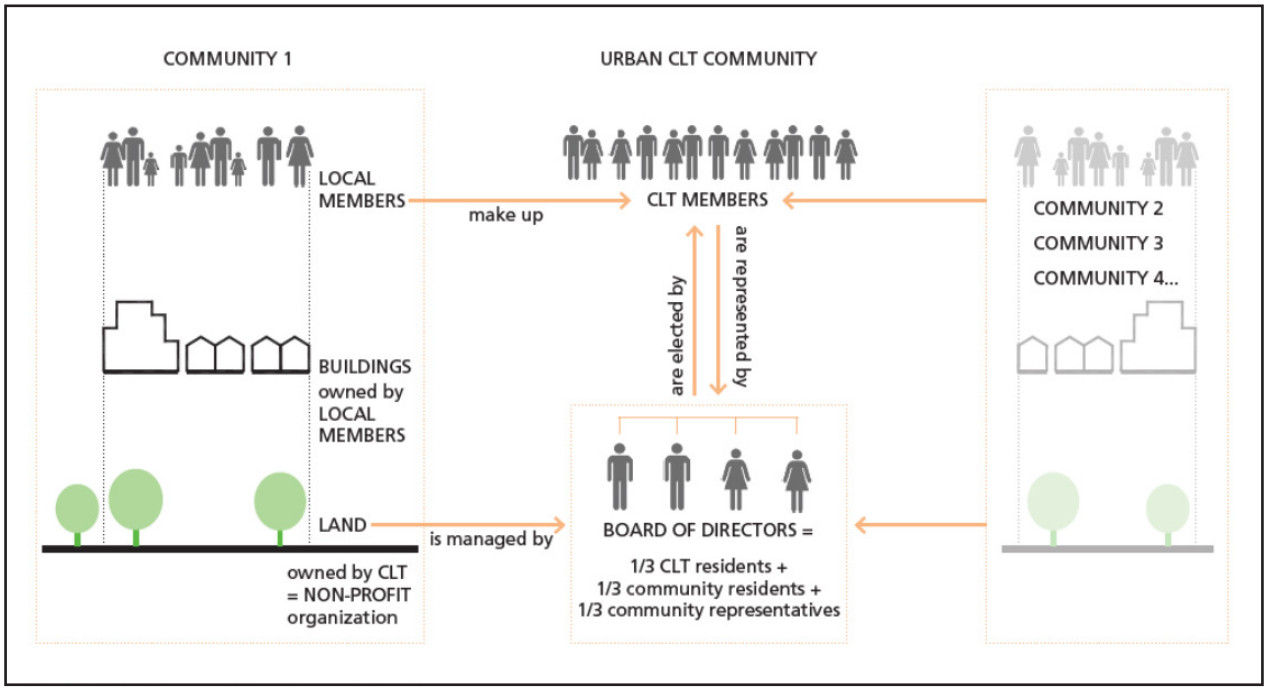


fig.4.21 Schematic diagram of organization of a Community Land Trust (Dina Tranze Drabinia)

like the 2020 Master Plan detailing the needs and conditions of the neighborhood as well as in 2022, when they, along with the greater Boston CLT network successfully lobbied for a one time CLT fund of $2M to be put in the city's FY2022 budget. Closer to home, the Kensington Market Community Land Trust (established 2017) covers the area just west of Chinatown West. While still in its infancy, it has made consistent progress in acquiring and removing land off the real estate market, including recently, the acquisition of 54-56 Kensington Ave, which includes 12 residential and 5 business units[18]. They were able to raise the funds needed through a motion to city council, which gave them $3 Million to buy, renovate and operate the building as affordable housing.

Chinatown West has the opportunity to also establish a community land trust, helping to keep the scores of lower working class housed. This could follow three possible strategies. The first and most likely strategy involves slowly accumulating small properties over many years. This would require appealing to local property owners to sell to the land trust, which would be quite costly within Toronto's competitive housing market. Appealing to property owners who empathize with the land trusts' mission would be a good place to start however. Chinatown West is still home to many traditional associations who own their own properties and already provide deeply affordable rooms to seniors in the community[19]. It is likely that these organizations would want to support the mission and be willing to sell their property to the land trust at a reasonable cost. Recall that one of the historical operations of traditional associations was a community land trust – they operated and owned property for the community who lacked the rights and ability to find housing individually in the early days of Chinese settlement in Toronto. Another option would be to target big obsolete properties, or properties that have been neglected by their current owners. In Chinatown West, the Chinatown Centre at 222 Spadina Ave has been struggling for years to fill its many empty commercial units. Notably, the Super 8 Hotel, which occupied a portion of three floors of the mall was purchased by the city to convert to permanent affordable and supportive housing. It follows that if the city was able to purchase a failing hotel for affordable housing, there may be a possibility to purchase all the units in the shopping center and convert all or a portion of it into affordable housing for the land trust. The third strategy would be to appeal to the city itself for any parcels of land (parking lots) or public properties (public housing projects)

18. '54-56 Kensington Avenue', *KMCLT* (blog), 22 March 2021, https://kmclt.ca/coming-soon/.

19. Zeina Ahmed et al., 'Community Power for Anti-Displacement"

to sell to the land trust. Given the city's new HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan puts "improving affordability of 40,000 households" and providing "40,000 new affordable rental homes approvals" as some of its key goals[20], this may be a promising avenue to pursue. The city could also be appealed to as a form of funding for the CLT, following the Kensington Land Trust example. They were able to demonstrate their immediate need to buy the building in order to stop several tenants from being evicted and were thus granted $3 million from the city. With one or a combination of the above strategies, Chinatown West would be well on its way to achieving community control of the neighborhood and providing housing security and improvements for the lower class and vulnerable populations living within. Indeed, while for the other groups (city planners, speculative developers etc.) the value of Chinatown is in its speculative real estate value and its capital generating cultural experiences, for these precarious populations, the value of Chinatown lies in its ability to provide a home that is affordable and keeps them close to their jobs and community.

20. City of Toronto, 'HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan', City of Toronto (City of Toronto, 21 November 2018), Toronto, Ontario, Canada, https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/community-partners/affordable-housing-partners/housingto-2020-2030-action-plan/.

05 Ethnoburbs, the new Chinatowns?

Since the 1980s, the new Chinese ethnic enclaves of the suburbs – the ethnoburbs, have gradually overtaken Chinatown as the main hub of Chinese settlement and economy. In the GTA, there are thriving Chinese ethnoburbs in Scarborough, Markham and Richmond Hill. New immigrants are consistently choosing to live in the ethnoburbs for its greater space and greater offering of ethnic services reflecting more modern tastes and lifestyles. In comparison to the ethnoburbs, the downtown Chinatown has frequently been regarded as old, outdated and rundown[1]. Here again, as was the case during the move from First Chinatown to Chinatown West, ethnoburbs are seen as 'the real Chinatown' while dismissing the older enclave as a thing of the past, one that cannot keep up with the fast-moving enclaves of the modern age.

However, while Chinatown West was more or less able to fully replace First Chinatown, the same cannot be said about ethnoburbs replacing Chinatown West. Ethnoburbs and Chinatowns have always had very different dynamics and conditions of formation that inform the types of communities they support. The term 'ethnoburb' was initially coined by geographer Li Wei in 1998 who observed organizational and spatial differences in Los Angeles Metropolitan area between Chinatown – the traditional center of Chinese residential and business activity, and the emerging new Chinese area of the San Gabriel Valley. The same patterns have since been observed in several other major metropolitan areas and different ethnic groups all over North America. Some examples include Richmond, BC, just south of Vancouver, or Flushing in New York. Ethnoburbs are ethnic enclaves located in the suburbs and characterized by lower density, higher socio-economic class and greater heterogeneity than typical downtown enclaves. (see figure 5.2). Spatially, they follow the suburban model of functionally separate planning. Instead of retail streets, there are retail plazas and shopping malls filled with Asian stores. In residential blocks, Chinese families might live in clusters of single-detached houses.

Importantly, unlike traditional downtown Chinatowns, ethnoburbs are a voluntary creation formed out of buying power and wanting

1. Andrew Chung, 'Chinatown...Death of a Neighbourhood', *UrbanToronto*, 12 March 2006, https://urbantoronto.ca/forum/threads/chinatown-death-of-a-neighbourhood.3738/.

to maximize 'ethnic personal and social network, as well as business connections; and to have a place with familiar language and culture'[2]. Furthermore, ethnic groups in ethnoburbs often make up a "plurality but not majority" - they make up the highest percentage of any other ethnic group but that percentage is still not over 50%. This means that ethnic clusters still live amongst a rather high level of ethnic diversity compared to the relatively insular and homogenous Chinatowns. Ethnoburbs are very much the product of post mass-immigration and amidst "contemporary socio-economic and political structural changes."[3] In terms of a heterotopia, the greatly increased agency in formation, diversity, and exchange with the wider society all suggest that ethnoburbs are not perceived as heterotopias of difference, from the interior or the exterior. Due to the changed socio-economic world order and the increased agency that resulted from it, ethnic residents of ethnoburbs do not rely on the social and economic benefits of their geographic settlement for survival. They have since their inception, quite a large amount of freedom to traverse many types of spaces in the 'official city', including running for political office and becoming established in global businesses outside the traditional ethnic economy. This is accomplished through both changes within the ethnic community like increased language skills, more established networks, greater economic power, and broader changes in the host society, like a greater appreciation for different cultures, reflected in policies and education. In this way, the ethnic residents of ethnoburbs are worldly and open, educated and socially adept, legitimate members of the 'official city'.

However, they are also not theme park heterotopias in that they do not present inauthentic, curated, displays of culture for the purposes of consumption. Since the ethnoburb is the site of the most new Chinese immigrant settlement, it has become the natural center of ethnic business activity. There is a rich multitude of ethnic businesses here that are an authentic representation of its community. Distinctively, within the traditional ethnic economy of restaurants and other service establishments it is known to have the most modern, trendy and authentic offerings over Chinatown (see figure 5.3). These businesses have naturally attracted many members of the Asian diaspora and foodies alike from outside the area to visit. In the GTA, it is an informally agreed upon fact that Markham and Scarborough and Richmond Hill are the best places to go for modern and authentic foods from Asia from bubble tea to hotpot. Interestingly,

2. Wei Li, 'Ethnoburb versus Chinatown: Two Types of Urban Ethnic Communities in Los Angeles Conceptual Framework: Ethnoburb', *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography*, 10 December 1998, https://doi.org/10.4000/cybergeo.1018.

3. Ibid.,

fig.5.1 First Markham Place at the intersection of Hwy 7 and Rodick Rd in Markham.

	Ghetto	Enclave	Ethnoburb
Dynamics	Forced segregation	Forced and Voluntary	Voluntary
Spatial Form	Small scale	Small Scale	Small to medium scale
Population	High density	High density	Medium density
Location	Inner city	Inner city and suburbs	Suburbs
Economy	Not many	Ethnically-bias towards services and complete w/ ethnically-owned businesses labour-intesive sectors	Own business of all kinds
Internal Stratification	Minimum	Not much	Very Stratified
Interaction	Mainly within group	Mainly within group	Both within and inter-groups
Tension	Between groups	Mainly inter-group	Inter- & Intra-group
Community	Mainly inward	Mainly inward	Inward & Outward

fig.5.2 A comparison of Ghetto, Enclave and Ethnoburb by geographer Li Wei.

fig.5.3 Skycity Shopping Centre near the intersection of Finch Ave and Midland Ave in Agincourt. It is known for its large offering of East Asian, particularly Chinese, restaurants and cafes.

fig.5.4 Times Square at the corner of Hwy 7 and Leslie St in Richmond Hill.

half a century ago, the same would have been said about downtown Chinatown West in relation to what was left of first Chinatown. This phenomenon is 'the crisis of commodification', the idea that the more ethnic communities get commodified, the more they become 'fake' and inauthentic, and no longer interesting to the tourist population, who become ever more discerning of the authentic. Authenticity, the idea that commercial offerings are a true reflection of the community they claim to represent, follows the migration of ethnic communities. This natural migration of culture has become a justification for why the disappearance of downtown Chinatowns is perhaps not a negative thing, rather it is simply a natural way cities grow. *Why bother trying to preserve Chinatowns when Chinese culture thrives in the suburbs?*

In reality, the distinct spatial differences in the suburbs create a vastly different culture in the ethnoburbs compared to the downtown Chinatowns. On an urban planning level, the highly segmented, 'neat and tidy' suburbs have long been critiqued to represent "an asylum for the preservation of an illusion"[4]. With it's too safe, too clean, too rigidly planned neighborhoods, it is a place where urban middle class folk went to avoid the "real world" civic responsibilities of the city and live in seclusion. More than that, suburbs came to represent "a bastion of race and class prejudice", the exclusive realm of a certain class and race of people that could afford and appreciate the lifestyle. As an ethnic enclave in the suburbs, ethnoburbs submit to similar shortfalls - a seemingly endless, undifferentiated building fabric encouraging solitary lives over a collective. Functionally separate planning requiring the use of cars to get from home to work and back. Chinese ethnoburbs, although a rising haven for new immigrants due to its ethnically relevant, authentic businesses and relative affordability, are squarely still for the urban middle class. There is an important reason why a large community of Chinese and other East and Southeast Asians living in Chinatown, particularly seniors, still refuse to move to the ethnoburbs despite the space and cultural businesses offered there – and it isn't simply for the nostalgia. The ethnoburbs excludes swaths of lower- and working-class Chinese who have long required the community, proximity and walkability of downtown Chinatowns to conduct their day to day.

4. Graeme Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies', *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 5 (1 September 2013): 829–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144213479307.

06 Conclusion

Our present need to preserve downtown Chinatowns is tied to the preservation of a specific Chinatown way of living that is entrenched in a culture and class intersection. This intersectionality ties Chinatown residents to the specific social structures and urbanism that is present only in downtown Chinatown, like the walkable streets, close living quarters and the streetside vendors. It is decidedly not about the preservation of any notions of 'Chinese-ness' or Chinese culture writ-large. As evidenced in the previous chapter, Chinese culture is 'alive and well' in the sprawling new Chinatowns of the suburbs – the ethnoburbs. More than protecting the memory of the historical centre of Chinese settlement, preserving Chinatowns are about preserving the right to stay in place for the intersectional community of lower and working class Asian people who depend on downtown Chinatown's urbanism and social structures for survival.

The problem that this thesis has illustrated is how Chinatowns, in response to exterior pressures, have increasingly allowed this community of intersectional, lower class, diverse people to be neglected and displaced, by reorienting itself toward what the outside city finds valuable about Chinatown, as a form of preservation. These 'preservation' strategies have taken many guises over Chinatowns' long and fraught history in North America, but until very recently, most have centered on rebranding and revitalizing the productive realm of Chinatowns – their commercial streets – and using this cultural 'other' to appeal to outside tourists. This is evidenced in both the kitschy Chinatown architecture of the early 20th century that sought to create a neighborhood that physically resembled an imperial China that never existed, or more recent iterations that focus on subtle celebrations of 'Chinese-ness' with art projects and public space interventions (see figure #). This strategy was generally effective in the early days of Chinatown growth, where commodification helped reshape racist conceptions of the Chinese community, keep violence at bay, and where the Chinese were an insular and homogeneous group of mostly rural farmer bachelors with fledgling businesses, it helped these businesses draw capital and make a living. Today, these strategies are no longer sufficient, as with a widespread diversifying of the population, ethnic business interests and community working class interests are no longer so closely aligned that they are mutually

fig.6.1 Community members browsing outdoor vegetable and fruit stands at Kai Wei Supermarket in November 2022.

fig.6.2 A display of shopping trolleys (a very commonly used item amongst senior members of the community in Chinatown) on sale at an import/export store in Chinatown West in November 2022.

supportive. In one example, the president of the Toronto Chinatown BIA supported the controversial new mid-rise market-rate condo development at 315 Spadina, saying it would bring "new people and investments to Chinatown"[1], even though the development was likely to displace many local businesses and working class residents. In an era of reverse white flight, gentrification is now about the cleaning up of downtown by an incoming population whose values are largely conditioned by living in the suburbs and small urban centres. To combat these pressures of class displacement, Chinatown community and working-class residents need a BIA equivalent institution to represent their rights to stay housed and in place, which has begun in grassroots movements like community land trusts.

Although Chinatowns' history of cultural commodification has resulted in the widespread displacement of many Chinatown communities, some Chinatowns are not quite as far along in their evolution. This is the case with Toronto's Chinatown West, which, as evidenced by the previous chapters, still holds onto a small but vibrant community that has the potential to be preserved and developed into a space that continues to support lower class immigrants. Here, the few, but surviving traditional associations are still frequented and used as community spaces. The micro retail spaces, both on the street in split levels, and in the two condo-malls encourage small, local businesses to flourish. Distinctively, the neighborhood has evolved to welcome a highly diverse community both in its residential population and its customer base. A significant population of Chinese, Vietnamese, and (to a lesser extent) Filipino, Cambodian, Laotian, seniors continue to rent its deeply affordable rooming houses, frequent the three highly culturally-appropriate supermarkets, sell homegrown vegetables on street corners and run small businesses. Indeed, Chinatown West's cultural identity is evidently no longer purely Chinese, but rather an informal and diverse amalgamation of different pan-Asian cultures, all rooted in the working class. This change is not to be frowned upon because it is what lends the neighborhood the authenticity and vibrancy that today, attracts its masses of visitors, and which the looming presence of class displacement is on the verge of destroying.

This thesis has exposed the role that the conflict between exterior and interior value has in the evolution of Chinatown. Across different ethnic enclaves residential enclaves have always been perceived from the exterior as inferior to their productive and 'valuable' commercial counterparts. Mohamed Qadeer notes in his study on ethnic enclaves

1. Jadine Ngan, 'Against Displacement, Not Development: Where Will Chinatown Go from Here?', The Varsity, accessed 7 October 2022, *https://deconstruct.thevarsity.ca/.*

and social cohesion that "we are seeing again, a difference in treatment across lines of use: where business streets are seen as valuable, whereas clusters of ethnics living close together are seen with distaste" [2] However, if productive spaces are authentic spaces and authenticity is a true and honest reflection of community interests, than the single best thing to retain authenticity and vitality in an ethnic community is to find ways to allow the community to stay in place. As Zukin proclaims in Landscapes of Power: "we must politicize the meaning of authenticity to include the right to put down roots, a moral right to live and work in a space, not just to consume it"[3].

2. Mohammad Qadeer and Sandeep Kumar, 'Ethnic Enclaves and Social Cohesion', *Canadian Journal of Urban Research 15*, no. 2 (2006): 1–17.

3. Sharon Zukin, 'Changing Landscapes of Power: Opulence and the Urge for Authenticity', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 33*, no. 2 (2009): 543–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00867.x.

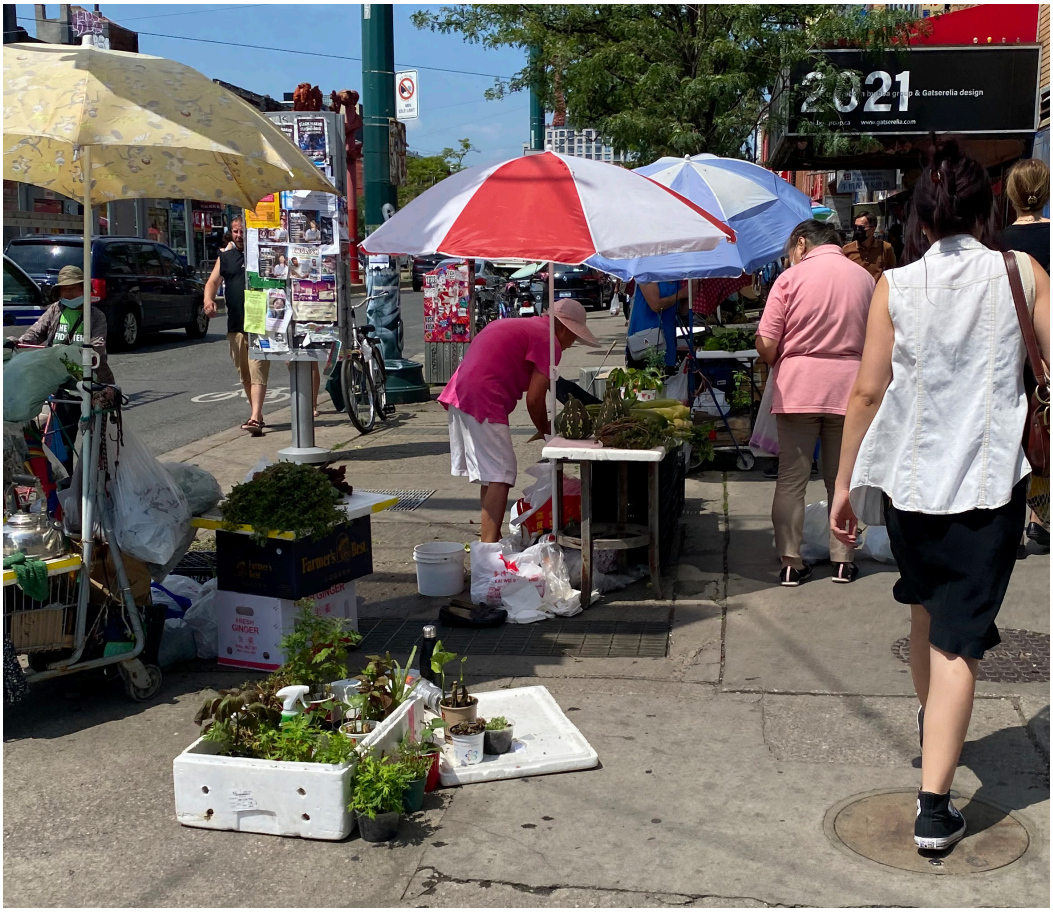


fig.6.4 Chinatown seniors selling homegrown vegetables and house plants on Spadina Ave

Moving forward, there are a number of questions that should be considered regarding the future of a rich, vibrant and inclusive Chinatown in Toronto. Chapter four framed the forthcoming Chinatown land trust as one of the key, and only solutions that champions the rights of the working class to stay in place. However, land trusts do still work within the property system and considering the seeming inevitability of the Chinatown neighborhood to become up-zoned, there is some uncertainty regarding the actual affordability that the land trust can promise, and whether this can be truly 'affordable' for the precarious communities that live in Chinatown. Moreover, how might the Chinatown land trust build into its structure systems to be inclusive to other marginalized groups not belonging to the East or Southeast Asian communities that might take residence here in the future? Looking beyond just housing, would there be structures that might help the land trust protect small mom and pop retail as well? This question also opens up larger questions of identity and authenticity. What exactly makes Chinatowns authentic, within a place and time where simulation is so frequent that is has been absorbed into the fabric of society, and how can we preserve this vibrancy and authentic Chinatown culture in ways that are not attached to the property system? We've already seen the attempted preservation and subsequent formalization and commodification of tangible Chinese and southeast Asian culture, but what can be gained through preserving or supporting elements of intangible culture? Furthermore, despite the ethnoburbs being the domain of an overall higher-class demographic of people, they are hailed as being definitively authentic and free of simulation, being the locus of most new immigration, and thus somewhat simpler to analyze. What then, can be learned by comparing the social structures of the two enclaves, and how can it be used to better the conditions of both? I hope that these questions begin to support a critical discussion on how to actionably maintain and preserve Chinatown and other similar neighborhoods currently disappearing in the city.

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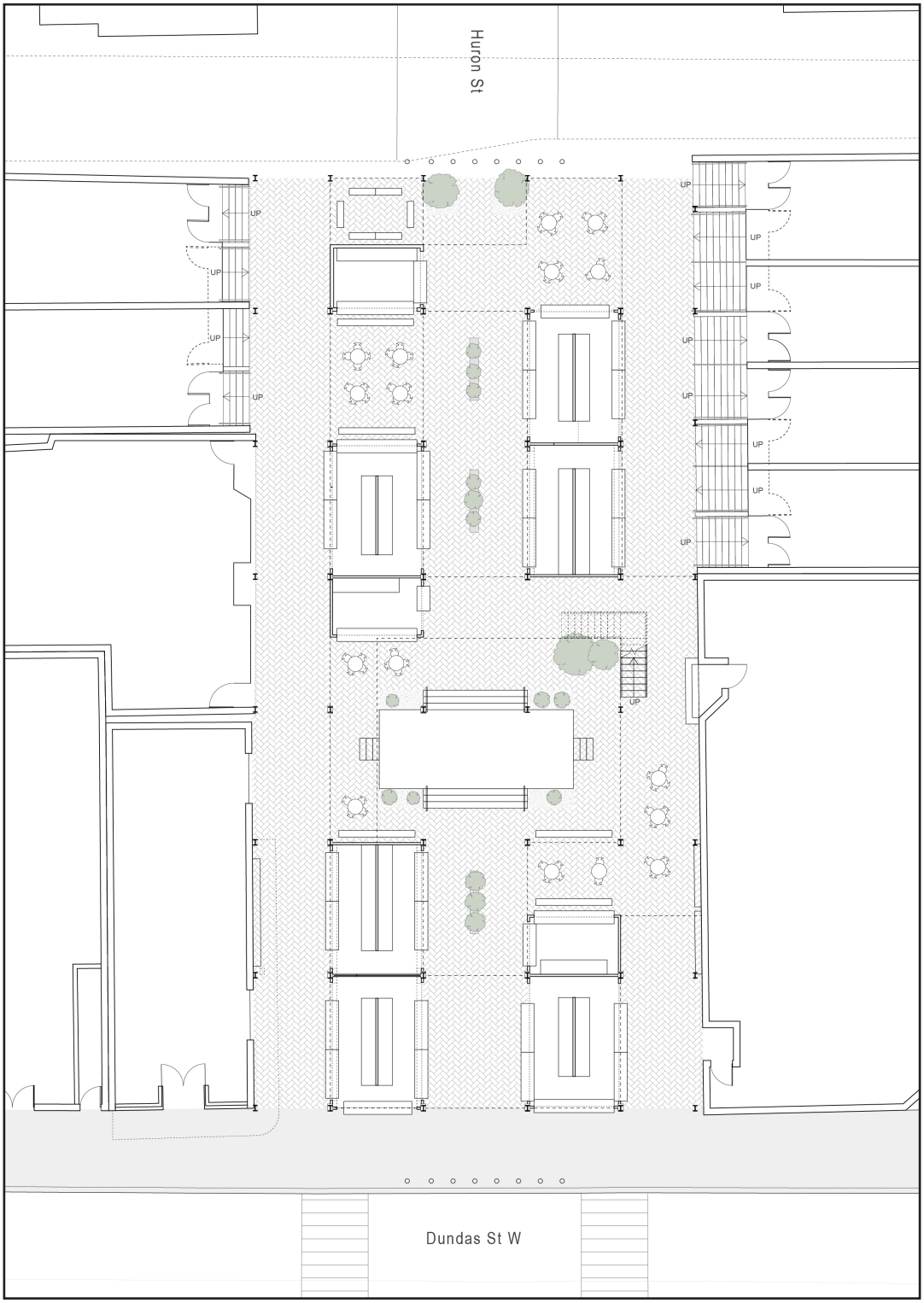
Appendix A

Huron Square Market

This small design project was completed in the first few months of the thesis research before the decision was made to study the evolution of Chinatowns as a majority written work. The goal was to make some type of design intervention into the neighborhood of Chinatown West in order to empower the working class senior community there. This project would reimagine Huron square into a public food and vegetable market that provides a concentrated and interesting space for the many celebrated backyard vegetable farmers to sell their produce, among many others. The space will be owned by the Chinatown BIA and rented out for short terms (bi-weekly, or monthly) and at low-cost to any vendors living in the community who might have something to sell. These vendors get the increased foot traffic resulting from the concentration of many small businesses as well as a children's play place on the upper level. This model creates a very low risk and flexible framework for individuals who cannot handle the increased financial volatility of starting business.

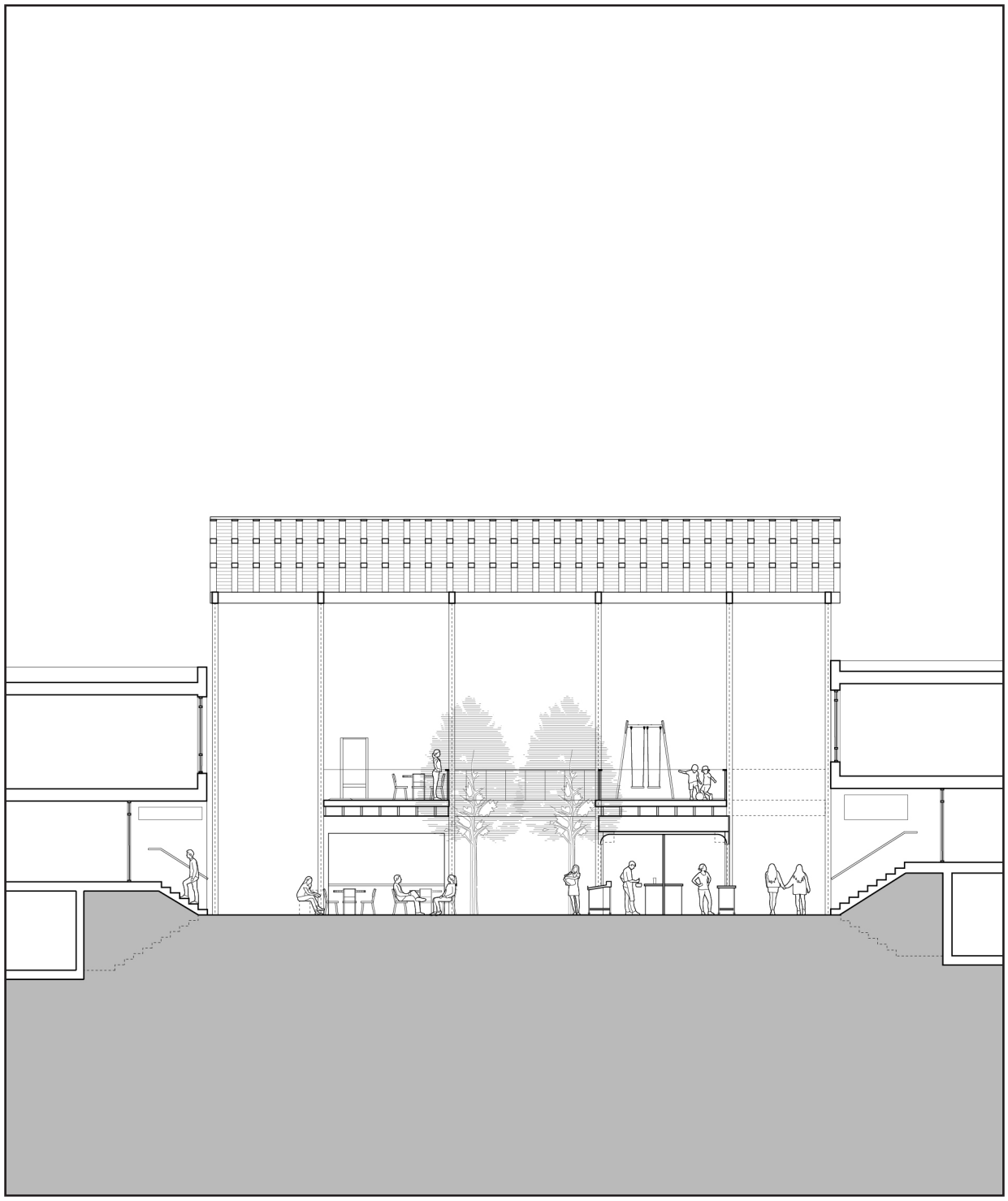


Ground Floor Plan

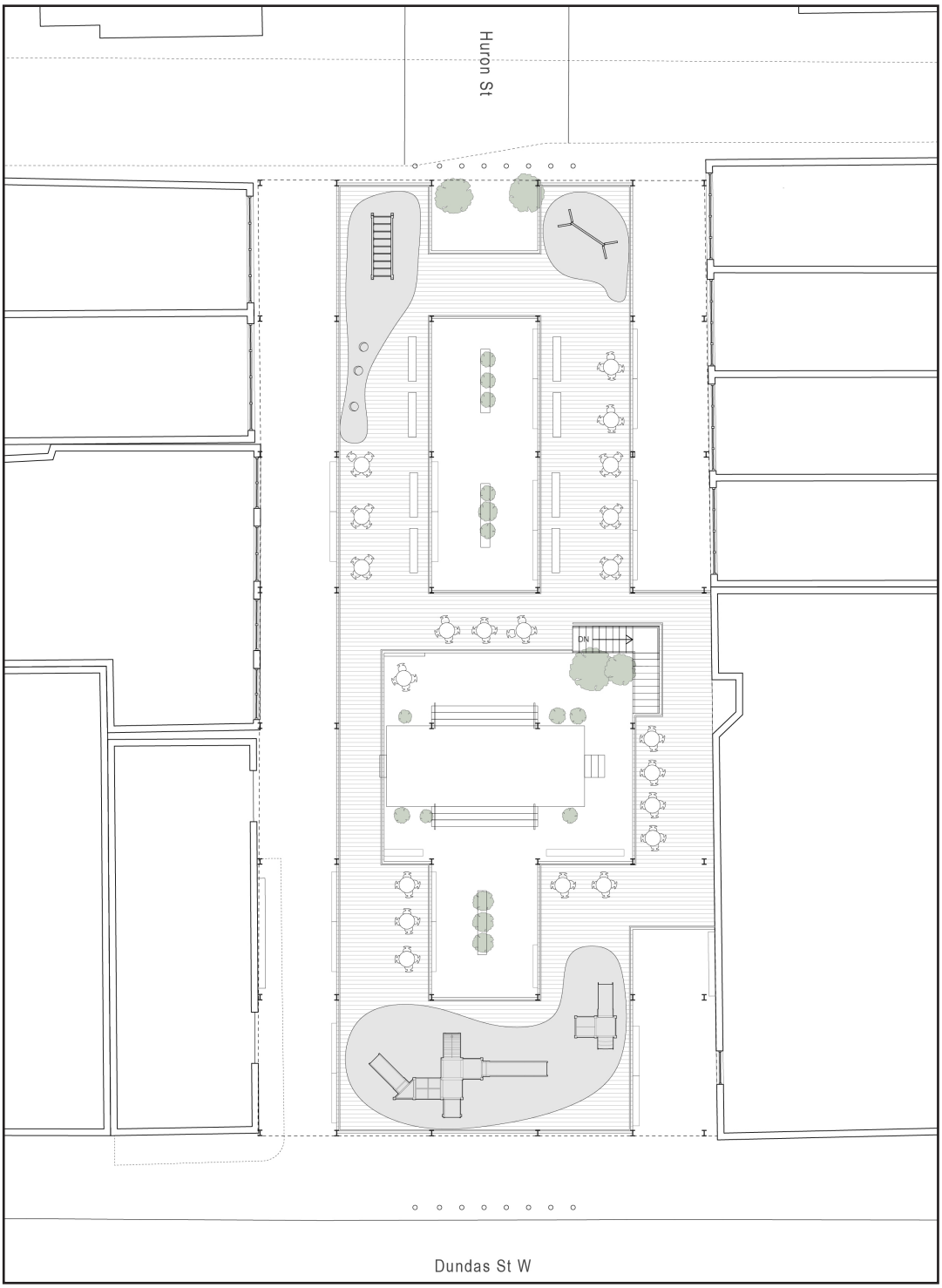
The market is located at a site currently occupied by the Huron St. Square. In 2018, the Chinatown BIA attempted to turn this space into a cultural point of interest by installing chinese art scultures, benches and bronze quilin. Three years on however, it fails to attract much interest due to its general lack of programming and activity. They serve as a one time photo-op for tourists, and does not provide much of a service to the community who resides here. The active car lanes that run through makes it hard for any large informal activity (street parties, gatherings) to take place.

Section A-A

Included in the design is a porous wooden canopy made from many aggregated layers of a variation of a truss, and covered with polyuerthane sheets to allow the sunlight to shine in. The canopy is designed to absorb and reflect light well so that at night, the lit canopy can draw passersby from far away into the market. In the center there is a dedicated stage platform to allow special cultural events to take over the market (like at Lunar New Year, where lion dance performances are a common sight). This is inspired by the stages inside the atriums of chinese malls, often used for small community performances and events or advertising.



Section B-B



Second Floor Plan