

**Vancouver's Chinatown:  
Rebuilding a Community's Identity**

by

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## **Abstract**

In the competition for space within developing cities, key cultural and social components within working class ethnic neighbourhoods are often found being transformed by outside market forces. In the newest iteration of redevelopment in Vancouver's Chinatown, the city continues to encourage the symbolic preservation of historical aesthetics instead of addressing the struggling community living within the heritage space. As a result, the vulnerable and aging population of Chinese seniors who still remain in the neighbourhood have few economically and culturally accessible options available to them.

This thesis attempts to break down the outdated interpretations of ethnic enclaves that reinforces outsider's abilities to manipulate the built environment and cultural identities. I propose instead an alternative redevelopment method for Vancouver's Chinatown neighbourhood that facilitates the community's preservation through the critical analysis of our current building and heritage practices, as well as the design of new public and living spaces.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Most of all, thank you Mom, Dad and the rest of my family for all of your patience and constant support. Love you.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The type of relationship that a host city has with their immigrant population can be judged in how the two entities construct their urban fabric. In Canada, healthy and vibrant cities use their diversity of culture and activities to create heterogeneous environments that are both specific to their small communities as well as inclusive to the greater population.

In Vancouver, British Columbia, one of their oldest ethnic neighbourhoods that still exists today is their Chinatown community. In 1886, a few months after the city was incorporated into Canada, a settlement of Chinese immigrants was established along what is now Main Street and East Pender Street. As the neighbourhood began to grow however, Chinatown was subjected to significant discrimination, restrictions, and cultural hegemony by their receiving society.<sup>1</sup>

As I will explore in later chapters, as a result of the imbalance of power between the two entities, when there is a conflict of interests, the host society tends to exercise their authority over the immigrant community by creating restrictions in how they can live and work.

The primary focus of this thesis, is the research of how the built environments of these communities are manipulated and constrained over time to benefit the host society instead of the ethnic enclave.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 9.

2 Ibid., 10.

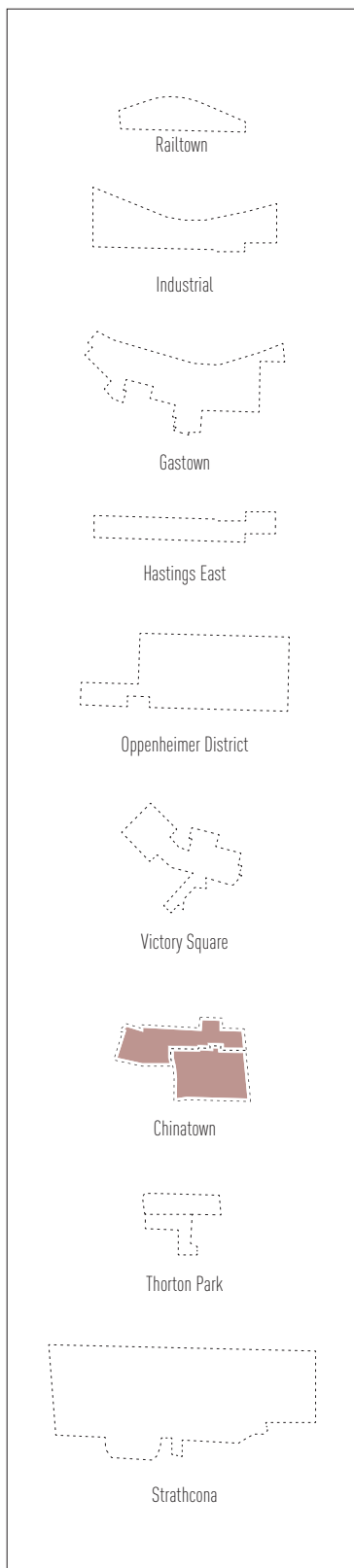


Diagram of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhoods.

In later chapters I will explore this relationship between host societies and their immigrant communities as well as their effects and the mechanisms that are used to consolidate power and control. My method involves deconstructing the composition of Vancouver's Chinatown through the combination of socio-historical analysis and urban morphology. From these studies, I build my argument that new urban and architectural strategies are needed to respond to the existing fragmentation of Chinatown from the rest of the city.

After establishing my criticisms to the current systems that reinforce cultural hegemony, I will use a new method to redevelop a site at the heart of Vancouver's Chinatown. My intention is to carefully develop strategies that are applicable to other heritage ethnic communities experiencing displacement and cultural domination. Before I begin I will briefly expand on two of the concepts concerning this project.

### Hybrid Spaces

Vancouver, British Columbia, like other major Canadian centers, is composed of a mix of districts, neighbourhoods, and communities that create a compact urban fabric. When performing properly, each area, in addition to being accessible to the rest of the city, is distinct and functions to support a specific set of social activities tailored for its local population. In these communities, the urban identity and the social environment are continuously and collectively defined between the city and its individual residents.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 9.

Ethnic communities, a common occurrence in Canadian cities, are considered hybrid spaces. Meaning they are defined by both the host-society and the minority immigrant population. In contrast to other communities, which are defined collectively between the city and its residents, intentions for immigrant environments may contrast significantly. Therefore, conflicts occur often as host societies tend to exercise their authority over the ethnic community's urban environment.



Situating Chinatown within Vancouver; Vancouver, British Columbia base map #1 from Google Earth. Chinatown, Vancouver base map #2 from CADMapper.



In this thesis, my first objective is the exploration and analysis of the imbalance of power that the City of Vancouver possesses over their Chinatown and its role in shaping the neighbourhood's architecture and urban identity. I chose Vancouver as the city to examine in further detail as I believe it exemplifies the most decisive location to study the complex issues of the race defining process of ethnic communities within Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Vancouver's Chinatown is one of the oldest in Canada and one of the largest in North America. Although Vancouver is a relatively young city, a small Chinese population was living and working in the British settlement before it was incorporated into Canada in 1886. As Vancouver grew, the Chinese played a major role in shaping the city's social and built environments.

Recently however, Vancouver along with other North American cities, have been starting to experience the effects of globalization and gentrification, as they both significantly influence, directly and indirectly, the property market and global investment.<sup>5</sup>

As property and neighbourhood values suddenly increase, I argue that Chinatown's population of low-

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4 Mohamed Omar, "Canada's Most Endangered Places Include Vancouver's Chinatown," *Huffington Post*, May 27, 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/05/27/most-endangered-places\\_n\\_10146118.html?fb\\_comment\\_id=187380191281115\\_1187509221268212](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/05/27/most-endangered-places_n_10146118.html?fb_comment_id=187380191281115_1187509221268212).

5 Bhinder Sajan and Kendra Mangione, "Housing Market Data: Vancouver Condos Most Popular with Non-Resident Owners." *British Columbia, CTV News*, March 13, 2019, <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/housing-market-data-vancouver-condos-most-popular-with-non-resident-owners-1.4333172>.



“Vancouver Housing Crisis for the New York Times,” 2018; photograph by Alana Paterson.

income and working class residents and the businesses they rely on, are at great risk of redevelopment related displacement.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, I argue that this neighbourhood’s inhabitants also have the most to gain by reconstructing their urban and architectural strategies to resist the displacement inherent in this economy driven redevelopment.<sup>7</sup>

## Growth and Decline

Before I discuss how processes of cultural hegemony and identity manipulation effect the social and built environments of Chinatowns, I first need to define the mechanisms that allow the processes to take place.

To understand the growth and decline of Chinatowns, it is helpful to look at the life-cycle of ethnic enclaves as a cyclical system, constantly revolving between development, decay, and redevelopment.<sup>8</sup> Currently, Vancouver’s Chinatown neighbourhood finds itself in between the urban decay and redevelopment phases.

When the redevelopment is initiated by the host-society, a community’s buildings are updated, maintained, and replaced.<sup>9</sup> However, the neighbourhood and its future identity are also put in a vulnerable position at this stage, as the redevelopment is easily shaped by

<sup>6</sup> City of Vancouver, *Downtown Eastside: Local Area Profile 2013* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver Community Services and Planning and Development Services, 2013).

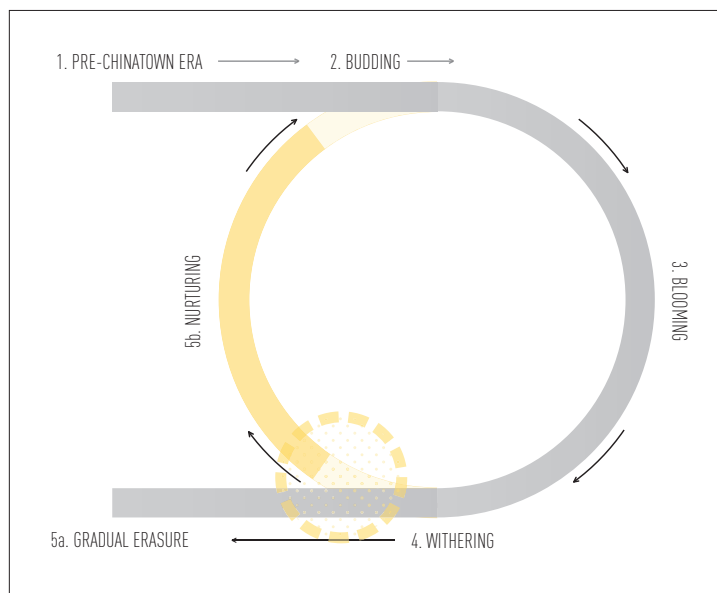
<sup>7</sup> Matt O’Grady, “Vancouver’s Future Hinges on the Fight to Save Chinatown.” *Vancouver Magazine*, June 13, 2017, <http://vanmag.com/city/vancouvers-future-hinges-on-the-fight-to-save-chinatown/>.

<sup>8</sup> David Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 4-8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

motivations outside the community's control and best interests.

Development life-cycle of Chinatowns; Adapted from David Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 5.



Therefore, the potential for essential community spaces to be lost are high in this phase, as the struggling local economy of the neighbourhood leaves residents and business owners with little choice but to sell their properties.<sup>10</sup>

Ideally, a community supportive plan should engage with the existing urban identity, the anticipated needs, and future ambitions of the neighbourhood, in addition to establishing a continuous discussion with the community's local population.<sup>11</sup> However, for Vancouver's Chinatown and other ethnic neighbourhoods, cycles of investment, divestment, and reinvestment are used by the host societies to induce

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Hardy, "The Wing Sang Building," *Montecristo Magazine*, April 6, 2015, <https://montecristomagazine.com/magazine/spring-2015/the-wing-sang-building>.

<sup>11</sup> Joe Wai, "Why Chinatown Needs to Grow Taller," *The Tyee*, Mar 16, 2011, <https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2011/03/16/ChinatownGrow/>.



“Vancouver Housing Crisis for the New York Times,” 2018; photograph by Alana Paterson.

neighbourhood redevelopment.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1960s, the systematic neglect of Chinatown’s urban environment gave the city and developers justification to invest in a slum clearance scheme, or what the city called urban renewal projects. Even before the slum clearance scheme, the municipal government was more than willing to let the neighbourhood fall into disrepair.

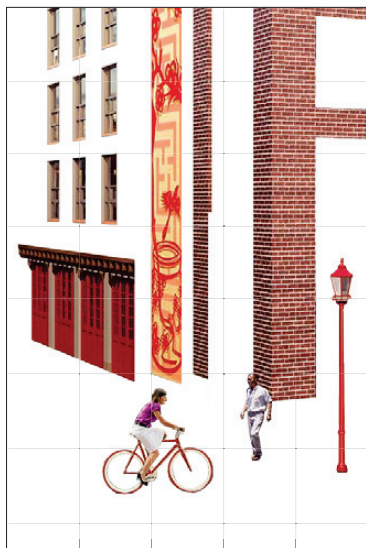
While Chinatown had always been criticized as a filthy, overcrowded slum, the government made no effort to improve it. Instead it merely condemned buildings in Chinatown and evicted tenants. For example, in August 1944, 300 Chinese tenants were removed from several tenement buildings on Shanghai Alley after the structures were declared unsanitary.<sup>13</sup>

Recently, in Vancouver and other cities growing in population and developing their economy, property values have become the primary force that dictates their built environments.<sup>14</sup> I propose however, that this strategy limits diversity in developing urban centres and is used as an effective method to exclude a lower-income working class community who cannot afford the increased rent and costs of living. Jane Jacobs’ describes the phenomenon in her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Lin, “Los Angeles Chinatown: Tourism, Gentrification, and the Rise of an Ethnic Growth Machine,” *Amerasia Journal* 34 (2008): 110-125, doi:10.17953/amer.34.3.v545v63lpj1535p7.

<sup>13</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 85.

<sup>14</sup> Fiona Morrow, “Big Fat Deal: \$5.7 million for this Keefer Street Penthouse or a mere \$16 million for the Whole Building,” *BC Business*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.bcbusiness.ca/big-fat-deal-57-million-for-this-kefer-street-penthouse>.



Recent rendering for a Chinatown project that shows the development prescribing to a certain visual aesthetic.



The red light posts, bilingual signs, and ornamental dragons were all installed in the 1980s as part of Vancouver's 'beautification' (brand making).

The winners in the competition for space will represent only a narrow segment of the many uses that together created success. Whichever one or few uses have emerged as the most profitable in the locality will be repeated and repeated, crowding out and overwhelming less profitable forms of use.<sup>15</sup>

Currently in Vancouver, the uncertainty for the future of Chinatown's essential community spaces and programs has made the local residents reluctant to commit to a full blown redevelopment of the neighbourhood.<sup>16</sup>

This hesitation stems from recent renewal projects that relied on the host-society's perceived identities of the neighbourhood instead of citizen involvement. In the past, redevelopment goals has led to the symbolic preservation of heritage aesthetics in place of the preservation of residents and businesses, which were displaced to other sectors of the city.<sup>17</sup>

In Vancouver's Chinatown neighbourhood, we have seen, even in recent projects,<sup>18</sup> that the city believes the area is more profitable as a symbolic representation

15 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 243.

16 Frances Bula, "Vancouver developers and community activists debate Chinatown's future," *The Globe and Mail*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/vancouver-developers-and-community-activists-debate-chinatowns-future/article30461057/>.

17 Zachary Hyde, "Gentrification as Symbolic Cannibalism: From 'Fraserhood to Chinatown,'" *The Mainlander*, March 5, 2017, <http://themainlander.com/2017/03/05/gentrification-as-symbolic-cannibalism-from-fraserhood-to-chinatown/>.

18 Nat Lowe, "Class Struggle in Chinatown: Ethnic Tourism, Planned Gentrification, and Organizing for Tenant Power," *The Mainlander*, July 16, 2019, <http://themainlander.com/2019/07/16/class-struggle-in-chinatown-ethnic-tourism-planned-gentrification-and-organizing-for-tenant-power/>.



“Vancouver Housing Crisis for the New York Times,” 2018; photograph by Alana Paterson.

of a Chinatown aesthetic than it would be supporting its aging population and fostering a new generation of working class residents.<sup>19</sup>

In response, my thesis argument is that this current redevelopment model, which relies on the homogeneous repetition of profit based developments, is sufficient in only redistributing market values; and is inadequate for creating a distinct social environment that supports the specific needs and activities of its community members.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, this wave of global economic power that homogenizes our neighbourhoods into economic machines not only restricts and alienates members of these communities from participating in the neighbourhood, but it also restricts the future diversity of a growing city’s built environment.

## Method and Application

To construct this thesis, I begin by analyzing the current redevelopment model and how Vancouver’s Chinatown has become a product of hegemonic processes.

To investigate the systems that define Chinatown, I explored three historical time periods from the neighbourhood’s past to extract the common patterns

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19 Joanna Chiu, “Inside the Affordable Chinatown Haven that Narrowly Avoided Renovation,” *Vice Magazine*, Nov 26, 2018, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/9k43qe/inside-the-affordable-chinatown-haven-that-narrowly-avoided-renovation](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/9k43qe/inside-the-affordable-chinatown-haven-that-narrowly-avoided-renovation).

20 Fiona York, King-Mong Chan, Lama Mugabo, and Elli Taylor, *Displaced: Rents and the Rate of Change in the Downtown Eastside* (Vancouver: Carnegie Community Action Project, 2018), 26-29.

and themes that constructed how these hegemonic processes work. The goal for this analysis is to strengthen my argument that Vancouver's Chinatown, along with other communities in the same position, are as much a product of the host society they exist in as they are a product of their local ethnic community.

After my initial investigation, I use spatial syntax analysis, which brings the physical morphology of space together with decisive socio-historical events, to deconstruct the built environment. The argument that I am building is a critical analysis of the existing immigrant - host society relationship which has resulted in a fragmented urban fabric and therefore a fragmented social environment.

To construct my critique, I examine both physical and non-physical boundaries imposed historically on Vancouver's Chinatown to demonstrate how themes of isolation and exclusion, are inherent in the built environment. Thereby necessitating a new method for restructuring ethnic enclaves that values the community's input instead of the market's.

Finally I build a new redevelopment method that informs the urban and architectural strategies of the design portion of the thesis project, which serves as a study of my thesis strategies.

By inverting the current development method, these strategies respond directly to the current built environment and the building practices that prioritize the best interests of market values over the existing community's concerns and interests.



Situating Vancouver's Chinatown;  
Vancouver, British Columbia base map #1 from Google Earth.  
Chinatown, Vancouver base map #2 from CADMapper.





J.S. Matthews, Print of The Great Vancouver Fire, 1932; from the City of Vancouver Archives.

## Chapter 2: Intersecting Cultures

The City of Vancouver was incorporated into Canada on April 6, 1886. Two months later on June 13th 1886, the Great Vancouver Fire razed the entire city. After the fire was put out, the government needed labourers to clear the land for resettlement. Consequently, the city council leased 60 hectares of forested land on Westminster Ave. (now Main St.) on the North Shore of False Creek, to the Chinese, rent-free for ten years, on the condition that they clear and cultivate the land. By the end of 1886, a tiny Chinatown, with a population of about 90, had emerged on the northern tidal flat of False Creek on the outskirts of the city.<sup>21</sup>

In this chapter I position my thesis within its intellectual context before I begin to analyze the history of Vancouver's Chinatown. The purpose of this chapter is to build my argument: that there is an imbalance of power over Chinatown's built environment and that it is problematic for the existing Chinatown community. I will also define the patterns of redevelopment and the mechanisms that allow for them to take place.

### Cultural Positioning

David Lai was a professor at the University of Victoria where he spent his career involved in researching the Chinese in Canada. In his book *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, he published the popular and now widely accepted critical analysis of North American Chinatowns. Lai describes Chinatowns as

<sup>21</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 79.



View of V.J. Day Chinese Dragon Parade, 1945; photograph by Don Coltman, from the City of Vancouver Archives.

components of the host city's urban fabric, performing as home to both an ethnic population and their economic activity. He asserts the urban composition of these neighbourhoods are a result of the immigrant community transferring their cultural and social organization into a new environment.<sup>22</sup> In general, host societies view ethnic communities as distinct and separate from the rest of the city.

However, I found that Edward Said and Anderson Kay adopt another approach in the conceptualization of the Orient and of Chinatowns, that helps me to further my understanding of Vancouver's Chinatown.

In Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, which serves as a critical reflection on the discourse of the same name, he asserts that the concept of the Orient is a European invention. Within *Orientalism* there is a set of traditional images, vocabulary, and thoughts that are used to describe the Orient. The sociologists, historians and anthropologists who define this language, Said argues, use the Orient as a way to define and strengthen their own European identity by setting themselves in opposition and superior to the Orient, by defining the Orient as an otherness.<sup>23</sup> Said concludes, this relationship creates an interdependence between the two entities that support and reflect each other, making *Orientalism* more valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as an effective discourse about the Orient.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 2 - 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



François Boucher, *The Chinese garden*, 1742; from Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archeologie de Besançon.

Along the same line of thinking as Said, Kay Anderson asserts that Chinatowns are a Western conceptualization and serve as commentaries on the attitudes and behaviors that host-societies have towards their Chinese communities.<sup>25</sup>

In this chapter I explore the extent of Anderson's proposition that Chinatowns belong as much to the institutions with the power to define and shape them, as they are a product of its resident's who are active participants in their new environment.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, in this chapter I argue that the racialization and exclusion that defines and continues to control Vancouver's Chinatown and its built environment today, is a product of host society perceptions.

In the next sections of this chapter I cite directly from Lai's book, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, to relay the necessary information about the neighbourhood's history of development, decay, and redevelopment into my thesis argument. Without Lai's consolidation of data from his extensive research this analysis would not be possible.

## Chinatowns

To begin let us outline the Chinese migration onto the North American West Coast and the creation of the initial settlement communities.

As Lai describes, Chinatowns are ethnic enclaves

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



Map of Guangdong Province, China; Map of China base map from Google Maps.

of Chinese or Han people located outside mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan, and most often in an urban setting. In North America, the oldest Chinatowns have existed since the mid 1800s; a result of immigration from the Province of Guangdong to the North American West Coast.<sup>27</sup>

The necessity of creating a separate Chinese community in the North American context was due to a need to create a support system in a strange, and hostile environment.

During the period of free entry, the Chinese were free to enter and leave Canada but they were not free in many other respects: there were restrictions on their right to vote, to seek employment, and to choose where they could live and work.<sup>28</sup>

In day to day life, Chinese immigrants would voluntarily separate themselves from the white settlement in order to avoid open discrimination and abuse. As Lai argues, the boundaries of Chinatown were initially intended not only to keep the Chinese in, but to keep the rest of society out, as a means to secure the community's safety.<sup>29</sup>

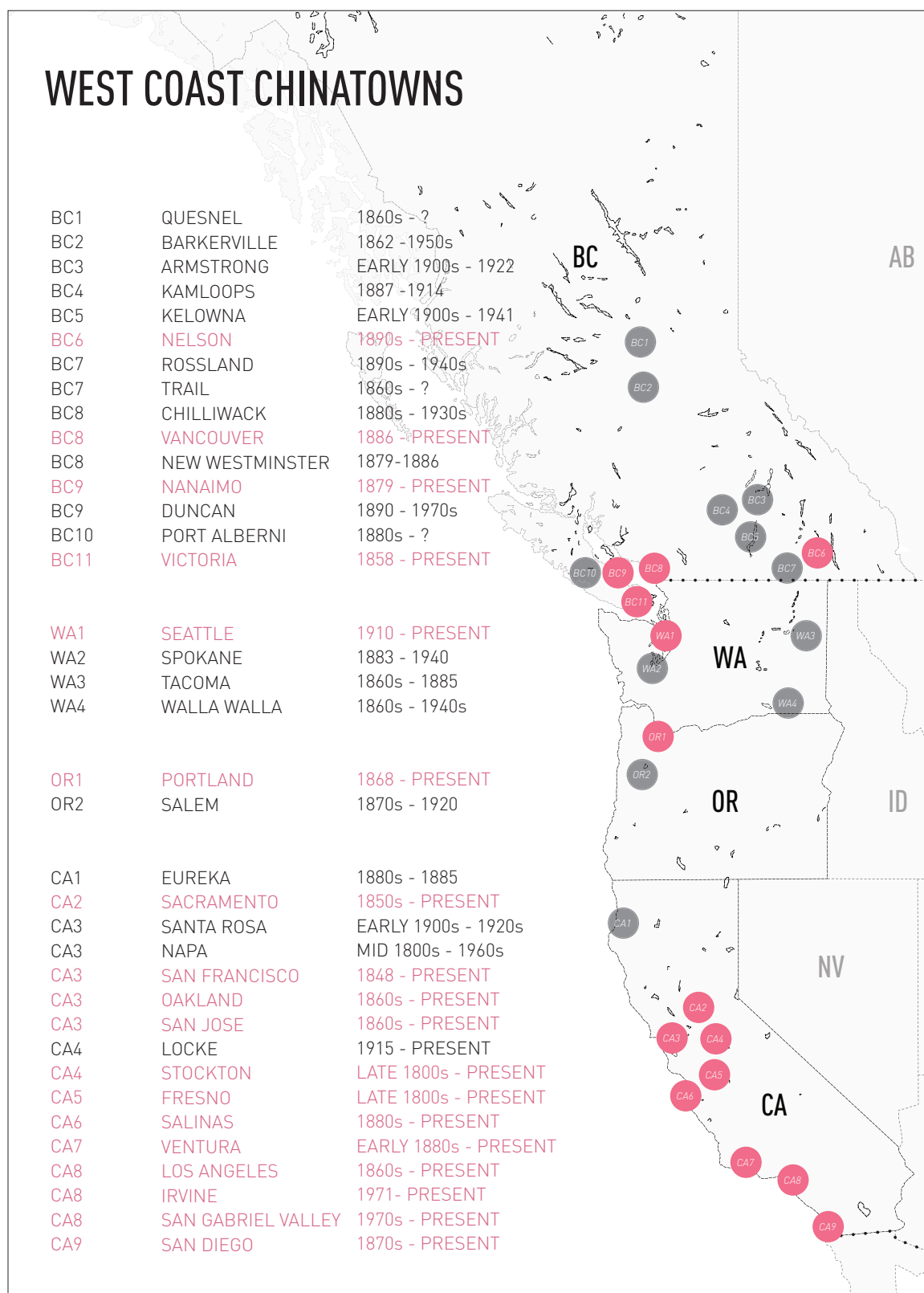
This early discrimination was the beginning, as Anderson puts it, of Chinatown becoming a store of collective representations. Meaning that past conceptions of identity and place continually shaped practices that cemented their image within later formulations of cultural hegemony by the host society.

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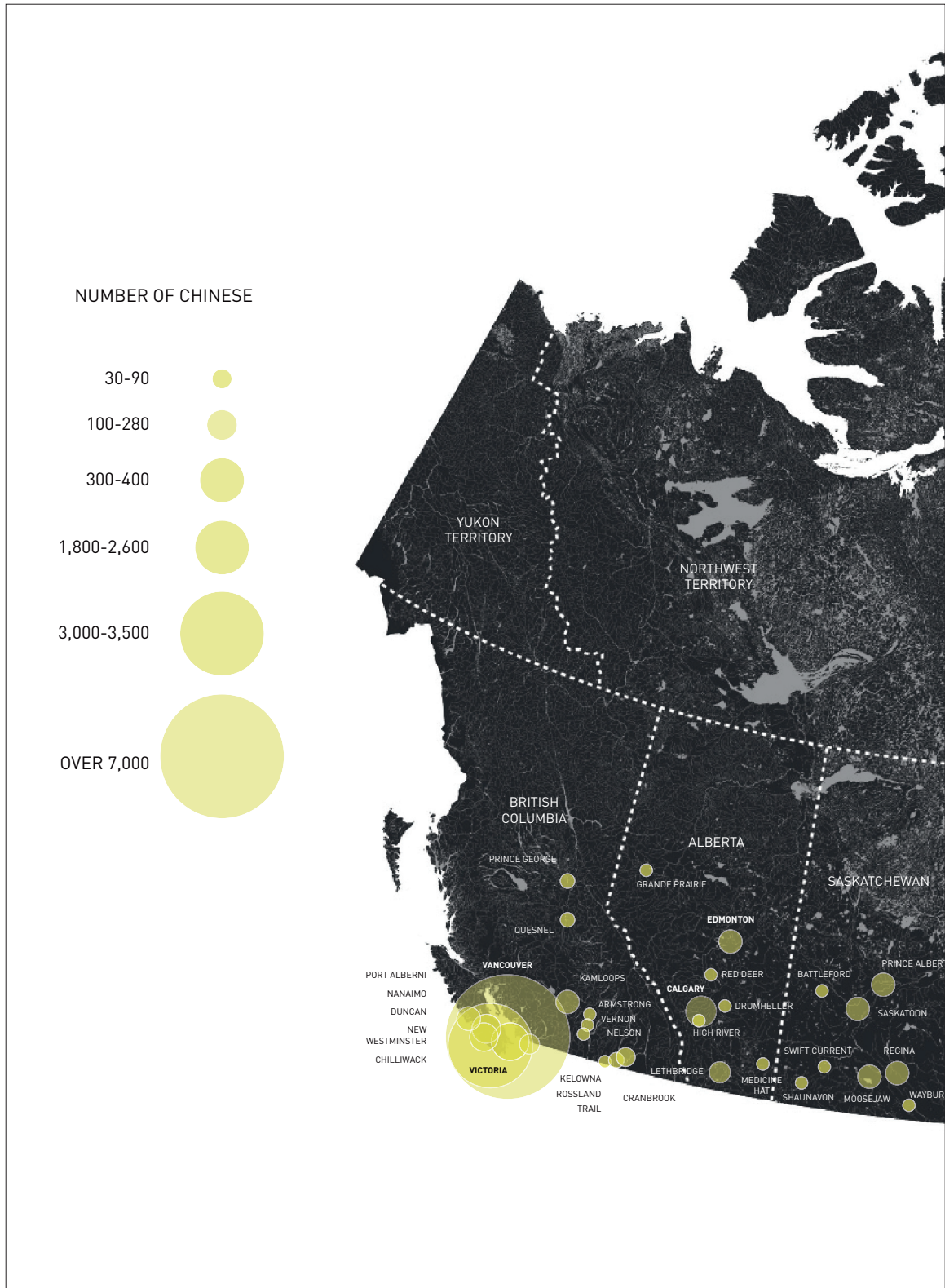
<sup>27</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 4-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

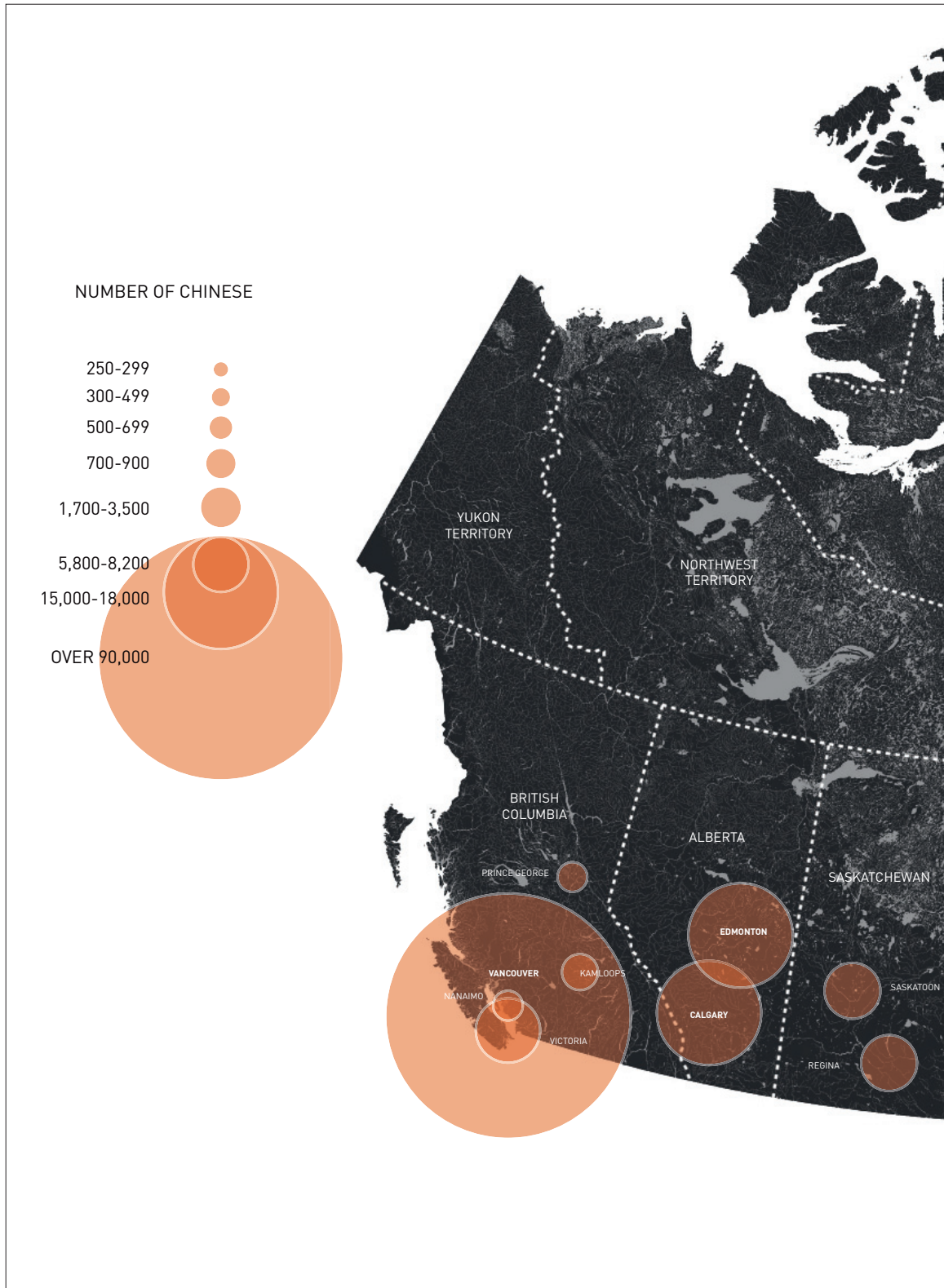
<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



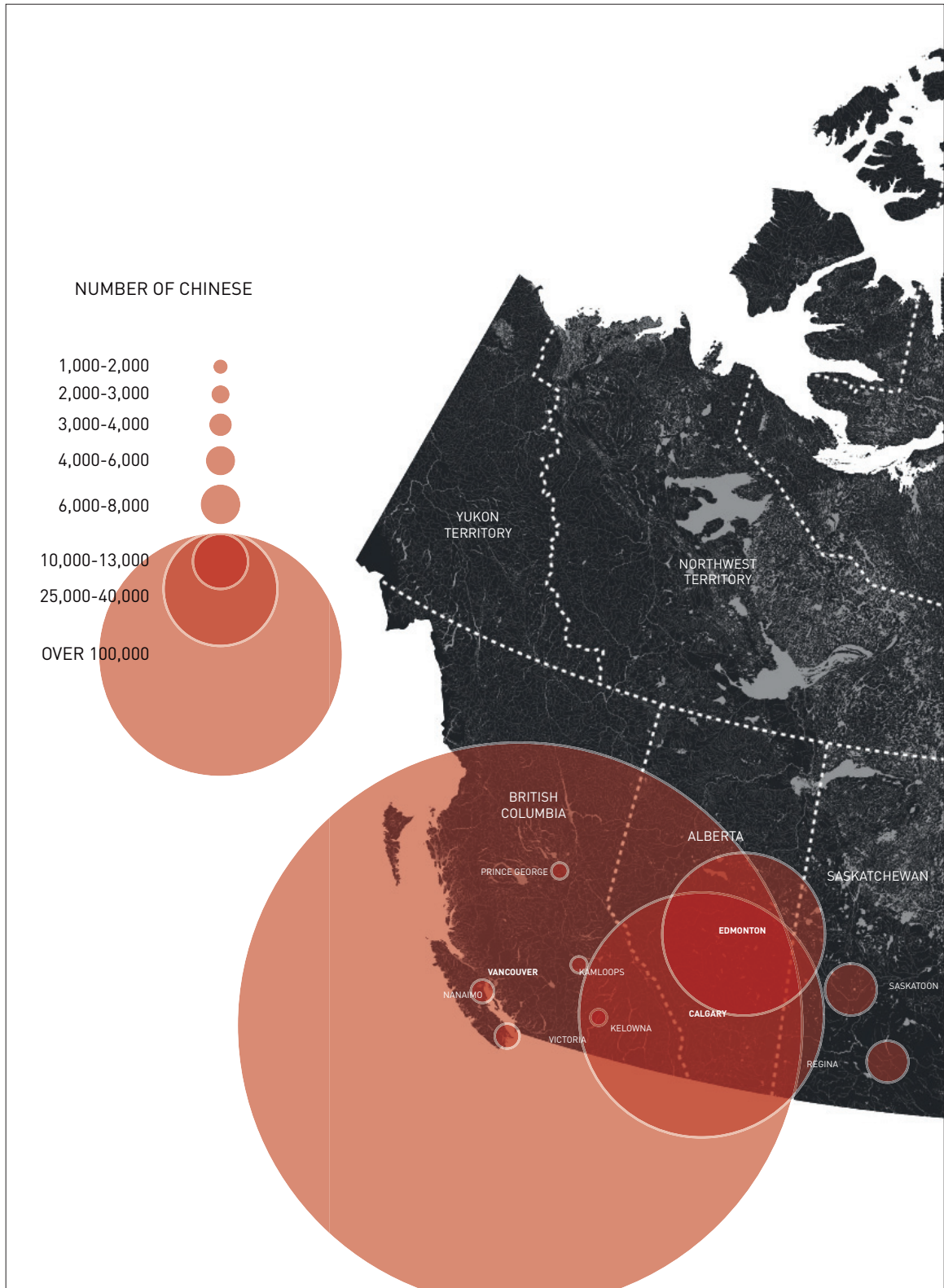
Mapping and designating Chinatowns that were redeveloped and those that have disappeared; North American West Coast base map from Google Maps. Data collected from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*; and Statistics Canada, *2016 Census*.



Distribution of Chinese in Canada by Cities and Towns, 1941;  
 Canada base map from Google Maps.  
 Background map by Joy Charbonneau, 2011.  
 Data from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 65.



Distribution of Chinese in Canada by Cities and Towns, 1981;  
 Canada base map from Google Maps.  
 Background map by Joy Charbonneau, 2011.  
 Data from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 117.



Distribution of Chinese in Canada by Cities and Towns, 2016;  
 Canada base map from Google Maps.  
 Background map by Joy Charbonneau, 2011.  
 Data from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.



From the time of neighbourhood harassment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through a period of classification as a tourist amenity in the 1930s and a 'slum' in the 1950s and 1960s, to the recent era when, under the aegis of Canada's multiculturalism policy, Chinatown has been courted by the Canadian government precisely for its perceived Chineseness.<sup>30</sup>

In the past, Chinatown was perceived as "a godforsaken place to be kept as far away as possible from the white community,"<sup>31</sup> which resulted in discriminatory laws, confined living conditions, and barriers between the ethnic enclave and the rest of society. If we compare these perceptions to today, Chinatown now is viewed as "an important historical district where heritage buildings should be protected."<sup>32</sup> These current perceptions, driven by extracting the economic value out of working class histories, has resulted in an application for a UNESCO heritage designation. This designation however, is problematic and would prevent the much needed density from entering the neighbourhood.

Therefore, I argue that regardless of the era, it is the host society that has historically controlled the physical and social outcome of the neighbourhood through the race defining process.<sup>33</sup>

30 Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, 33.

31 Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 121.

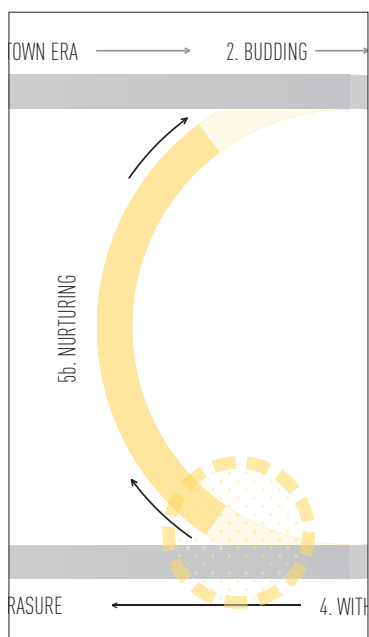
32 CBC News, "World Heritage status would make Vancouver's Chinatown permanent symbol of resilience, B.C. says," British Columbia, CBC News, Sep 17, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/world-heritage-status-would-make-vancouver-s-chinatown-permanent-symbol-of-resilience-b-c-says-1.4826844>.

33 Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, 33.

## Defining Otherness

In my argument that I described in the introduction, reducing a culturally diverse immigrant community into static identities is achieved through the current urban development cycle. As I briefly described earlier, when an ethnic neighbourhood enters the redevelopment phase of the development cycle, the host society has the authority to dictate what can be built, where it is placed, and more.

Therefore, by simultaneously deconstructing and replacing old built environments, the redevelopment phase has the most impact on the future identity of the community, as it temporarily redistributes the power to determine how a neighbourhood is shaped, to groups of people and businesses outside the community.



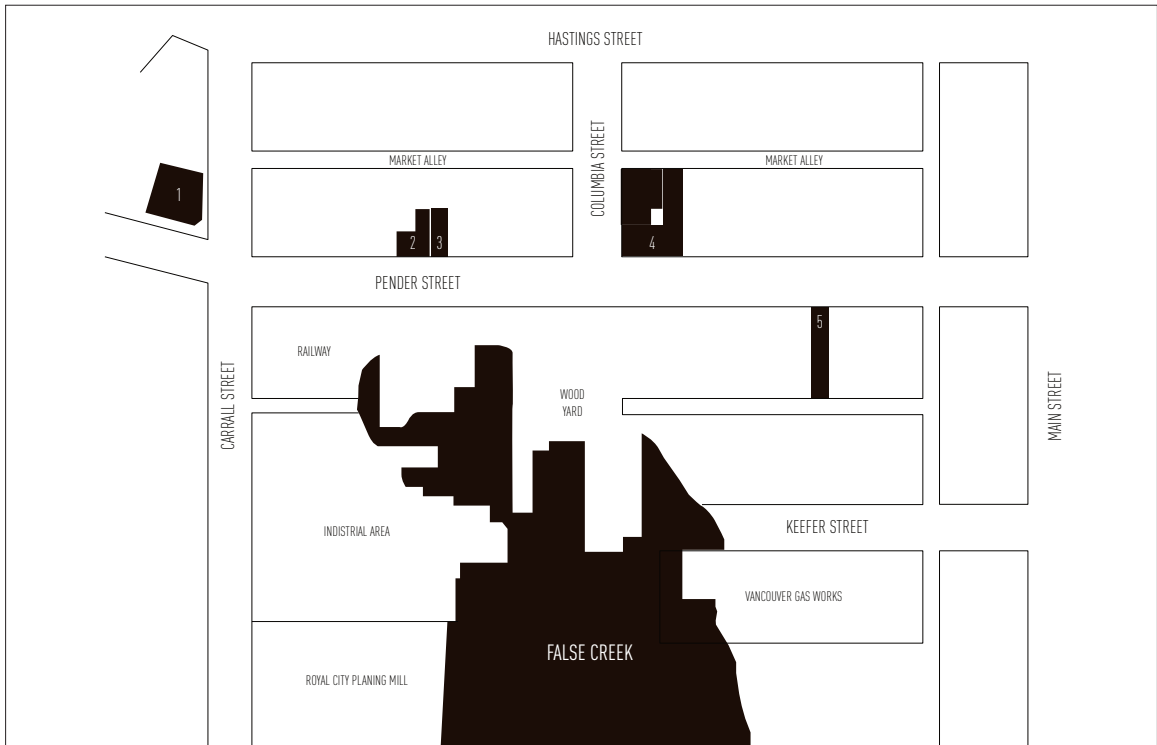
The redevelopment phase of the Chinatown life-cycle.

Furthermore, as Samuel Stein proposes in his book *Capital City*, Vancouver's Chinatown is subjected to strategic divestment and reinvestment from the different levels of government to induce urban decay, which is inevitably followed by redevelopment.<sup>34</sup>

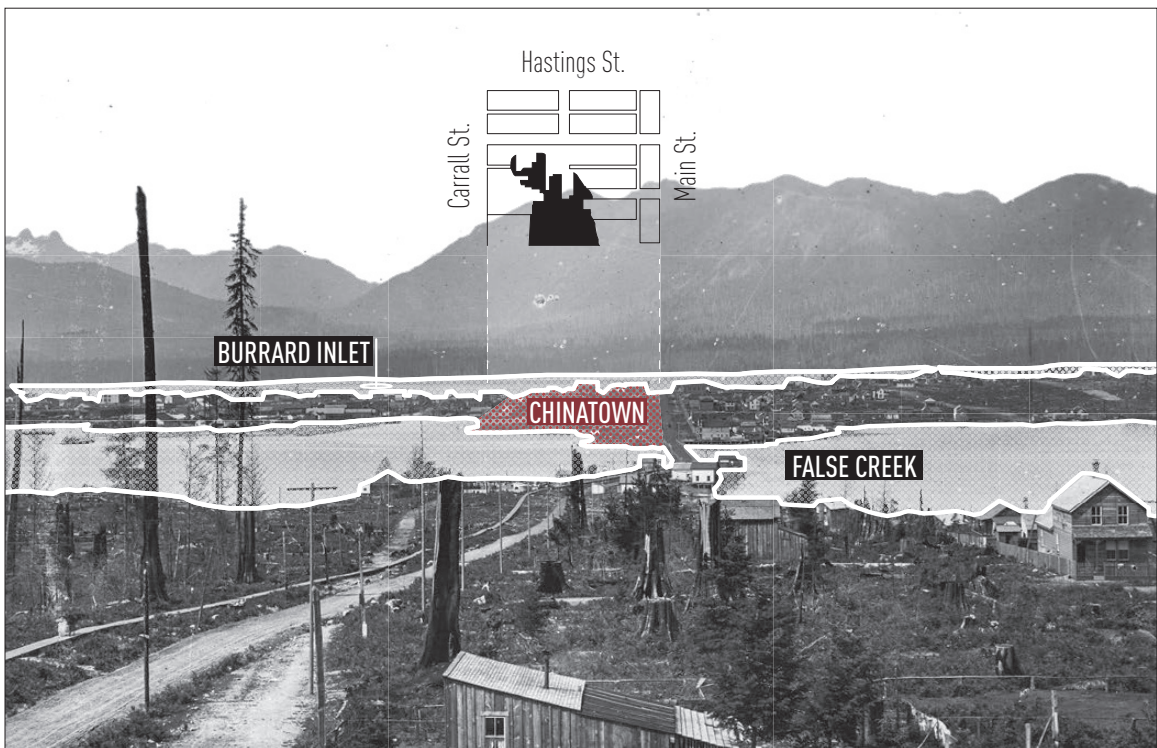
In short, host society's will tend to exercise their authority to shape their ethnic communities into characterizations that fit into a narrative that benefits the interests of private businesses and individuals.

As a historical example of controlled space, Lai outlines the host-society's impact on Chinese immigrants ability to settle in a foreign environment.

<sup>34</sup> Lowe, "Class Struggle in Chinatown: Ethnic Tourism, Planned Gentrification, and Organizing for Tenant Power."



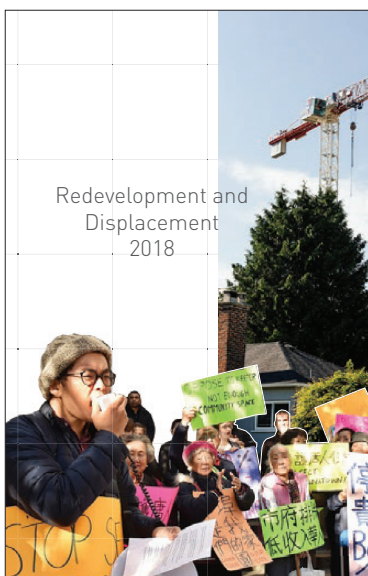
Vancouver's Chinatown in 1889, pictured are the oldest surviving buildings that still remain today; Base map from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 82.



Vancouver's Chinatown established on False Creek Flats; Looking north from the corner of Westminister Avenue and 7th Avenue, 1890; photograph by J.S. Matthews, from City of Vancouver Archives.



Collage representing the 1907 Anti-Asian Riots.



Collage representing the 2018 Beedie Development protests.

White landlords would not sell or lease their properties to the Chinese unless the lands were on the fringe of the town and thus unattractive to the white community. For example, the Chinese in Victoria and Vancouver established their living quarters on mud flats, the cheapest districts of the cities, where the low rent also attracted low-class saloons and brothels.<sup>35</sup>

By controlling space through government legislation, the city can limit the immigrant community's ability to transfer and retain their cultural identity.<sup>36</sup> Over time, through generations of hostile building code, bylaws, and other restrictions, the public spaces, architecture and the resulting urban diversity tends to be increasingly shaped by the outsider's perception of the neighbourhood, typically to the detriment of low-income working class residents.

The process begins with host society's perceptions, who through rules, legislation and permits, manipulate the built environment of the immigrant community. Once the host society can regulate the urban fabric of the ethnic enclaves, they can also organize, or limit, the way a community lives.

Consequently, by manipulating the daily practices of a neighbourhood's population, the host-society is able to reinforce their own imposed identities upon the community.

<sup>35</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 34.

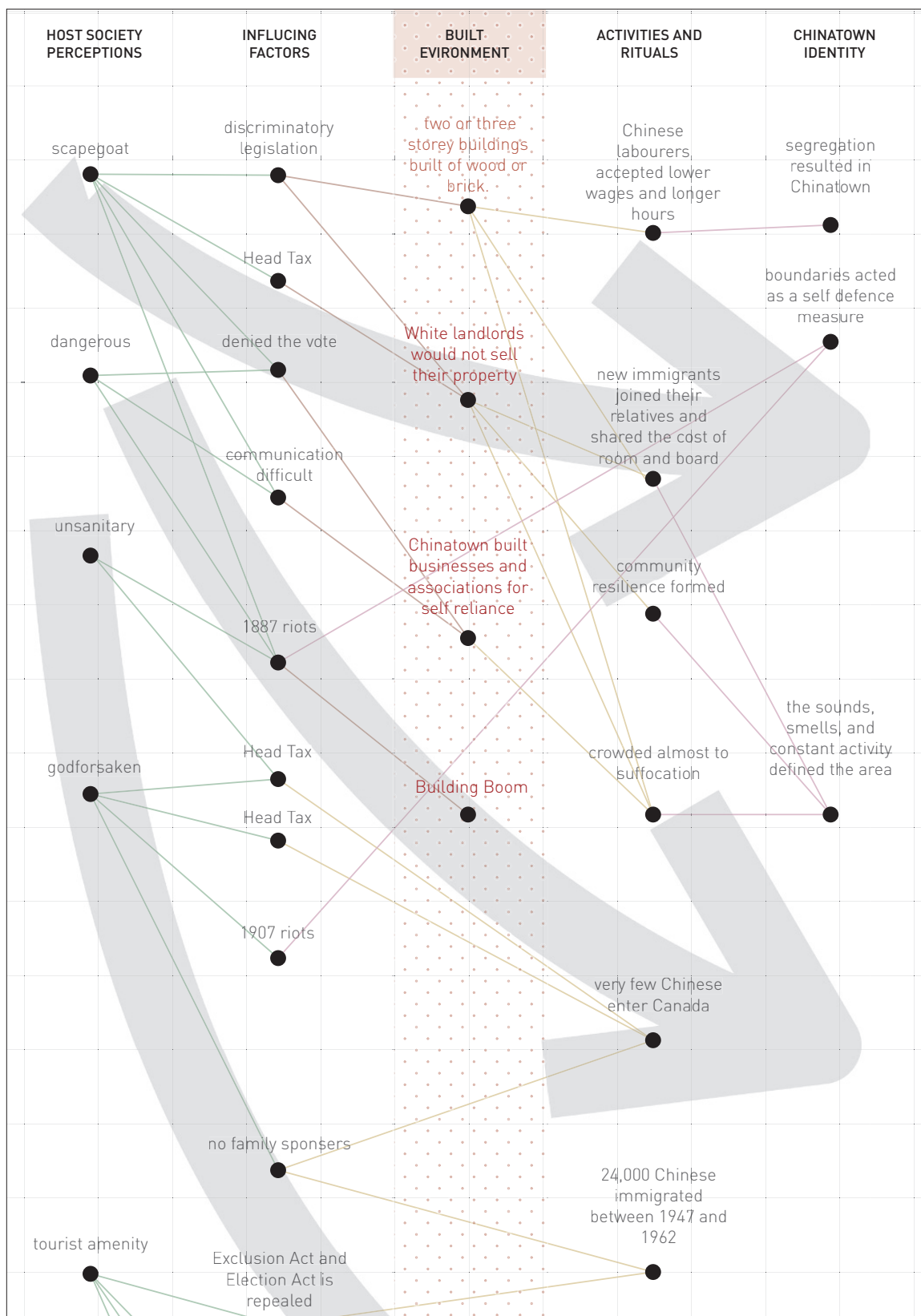
<sup>36</sup> Kay J. Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4 (1987): 580-598, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2563924>.



Cultural hegemony sequencing diagram.



Vancouver's Chinatown on the development life-cycle and the cultural hegemony sequence; Data from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*.



Graphing the history of Vancouver's Chinatown on the cultural hegemony sequence diagram; Data from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*.

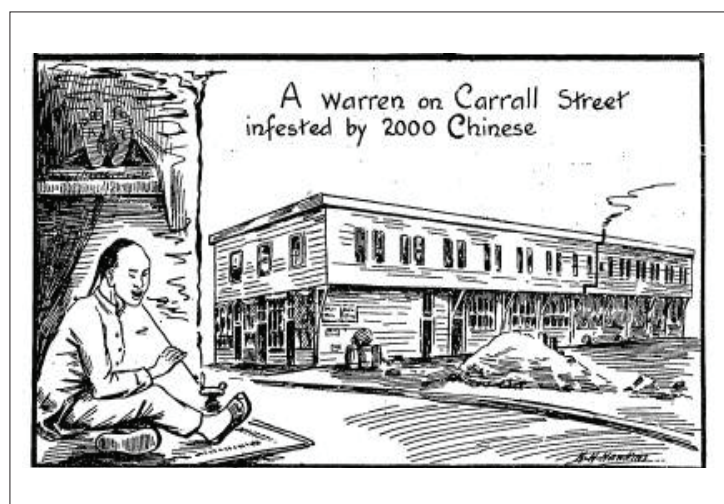
## Cultural Hegemony

I categorize the sequence of events that reinforces identities imposed by the host society as a process of cultural hegemony. Defined as the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society so that their imposed view becomes the accepted cultural norm.<sup>37</sup>

In the next section of the chapter I demonstrate how the sequence of events worked in the past to damage the Chinatown community in Vancouver. In order to construct the argument, I will elaborate on three distinct phases of Vancouver's renewal under Anderson's concept of Chinatowns as a conception of their host society.

I've placed the first phase between 1858 and 1947, the second between 1947 and 1967, and the third between 1967 and the 1980s.

John McConnell, Cartoon titled the Unanswerable Argument, 1907; from *BC Saturday Sunset*.



37 Kay J. Anderson, "Cultural Hegemony and the Race-Definition Process in Chinatown, Vancouver: 1880-1980," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6, no. 2 (1988): 127-149.



View of Chinatown's East Pender Street near Carrall Street, 1904; photograph by Philip Timms, from Vancouver Public Library, Historical Photographs.



View of smashed window of a barber's shop damaged in the Race Riot, 1907; from Active History.

## Phase One: Exclusion and Discrimination

When the gold rush ended in the late 1860s, an economic recession set in and unemployment began to rise along the West Coast. As a result, Chinese labourers were blamed for the economic downturn and demands for their restricted entry increased as discriminatory laws and regulations against them were soon instituted.<sup>38</sup>

Public opinion directly influenced political will in 1875, when Victoria's city council passed a bylaw to include, in all contracts for city works, a clause that prescribed that only white labour could be employed. Three years later, the Legislative Assembly passed a resolution to exclude Chinese people from provincial works as well.<sup>39</sup> The quick succession of exclusionary acts were critical in suppressing the Chinese attempts to find a diversity of work and challenge future discriminations.

Routine violence led to the further isolation of Chinese immigrants from the rest of society. The Anti-Asian Riots of 1887 and 1907 proved to be the peak of Vancouver's racial aggression. Beyond rioting however, daily assaults and common racism indicated a strong animosity between the Chinese and their host society.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, within the boundaries of Chinatowns where they felt safe and secure, it became necessary for the Chinese settlers to support each other and rely on their community programs and businesses for their day to day needs. As a result of their self reliance, strong ties

<sup>38</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.





Men in front of Sam Kee Building. 1936; from the Vancouver Public Library Historical Photographs.



View looking southwest from northeast corner of Hastings and Columbia Streets, c.1900; photograph by Philip Timms, from the Vancouver Public Library Historical Photographs.

between the residents and the systems that supported them within the neighbourhood were created.<sup>41</sup>

The divide between the two cultures soon influenced the spatial morphology where restrictions and economic disparity determined the housing typology for Chinatown. Labour sponsors, responsible for recruiting Chinese workers, would build and lease wooden shacks in the cheapest areas of their towns. Often, new Chinese immigrants would join their relatives or friends, deciding to live together and share the cost of room and board.

Although this housing arrangement was rooted in restrictions and economy, it brought friends and families closer together physically and socially, creating bonds that impacted how a generation of residents preferred to live.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of the era of free entry, the initial perceptions of the Chinese had become rooted into Canada's history of exclusion and discrimination. The results of Chinatown's infrastructure was an isolated and exclusive block of wood cabins, where Chinese communities of mostly men would live together to lower their cost of living.

Although this physical separation strengthened the cultural divide between the ethnic enclave and its host society considerably, it more importantly shaped the first generation of immigrants into an incredibly strong, resourceful, and self-reliant community.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

## Phase Two: Renewal and Displacement

Since the Second World War, social attitudes and practices in the Chinese community and the host society have been changing rapidly. Younger generations and new Chinese immigrants have started to integrate themselves into Canadian society and have begun to participate in public events within the community.<sup>43</sup>

However, as the host society's attitudes towards its Chinese population changed, so did the images of Chinatowns. Despite late nineteenth-century buildings being demolished to provide sites for new developments office buildings or parking lots, the marks of age were still visible and the townscapes were deplorable. Where most institutional buildings that were once focal points of activities in Chinatown, began to their functionality and were physically decaying.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore many city governments perceived their old Chinatowns as blighted inner-city neighbourhoods and considered clearing and redeveloping them to be the only solution. City governments also began to realize that Chinatowns could be restored to take advantage of their history, preserved through the retention, repair, conservation, and improvement of historic buildings.<sup>45</sup>

In 1957, the City of Vancouver put forward a three-phase, twenty-year, \$100 million slum clearance scheme, known as the Urban Renewal Project. However, the community was so persistent in pushing the argument



Fred Auger, "Goodbye Slums, Hello Luxury," 1962; photograph from *The Province*.



Collage of the Strathcona Demolition.

43 Ibid., 121.

44 Ibid., 122-134.

45 Ibid., 120.



View of the reconstruction during the Slum Clearance, 1973; photograph by Hayne Wai, from *High Country News*.



Image of Shirley Chan speaking at a Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association Meeting, c.1970; photograph by Hayne Wai, from *High Country News*.

of preserving the Chinese character of Strathcona, that the battle to preserve the community became one implicitly tied to the nature of a “Multicultural Canada.”<sup>46</sup>

Regardless however, in 1959, the City began Scheme I of its Urban Renewal plans with the construction of a public housing project at Maclean Park, followed by clearing ten acres of homes along Campbell Avenue. By 1965, Scheme II had begun with a 260-unit extension to Maclean Park. However up until 1968, all efforts to prevent the expropriation of homes were unsuccessful, and over thirty acres of land were cleared while 3,000 people, most of whom were Chinese, were dispersed.<sup>47</sup>

By December 1968, a decade later, the first two phases of slum clearance were complete and the city was preparing for the final phase. However, the federal government changed their position on and withdrew funding for urban renewal schemes across Canada. In 1969, the City of Vancouver was forced to abandon its plans for Phase III.<sup>48</sup>

Simultaneously in 1967, news stories started to appear regarding the City of Vancouver’s proposal to construct a freeway right through the heart of Chinatown’s commercial district, which would have eliminated a historic area known as Shanghai Alley that now hosts the Chinese Cultural Centre and the Sun-Yat Sen Classical Garden.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 130.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.



View of the construction of the Georgia Viaduct, 1970; photograph by Vancouver Engineering Services, from the Vancouver Heritage Foundation.



Image of some of the opponents to the Freeway Project in the 1970s.

After a decade of protesting the planned destruction of Strathcona, housing had become an integral part of Chinatown's identity.<sup>49</sup> Opponents to the project were victorious and the freeway project was cancelled.

However, the small victory came at the cost of Chinese merchants and residents harnessing Chinatown as a tourist destination in their efforts of neighbourhood preservation. Community organizations projecting Chinese-ness onto their neighbourhood during the stages of redevelopment in Strathcona was an important moment for the host society, who realized they would be able to use Chinatowns and other ethnic enclaves to define themselves as a multicultural society.

Anderson concurs that Chinatown's ideological construction has not been a simple process of cultural identification from the City of Vancouver on an unreflective Chinatown. For example, in 1936, merchants appropriated, to lucrative effect, the conceptual symbols of Chinese-ness, and again, in the 1970s, the merchant and community elite came to endorse the image of Chinatown that the city of Vancouver desired to create on its streetscape and buildings.<sup>50</sup>

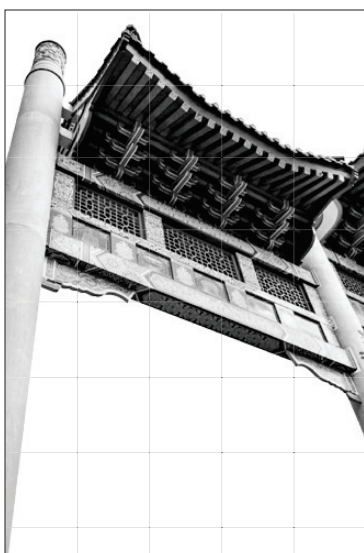
Although in the 1950s and 60s Chinatown was no longer regarded as a godforsaken place to visit, it was instead perceived as an aging residential and commercial inner city neighbourhood where poor, elderly Chinese

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, 249.



One of two guardian lions at the foot of the Millennium Gate in Vancouver's Chinatown



The Millennium Gate on Pender Street.

males lived, easily displaced as redevelopment necessitated.<sup>51</sup> I argue it was at this point that the Chinatown identity started to lean toward more of a destination for tourists and outsiders than a vibrant neighbourhood for the local residents.

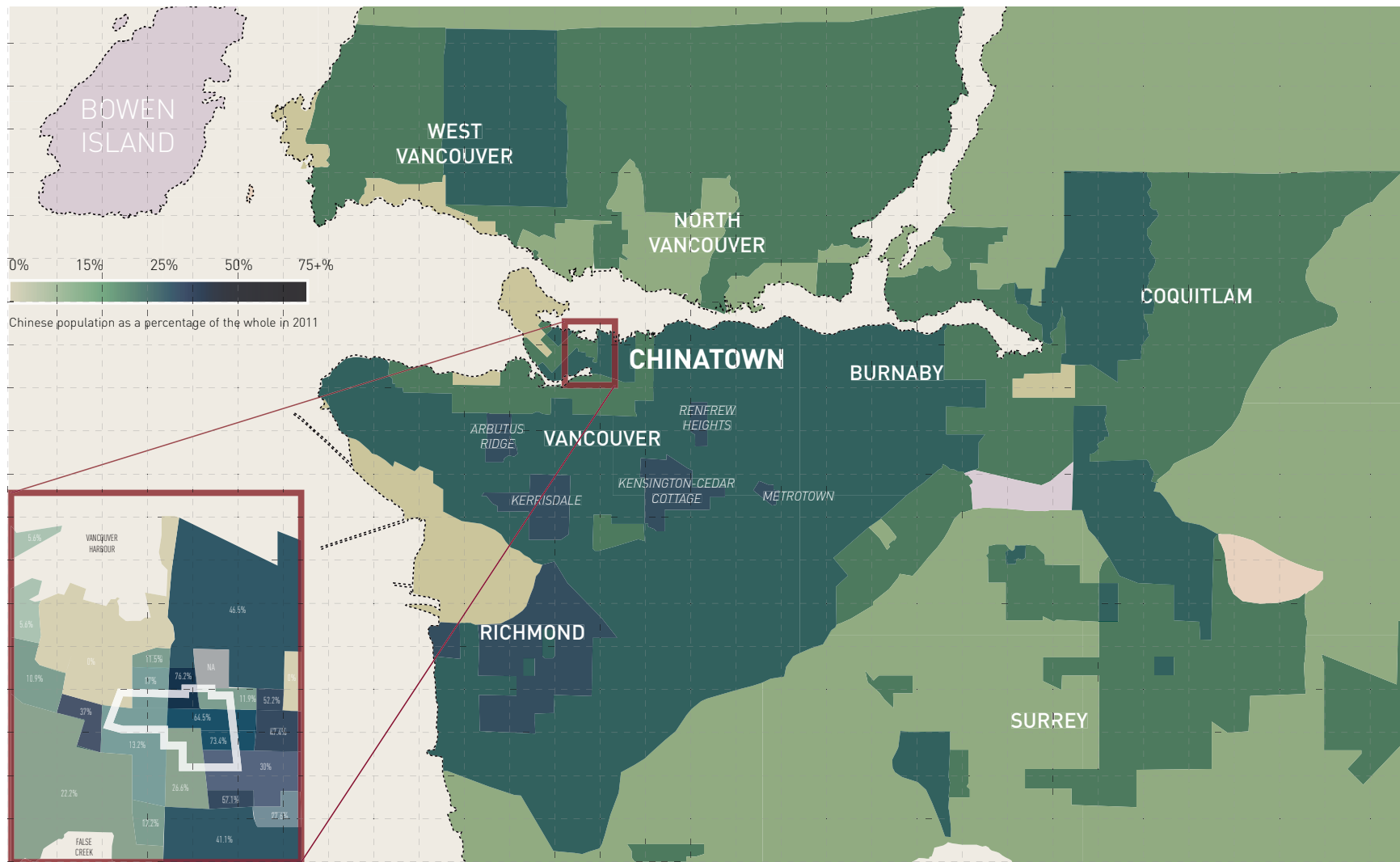
### **Phase Three: Beautification and Poverty**

Since the late 1960s, better-educated and more affluent migrants meant that people were not necessarily tied to Chinatown for economic and employment opportunities. Therefore the new generation of immigrants were choosing other neighbourhoods in Vancouver where there were better options for housing. Many were also choosing to leave Vancouver altogether and settle in Richmond, Burnaby, and Coquitlam instead. Today these urban centres boast Chinese populations of 104,185 (52 percent), 78,025 (34 per cent) and 28,935 (21 per cent) of their total populations respectively.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the changing demographics, Chinatown was still attractive and essential to an elderly Chinese demographic who could not speak English. Clinging to their cultural tradition in Chinatown, they still relied on the community programs and shops. In addition, Chinatown has been equally essential to the low-income working-class families as well, including many recent emigrants from China and refugees of Chinese ethnic origin from Indochina who are unable to speak

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Statistics Canada, "Census Profile, 2016 Census." Accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.



Chinese population as a percentage of the whole in the Lower Mainland, 2011;  
 Data from Census Mapper, Chinese Population as % of Total Based on Canada Census 2011.



Image of opponents to the Beedie Development Proposal, 2017; Photograph by Dan Toulgoet.

English. They use Chinatown as a transitional place to learn about Canadian culture and adjust to their new environment. Hence Chinatown was, and still is, used by many new immigrants as a springboard for acculturation and assimilation into Canadian society.<sup>53</sup>

However, as a result of the previous redevelopment projects conforming to a certain narrative of the neighbourhood, thirty years on, Vancouver's Chinatown finds itself in a current state of decay as more complex problems still persist. While goals of redevelopment are centered around themes of beautification, preserving symbols of heritage, and minor rehabilitation, larger issues like the lack of affordable and seniors housing, community programs, building upgrades, safety, and exclusivity have only grown bigger.<sup>54</sup>

Heritage preservation had been welcomed in Chinatown, particularly since 1971, when the Gastown and Chinatown districts were designated a special protected area by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Protection Act. The Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee was established in 1975 to preserve and protect the heritage and character of the Chinatown area and to work with all city departments in the development and implementation of area policies and programs.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the second half of the 1970s, various beautification projects such as the installation of new

<sup>53</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 134.

<sup>54</sup> City of Vancouver, *Downtown Eastside: Local Area Profile 2013*.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, 6.



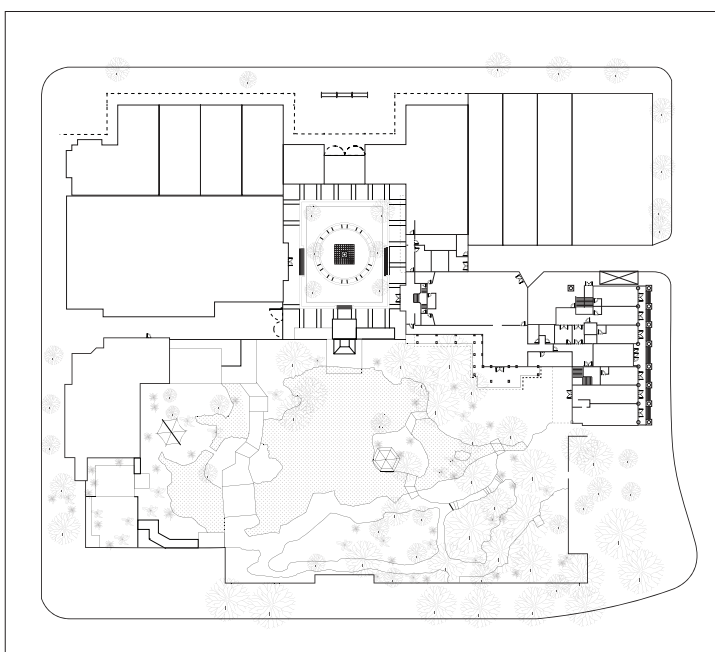
Yip Sang with children in front of the Wing Sang Company building, c.1900; photograph by A. Milne, from the City of Vancouver Archives.

streetlight fixtures, the creation of bilingual street signs, and tree-planting were also carried out.<sup>56</sup>

The most significant construction projects were the Chinese Cultural Centre, which opened in 1980, and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden and Multipurpose Hall which both opened in 1986. These projects depended not only on government subsidies but also on generous contributions of many corporate and individual donors.<sup>57</sup>

Multiple plaques were installed, one at the entrance of Shanghai Alley to identify its historical significance and another on the Wing Sang Building, the oldest surviving building in Chinatown. In 1987, the Chinese Cultural Centre acquired the Chinese arch from Expo 86, and in 2002 the Millennium Gate, designed by local Chinese Architect Joe Wai, was erected on Pender Street.<sup>58</sup>

Plan of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, the Chinese Cultural Centres, the Multipurpose Hall, and the Expo 86 Chinese Gate; Base map from the Vancouver Parks and Recreation, Approval of Final Design for the Enhancement Project 2003.

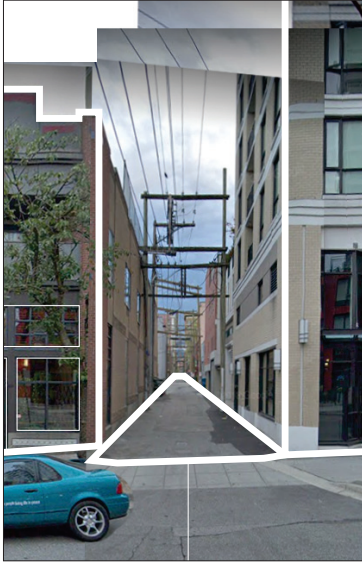


<sup>56</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 134.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*





Keefer Street elevation, The alleyway remains a lasting image of Vancouver, with the exposed power lines and general filthiness; base image from Google Maps.



Pender Street elevation, the arches, recessed balconies, Chinese signage, use of red, and the decorated lamppost are being used to express the visual aesthetic of Chinatown; base image from Google Maps.

## Symbolic Space

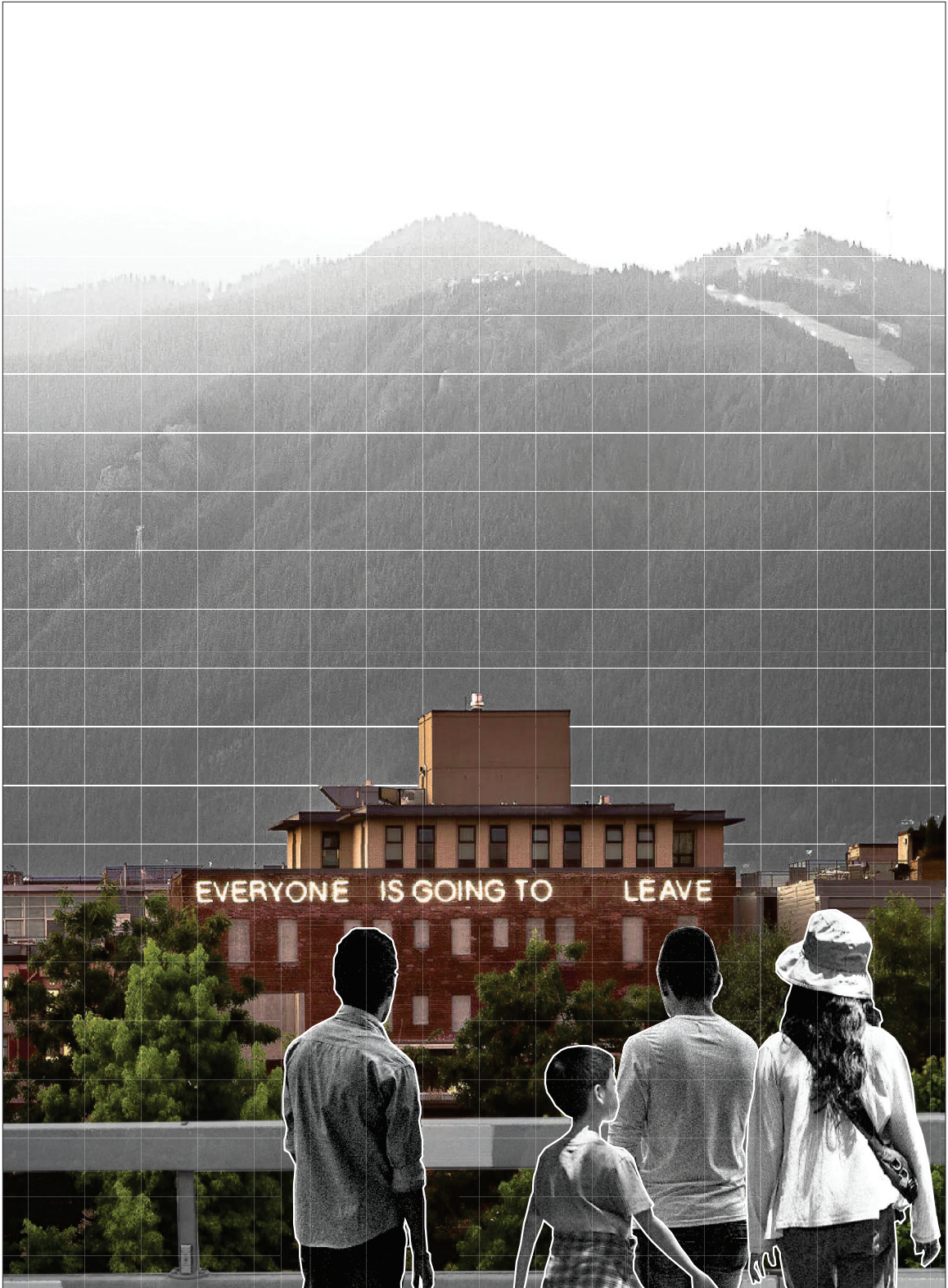
Traditionally, a collective sense of place in the urban environment is determined through personal experiences, the media's characterizations, local branding, and other sources.

Today, as a result of Canada's Multiculturalism Policy, which recognizes Canada's multicultural heritage and encourages that this heritage must be protected, ethnic enclaves are increasingly viewed as valuable symbols of our country's multicultural past.

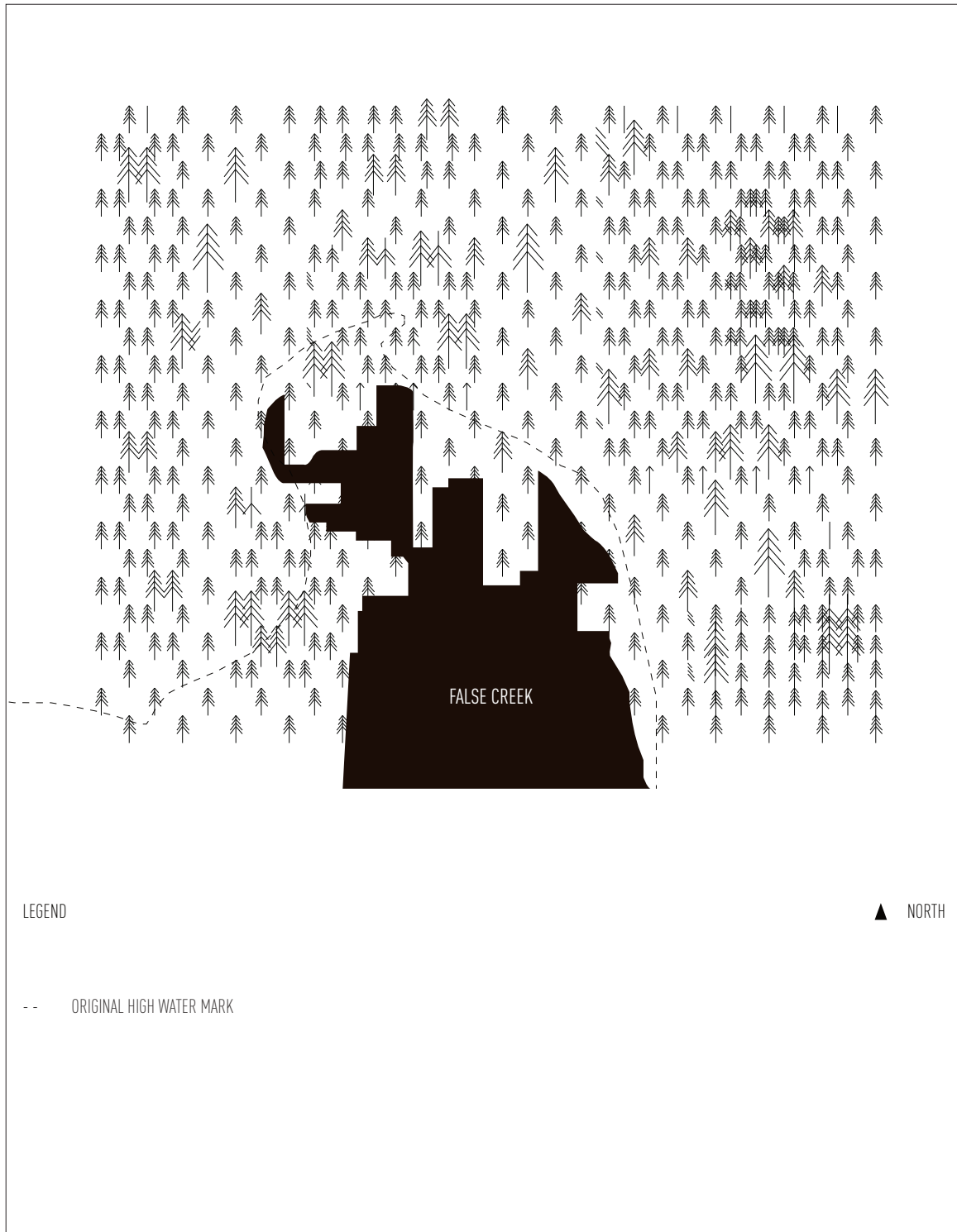
As a result, Vancouver's definition of Chinatown today is as a collection of symbolic objects and architectural features. Some of these include: masonry facades with recessed balconies, Chinese signage, red and gold colors, neon lights, ceremonial arches, low building heights, narrow lots, and more.

My argument is this gradual reduction of a community to a symbolic visual aesthetic gives developers a social excuse for the exclusion inherent in their projects. The logic is that by catering to nostalgic symbols, they are in turn supporting the community itself, although by only serving the visuals of these buildings and replacing original tenants and owners, this logic is problematic.

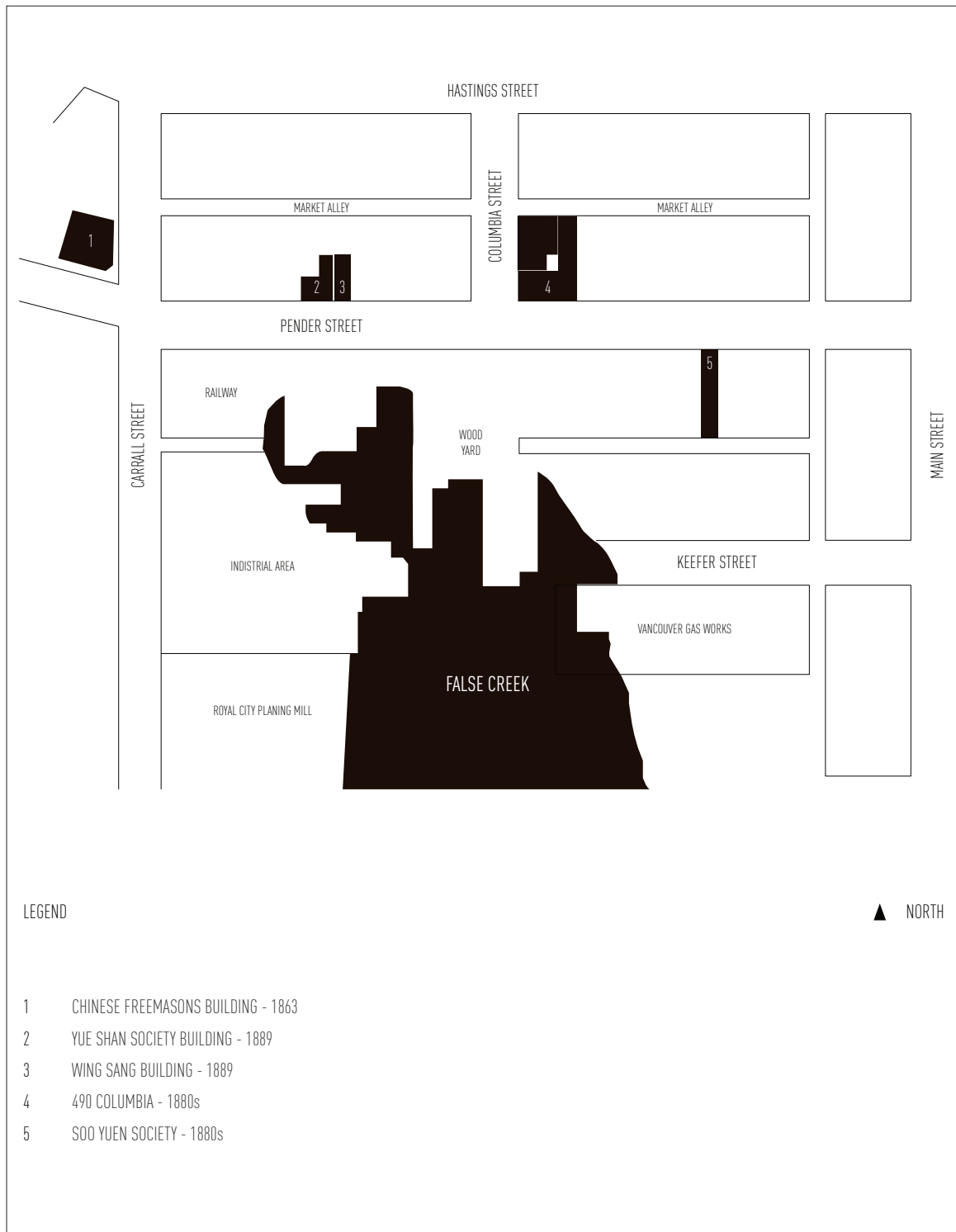
Furthermore, the existing relationship between the host-society and the immigrant population has resulted in a fragmented built environment, I will explore the history of the separation of Chinatown from the rest of Vancouver in the next chapter through Spatial Syntax analysis.



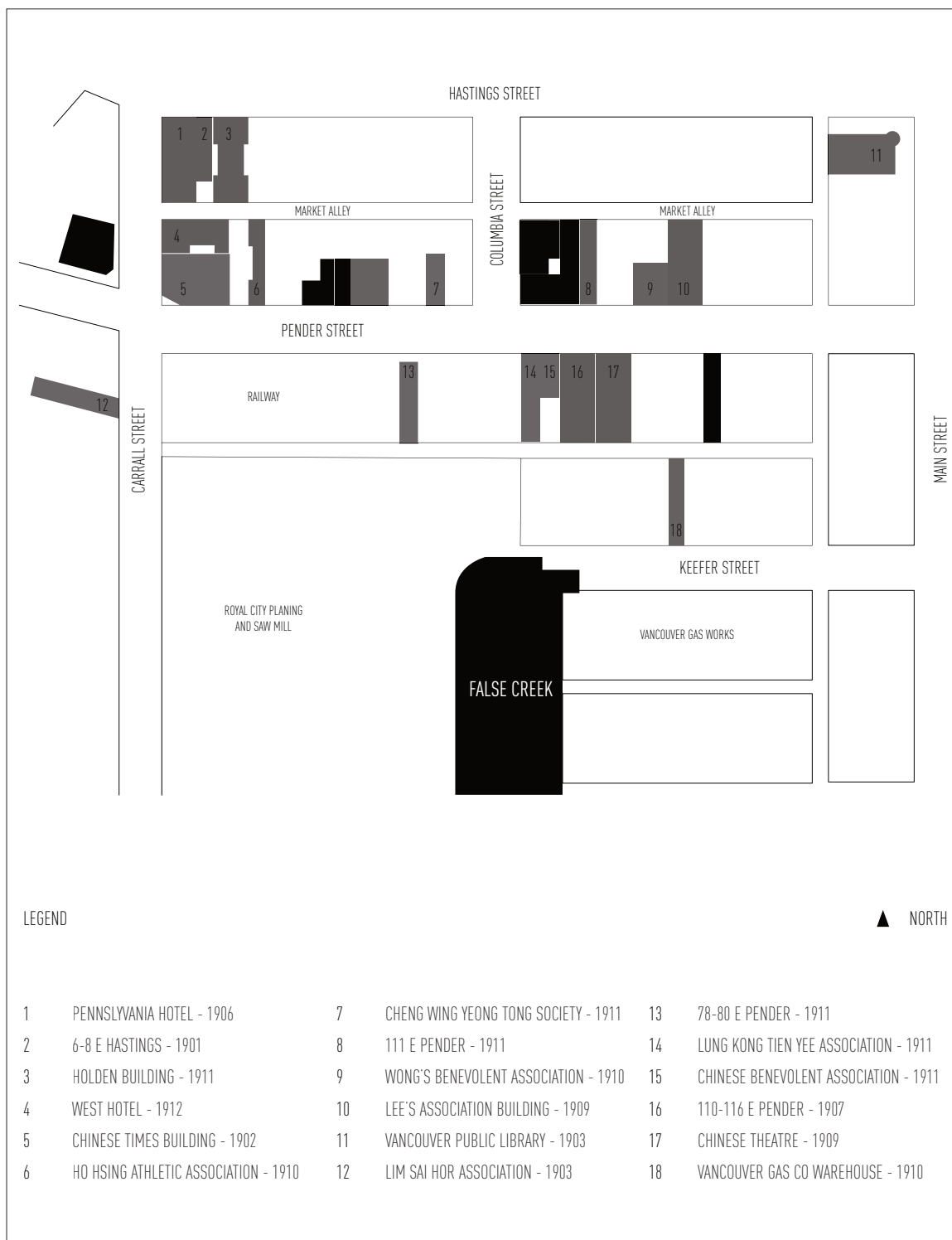
Collage looking north from the Georgia Viaduct at the oldest surviving building in Chinatown, the Wing Sang Building, built in 1889, now restored for a private art collection and marketing offices. On their south facade they currently display Martin Creed's artwork "EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT," altered in this collage to read "EVERYONE IS GOING TO LEAVE."



Site morphology, pre-1886. Mapping the location and evolution of Vancouver's Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; base map from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, 82.



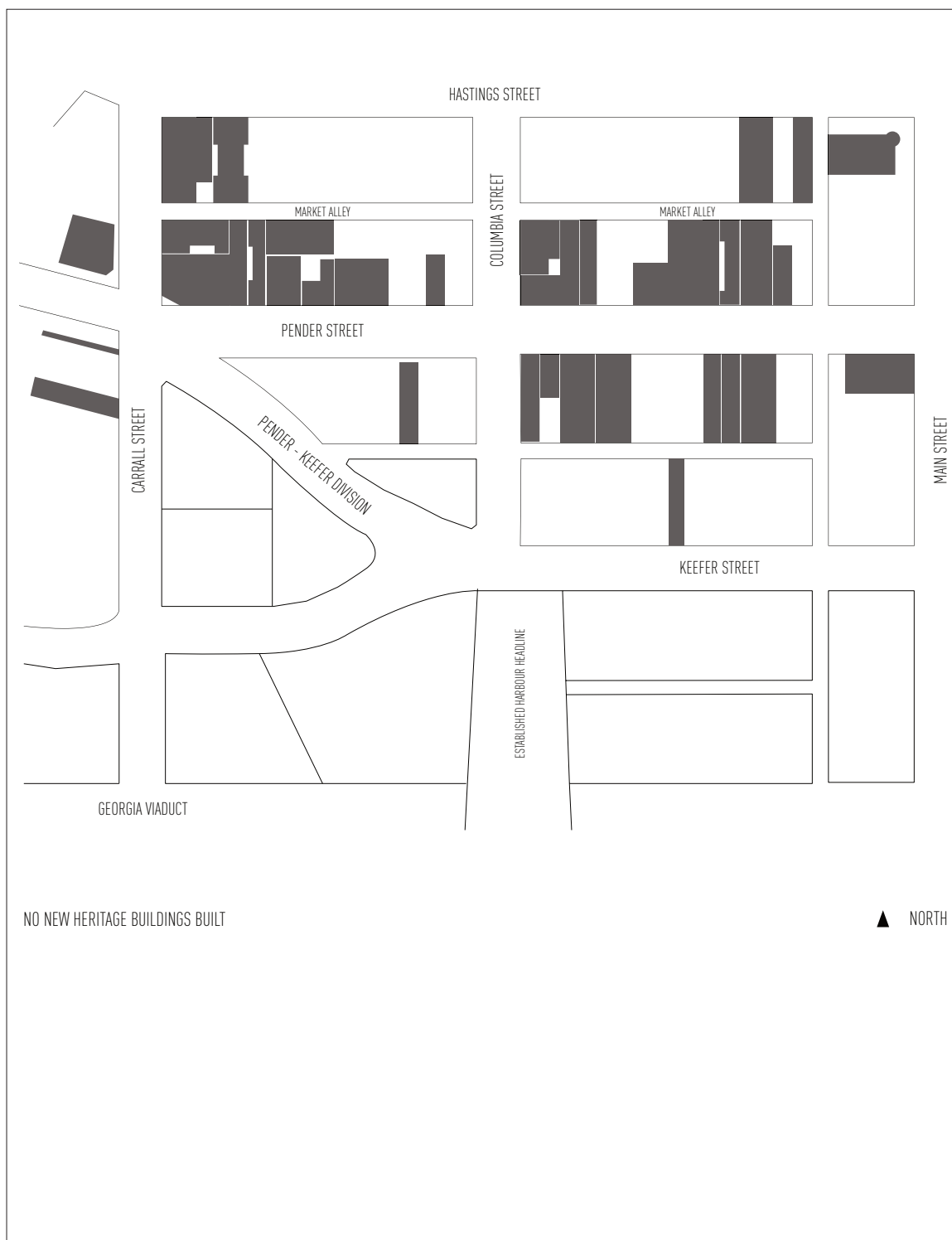
Site morphology, 1889. Mapping the heritage buildings in Vancouver's Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; base map from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, 82.



Site morphology, 1912. Mapping the heritage buildings in Vancouver's Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; base map from City of Vancouver Archives, Goad's Atlas 1912, Plate 69. Data from City of Vancouver Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines, Vancouver Heritage Register 2013.



Site morphology, 1927. Mapping the heritage buildings in Vancouver's Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; base map from Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, 86. Data from City of Vancouver Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines, Vancouver Heritage Register 2013.



Site morphology, 1967. Mapping the heritage buildings in Vancouver's Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; base map from City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver Engineering Services 1967 Map, Sheet 7. Data from City of Vancouver Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines, Vancouver Heritage Register 2013.

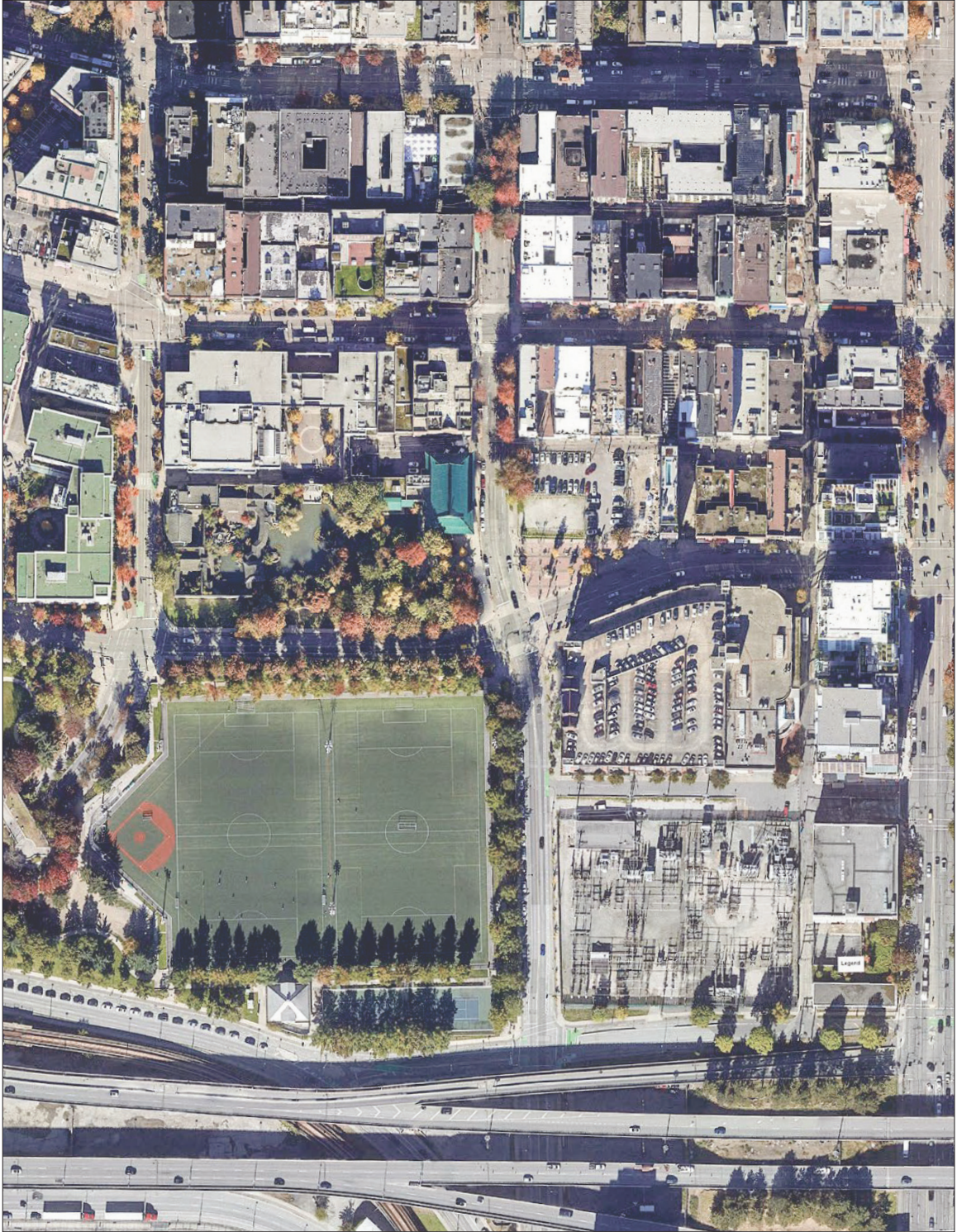


Site morphology, 2019. Mapping the heritage buildings in Vancouver’s Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; Vancouver’s Chinatown base map from Google Earth. Data from City of Vancouver Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines, Vancouver Heritage Register 2013.





Site morphology, 2019. Mapping the heritage buildings in Vancouver's Chinatown between Main, Hastings, and Columbia; Vancouver's Chinatown base map from Google Earth. Data from City of Vancouver Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines, Vancouver Heritage Register 2013.



Site morphology, 2019. Vancouver's Chinatown.  
Vancouver's Chinatown base map from Google Earth.

## Chapter 3: Deconstructing Place

In this chapter I examine the dynamic between a host society and their immigrant community. By deconstructing and analyzing the specific aspects of the built environment of Vancouver's Chinatown I can respond with strategies to inform a new method of development goals for ethnic communities. For this section of analysis, I will be using space syntax theory.

### Space Syntax Theory

For a method of analyzing the correlation between morphological changes, historical events, and identity construction, Or Aleksandrowicz, Claudia Yamu, and Akkelies van Nes, in their essay titled *Spatio-Syntactical Analysis and Historical Spatial Potentials*, assert that spatial syntactical analysis can uncover a strong understanding between the physical configuration of a city and its ability in shaping its social environment.

Space-syntax analysis has long been applied in morphological studies of partitioned cities, where lines physically prevented or controlled movement between urban territories. Examples from past studies—such as Berlin before and after reunification, Belfast with its peace walls between Catholics and Protestants, and Beirut's division lines of the civil-war years—indicate that physical divisions within an urban network affect the social and economic lives of cities, as well as their center-periphery relations.<sup>59</sup>

When we discuss the centre - periphery relationship in geography, we are interested in the spatial dimension

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<sup>59</sup> Or Aleksandrowicz, Claudia Yamu, and Akkelies van Nes, "Spatio-Syntactical Analysis and Historical Spatial Potentials: The Case of Jaffa-Tel Aviv," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 3 (2019): 445-472. [https://doi.org/10.1162/jinh\\_a\\_01304](https://doi.org/10.1162/jinh_a_01304).

of these relations and in particular the relations of domination and exploitation between places. Currently, Vancouver's Chinatown is divided from the rest of the city's urban network, therefore this method of analysis was chosen to uncover what these divisions were and how they affect the city's social environments.

In my deconstruction of Vancouver's Chinatown, I compare the causes and effects of historical events along with the limitations and restrictions imposed on the community's spatial morphology.

Space syntax theory and its methods have long been deployed in a wide range of research with a substantial historical component. By facilitating the comparative study of urban form through time, space syntax research has opened up a number of possibilities for exploring the relationship between urban transformations and social activity.<sup>60</sup>

My goal is to demonstrate how themes of isolation and exclusion used in the creation of Chinatown still implicate modern redevelopment and the social issues in the neighbourhood. Thereby reinforcing the necessity of a new architecture and the adaption of Chinatown's identity.

## **Analysis**

In his article regarding space syntax and historical research, Griffiths identifies four approaches to

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60 Sam Griffiths, "The Use of Space Syntax in Historical Research: Current Practice and Future Possibilities." *8th International Space Syntax Symposium*, (2012): 1-26. <http://sss8.c/8193.pdf>.

coupling historical research and space-syntax techniques. The four approaches are: History as Background, Syntactical Growth Processes, Syntactical Morphological Histories, and Spatial-Locational Histories.

The approach I am using is closest to Syntactical Morphological Histories. This study uses histories to compose the data used to trace the morphological changes of cities following important events. They center primarily around the spatial configuration of street networks and their evolution over time, while using socio-historical evidence for interpreting the driving forces behind the evolution.<sup>61</sup>

In tracing the transformation of the physical and cultural landscapes of Canadian Chinatowns from 1858 to 1988, Lai analyzed their origins, locations, viability, socioeconomics, and changes in perception. In this section I once again borrow from his book, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, to relate certain events to the evolution of the neighbourhood's spatial morphology.<sup>62</sup> To organize the my approach I have divided my analysis of Vancouver's Chinatown into physical and non-physical elements.

### **Non-Physical Boundaries**

The correlation between morphological analysis and historical evidence indicates that a physical configuration of a city holds a dominant position in

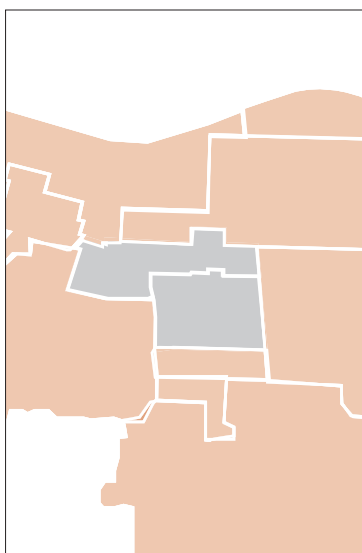
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<sup>61</sup> Aleksandrowicz, Yamu, and van Nes, "Spatio-Syntactical Analysis and Historical Spatial Potentials," 450.

<sup>62</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*.



Sara Anne McLagan, "Parties Unanimously Opposed to Asiatics," 1907; from the *Vancouver Daily World*.



Mapping the effects of discriminatory legislation on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

shaping the social environment of a place, however as the following analysis indicates, non-physical forces also have a strong influence on urban behavioral trends.<sup>63</sup>

I begin this analysis with the non-physical elements imposing on the Chinatown neighbourhood and community. These forces include discriminatory legislation, everyday violence and hostility, limits on property ownership, and limiting building heights.

### **Discriminatory Legislation**

Starting in 1872, the Legislative Assembly passed an act under which no Chinese or Indian would be eligible to vote in any Legislative Assembly election. The act received royal assent on April 22, 1875. The following year, an act to Amend the Municipal Act of 1872 was passed by which "no Chinese or Indians shall be entitled to vote at any Municipal Election for the election of a Mayor or Councillor."<sup>64</sup> When Vancouver had its first municipal election on May 1886, 60 Chinese-origin men were physically chased from the polls and denied the vote.

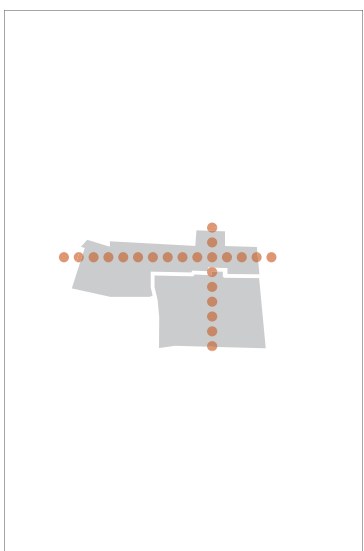
In the Preliminary Period of 1858-84, BC legislature enacted over 100 pieces of discriminatory legislation including a prohibition of Chinese employment from any public work and 'license fees' to businesses that employed Chinese labour. These exclusionary acts were critical in suppressing the Chinese attempts to find a diversity of work and challenge future discriminations.

<sup>63</sup> Aleksandrowicz, Yamu, and van Nes, "Spatio-Syntactical Analysis and Historical Spatial Potentials," 452.

<sup>64</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 29.



View of boarded up windows in response to the 1907 Anti-Asian riots, 1907; photograph by Philip Timms, from Vancouver Public Library, Historical Photographs.



Mapping the effects of violence and hostility on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

Most of all they were effective in creating a hostile environment when leaving the boundaries of Chinatown, thereby spurring a self reliant system of businesses and work within the neighbourhood.<sup>65</sup>

### Violence and Hostility

Let us turn our attention to the violence and hostility that led further to the isolation of Chinese immigrants from the rest of society through routine physical violence.

In 1887 close to 300 rioters decided to escalate their intimidation strategies by raiding and destroying the camps of Chinese labourers in the West End, chasing them into the harbour.<sup>66</sup> Again in 1907, during an anti-Oriental parade, a coordinated mob of several thousand marched into Chinatown, where they beat up dozens of Chinese, wrecked stores, and smashed windows before moving on to the Japanese community.<sup>67</sup>

Although these riots were the peak of physical violence, it was the daily assaults that encapsulated the anti-Chinese sentiment in the city. As a self-defence measure to avoid open hostility, the Chinese confined themselves, whenever possible, to the boundaries of Chinatowns where they felt safe and secure.

As a result it became necessary for the Chinese to support each other and rely on their community programs and businesses for their day to day needs, creating strong ties between the residents and the

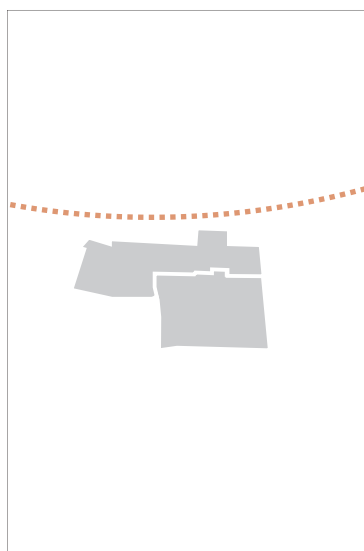
<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>66</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 84.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



View of the North side of the intersection of Pender Street and Carrall Street, 1910; photograph by Major James Skitt Matthews, from the City of Vancouver Archives.



Mapping the effects of the containment on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

systems that supported them.<sup>68</sup>

### Containing Expansion

In 1902, as a response to a growing Chinatown, some white businessmen on Hastings Street feared that if the Chinese continued to buy lots on the southern side of Hastings Street, Chinatown might expand into their territory. As a result of their complaints the city health inspector, Robert Marrion, made use of the fire and sanitary regulations to condemn Chinatown buildings and restrict its expansion to the north.<sup>69</sup>

Instead of expanding, Canton Alley and Shanghai Alley were developed with Chinese businesses and tenements as part of the resulting increase in density. Eventually Chinatown was able to grow westward along the northern bank of False Creek.<sup>70</sup>

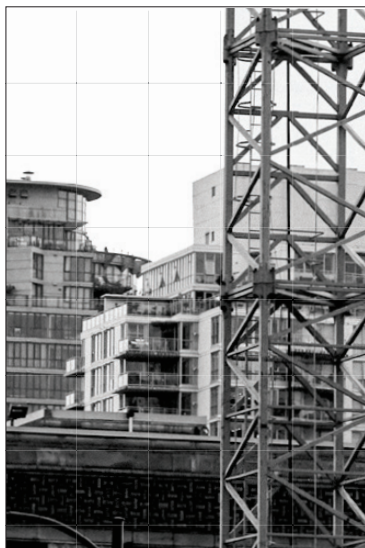
In general, before the 1940s it was not easy for Chinese to move into better residential areas. For example, a delegation representing eighty-three local residents went to city council to complain that their property values had dropped 20 percent after a Chinese couple had bought a house in West Point Grey. They urged the zoning committee to prohibit the sale and prevent Orientals from owning or occupying homes in their area, and to pass legislation restricting Orientals to certain areas of the city. In response, the city council set up a committee, although no recommendations were made by the committee, the incident revealed the

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 35.

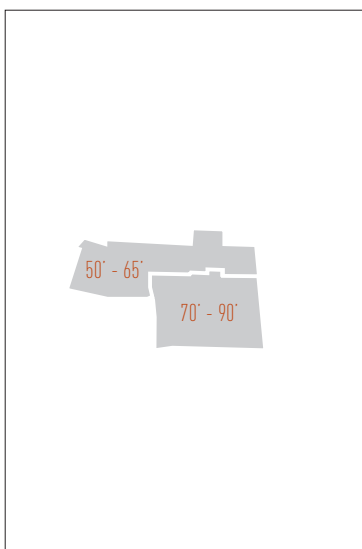
<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 79.





Crane in front of Vancouver's skyline, working on a new development; base image from Google Maps.



Mapping the effects of building height limits on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

strength of prejudice against the Chinese.<sup>71</sup>

The restrictions imposed by the different levels of government to prevent ownership outside of the boundaries of Chinatown had significant implications in the isolation of Chinatown from the rest of the city.

### Building Height Limits

As a result of the existing typology of historical buildings and tenements in Chinatown, when the neighbourhood was encouraged to reinforce the visual aesthetics of their past environment, the discussion concerning the preservation of heritage became centered on the discussion of building height limits .

A unique sense of place of HA-1 will be preserved and enriched by observing and respecting prevailing scale, building forms and parcel patterns, expressing a neighbourhood identity that is authentic and meaningful, and achieving livability and neighbourliness.<sup>72</sup>

In 2018, Vancouver's city council voted to lower the height limits in the two zones within the Chinatown boundary, HA-1 and HA-1A, from 120ft and 150ft to encourage a height for new developments that was closer to the existing heritage buildings in the neighbourhood which are between two and five storeys.

Now the maximum building height for new buildings is 15.3 m or 50 ft with some areas up to 22.9 m or 75 ft. This height is set to encourage a low to mid-rise building including a generous main floor height,

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>72</sup> City of Vancouver, *Chinatown HA 1 Design Guidelines* (Vancouver, Planning and Development Services, 2011).



The first train arrives at the CPR Station in Vancouver, 1887; from the City of Vancouver Archives.



Mapping the effects of CPR on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

compatible with the scale of the majority of the area's heritage buildings.<sup>73</sup>

The future of Chinatown's density and ability to create affordable homes is dependant on the building height limit of future developments. I believe it is not the scale or style of architecture that is reductive to the neighbourhood community and its identity, but the density, affordability, and ability for residents to stay in the neighbourhood

### Physical Boundaries

The physical elements imposing upon the built environment of Vancouver's Chinatown were and in some cases still are: the Canadian Pacific Railway, False Creek, the Strathcona Redevelopment, the Viaducts.

### Canadian Pacific Railway

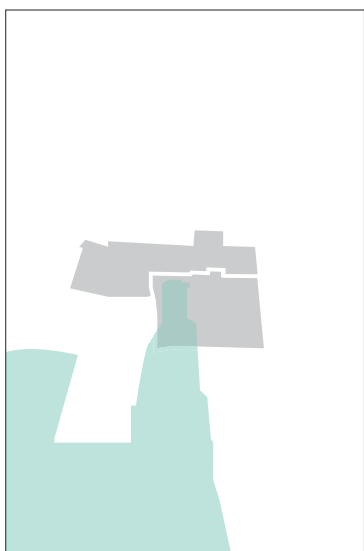
The second wave of Chinese immigration to Canada began with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in BC. Without the Chinese, the project would have gone bankrupt. It's estimated that between five and six hundred Chinese workers died during construction of the line.

Around the time of the completion of the railway, the forested land given to the Chinese on the North Shore of False creek needed to be cleared, and as the CPR came close to the new settlement, an industrial area with a woodyard and mill was established.

<sup>73</sup> City of Vancouver, *Amendments to the Chinatown HA-1 and HA-1A Districts Schedule: Design Guidelines and Policies* (Vancouver, General Manager of Planning, 2018).



View of West Coast Shipbuilders Ltd. on the southeast shore of False Creek, 1943; photograph by Philip Timms, from the City of Vancouver Archives.



Mapping the effects of False Creek on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

This mill along with the CPR tracks enclosed Chinatown and preventing expansion further to the West where Downtown Vancouver was located. The tracks still exist along Vancouver's Harbour and create another barrier between the water and Chinatown.<sup>74</sup>

### **False Creek**

Vancouver's Chinatown was initially created on mud flats on False Creek's North Shore where the inlet pushed farther north into what is now Keefer Street, setting a boundary for the neighbourhood's expansion to the south.

In 1917, the eastern basin of False Creek was infilled to create land for the Canadian Northern Railway's Pacific Central Station. Transcontinental railway terminals such as this helped earn Vancouver the label of "Terminal City."

Despite the city gradually filling in False Creek where it encroached into Chinatown, the new area was zoned as industrial. Cutting the waterfront access from Chinatown.

Recently, the City of Vancouver has approved developments along the North Shore of False Creek. These new developments that will be premium condominiums with waterfront access, and will act as another barrier, further separating the heritage neighbourhood and their community from their other connection to the water.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 82.



New Georgia Viaduct construction, 1970; photograph by Walter Frost, from the City of Vancouver Archives.



Mapping the effects of the Viaducts on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

## Viaducts

In 1967, news stories started to appear regarding the City's proposal to construct a freeway right through the heart of Chinatown's commercial district, eliminating a historic area known as Shanghai Alley. The route would require the acquisition and demolition of a strip of commercial buildings in Chinatown. On October 18th, the day after city council's approval, about 50 architecture and community planning students from UBC marched along Pender St. to protest the Council's decision.

Symbolic black banners were hung up from Chinatown buildings as funeral markers for the neighbourhood. At the public meeting, the hundred people in attendance expressed their desire to preserve Carrall St. as a historic site and elected a committee to spearhead the protest campaign. In January 1968, City Council rescinded its previous decision.<sup>75</sup>

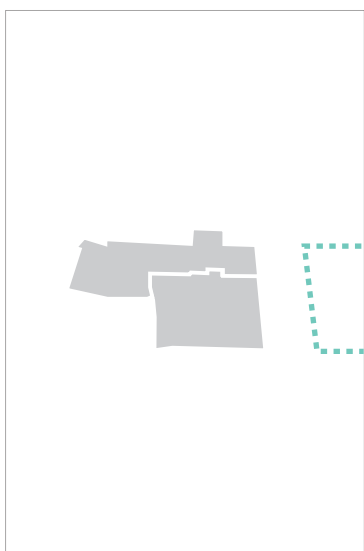
However, the Georgia Viaduct, which was intended to link up with the proposed waterfront expressway along Burrard Inlet was still built. This created another visual and physical barrier between the Chinatown community and their connection to False Creek to their South. However, in 2015 the demolition of the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts was approved by Vancouver's City Council, as part of the master plan for the new proposal along the North Shore of False Creek.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>76</sup> Michelle Morton and Simon Little, "Vancouver approves plan to remove viaducts, replace them with towers, park," *Canada, Global News*, Feb 13, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4024013/vancouver-approves-plan-to-remove-viaducts-replace-them-with-towers-park/>.



View of the Strathcona redevelopment work site for the Mau Dan Gardens, 1967; from the Maudan Co-op.



Mapping the effects of the Strathcona Redevelopments on the seclusion of Vancouver's Chinatown.

## Strathcona Redevelopment

After the Second World War, many city governments perceived old Chinatown's as blighted inner-city neighbourhoods and considered redevelopment to be the only solution. This meant that all the old buildings in Chinatown would be demolished to provide sites for new construction projects, which usually do not conform to the characteristic land uses of first generation Chinese immigrants.

In the 1950s, an increasing number of Chinese people moved into the Strathcona District partly because its house prices and rents were lower than those in other downtown areas and partly because it was adjacent to Chinatown.<sup>77</sup> In 1958, City Council approved the redevelopment plan, declaring Strathcona District a redevelopment area. The plan's objectives were to demolish all old houses in the area and replace them with townhouses and high-rise buildings. As a result, 4,500 residents, mostly Chinese, would be displaced and were either reluctant or could not afford to live in public apartment buildings.<sup>78</sup>

Most homeowners complained that the price offered to them was insufficient to purchase houses elsewhere in the city. Regardless, within a year six blocks had been appropriated and about 300 Chinese residents were forced to move, some of whom were very bitter about the clearance, arguing that the social impact on the community had not been considered by the City.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 126.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

For example, twelve old men had been living together in the Hing Mee Society house for 37 years, paying a monthly rent of 8 dollars. They wanted to remain together, but were forced to separate from the renewal.<sup>80</sup>

In October 1960, a delegation of Chinese community leaders headed by a lawyer C.C. Locke, met City Council to seek a delay in the slum clearance in Strathcona, since its 4,500 residents, mostly Chinese, would be displaced and were reluctant or could not afford to live in public apartment buildings. Their request was rejected; the city firmly believed that clearance was the only way to improve the physical environment of the slum area.<sup>81</sup>

In 1965, second phase of redevelopment proceeded, displacing another 300 or so Chinese residents. In response phase 3 was heavily protested, where residents and community members argued that the urban renewal had created more social problems than it had solved. They believed that it had resulted in unaccountable psychological and socioeconomic costs, such as the anxiety and uncertainty of the residents, the destruction of many structures of high heritage value, etc. Some Chinese people perceived the redevelopment programs as an attempt by the government to remove Chinese families from valuable real estate.<sup>82</sup>

In 1969 Paul Hellyer, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, froze federal funding for all urban renewal

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80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 131.

projects other than those currently implemented. This was the beginning of a change of attitude by the federal government towards the urban renewal programs of inner city neighbourhoods.<sup>83</sup>

## Results

In theory, if the distinctive characteristics of societies exist within spatial systems, and if their knowledge is conveyed through the organization of spaces, then we know these spatial configurations can express a social or cultural meaning and can be identified as such.<sup>84</sup> Or in short, we define our territory and in turn our territory defines us.<sup>85</sup>

From this analysis of Vancouver's Chinatown, one can conclude, as a result of the fragmented built environment, that the neighbourhood is isolated from the rest of the city and its spaces reinforce inequality and exclusion among its contrasting inhabitants.

As previous redevelopment projects conform to a certain narrative of the neighbourhood, thirty years on, Vancouver's Chinatown is in a state of decay as more complex problems still persist. Larger issues including the lack of affordable housing, seniors housing, community programs, building upgrades, safety, and exclusivity have only grown bigger in recent years.<sup>86</sup>

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83 Ibid.

84 Pelin Dursun, "Space Syntax in Architectural Design" *6th International Space Syntax Symposium*, (2007): 1-12, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2b78/e2c2896af3560c47dc4a6460d4ff531705f1.pdf>.

85 Jennifer Wolch, *The Power of Geography: How Territory Shapes Social Life* (Crows Nest: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 4.

86 City of Vancouver, *Downtown Eastside: Local Area Profile 2013*.



Mapping the physical and non-physical constraints on the built environment; Vancouver, British Columbia base map from Bing Maps.



## Chapter 4: A New Method

Through the spatial syntax analysis in the previous chapter, I came to the conclusion that the built environment is fragmented and isolated from the rest of the city. In response to the current redevelopment method I propose that the new neighbourhood redevelopment strategy instead works backward from the bottom up.

By first considering the collective identity of the Chinatown community, second, identifying social activities and cultural practices that are important to support or reintroduce, and finally how we can start to shape the urban environment to follow those needs.

Consequently, if the resulting architecture and urban design is successful in supporting the social environment, then we may see changes in the future of zoning, permits, and other legislation, signaling to the rest of the city that host perceptions have changed to a more complex understanding of ethnic neighbourhoods and their role in the construction of race, space, and place.

Moving into the design proposal, I have selected four components of the built environment as areas to provide an informed critique and response to the city's current practices. They are Heritage Preservations, New Developments, Public Spaces, and Living Spaces.

To organize this process I am separating the built environment further into the two categories of preserving place and making place.



Proposal for a new ground up development methodology, the reverse of the existing strategy.

## Preserving Place

Throughout this thesis I have proposed that host societies have historically used their authority to influence the outcomes of immigrant communities and their built environments to benefit themselves, usually to the detriment of the vulnerable minority population.

Currently in Vancouver, the city's best interests have been to continue growing their economy and housing market. The effect this has on their Chinatown neighbourhood has led to developers looking for every opportunity to commodify the low-income working class urban environment.

As we have seen in recent projects, Vancouver is driven to create a Chinatown neighbourhood that celebrates Vancouver's identity as a multicultural city and that serves as a major, economically viable, tourist attraction.

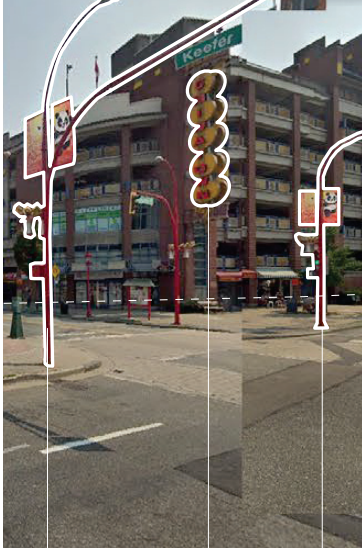
Carol Lee, through her charity, Chinatown Foundation, has invested millions of dollars of real estate capital into projects within Chinatown. In a news interview, Lee stated that she wants to make Chinatown Vancouver's number one tourist attraction.<sup>87</sup>

As we have explored, the results of this development strategy means beautifying the streets with the symbols and colors that represent the Chinatown identity and by building new developments and restoring facades that cater to this symbolic nostalgia.

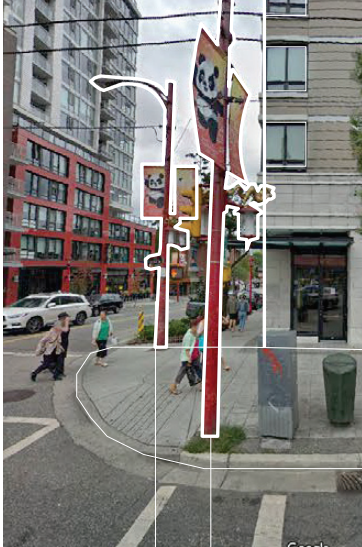


Collage of the exclusiveness of symbolic preservations.

<sup>87</sup> Stuart McNish, "Vancouver's Vanishing Chinatown," Seattle, *KCTS 9*, February 16, 2017. <https://kcts9.org/programs/in-close/vancouver-s-vanishing-chinatown>.



Columbia Street elevation, some of the outward symbols of Chinatown; base image from Google Maps.



Main Street elevation, some of the outward symbols of Chinatown; base image from Google Maps.

As the typology of buildings designed to make the most profit are repeated in the neighbourhood, Chinatown and the rest of the city become more and more homogeneous. Therefore, the city's ability to support diverse communities is reduced as the urban fabric of Vancouver becomes more exclusive and less vibrant.

Organizer of the Chinatown Action Group (CAG) Vince Tao argues that this new development in and around the neighbourhood that caters to outward symbolic representations, is really just gentrification with Chinese characteristics.<sup>88</sup>

In Chapter 2, I made the argument that Vancouver's Chinatown has historically been a conceptualization of its host society. In Chapter 3, I attempted to demonstrate that this imbalanced relationship between the two entities is reductive and harmful to the immigrant community through spatial syntax analysis.

In the new ground up methodology I propose, if we consider that the collective identity of Chinatown exists in the community's preservation, not just in the symbolic preservation of aesthetics, then we should be supporting the programs and activities that serve the vulnerable population of aging low income Chinatown residents.

When looking at the built environment for opportunities to reinforce these goals, I've separated the discussion into two strategies, historical preservations and new developments.

<sup>88</sup> Lowe, "Class Struggle in Chinatown: Ethnic Tourism, Planned Gentrification, and Organizing for Tenant Power."

## Historical Preservations

As I've suggested, the current model Vancouver has towards heritage preservation relies on exploiting the economic value of ethnic tourism. This is realized by putting the preservation of symbols ahead of preserving a community's residents and supporting their social activities. In this section I challenge the merits of Vancouver's criteria that awards buildings heritage protection, and in doing so, restricting their ability to evolve into a more supportive environment.

Today, Vancouver's current method uses four criteria to grade a building's historical value, these are: architectural history, cultural history, context, and integrity. In this system, architectural history judges the building's merit through its style, design, construction, and the architect. Cultural history considers the building's historical associations. Where context looks at the building's landscape features, as well as its continuity and visual or symbolic contribution to a neighbourhood. Finally the building's integrity is measured by the amount of physical changes the building has gone through and the impact of these changes to the building's style, design, and construction.<sup>89</sup>

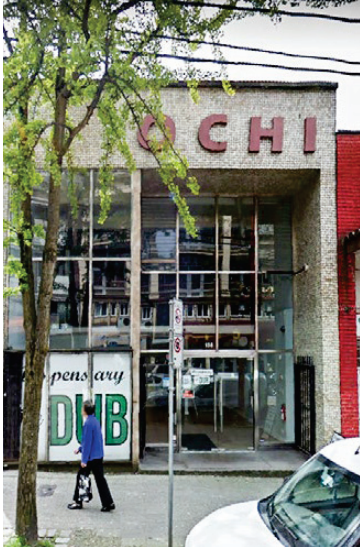
My response is that this criteria is outdated and reinforces a system of symbolic preservation. Therefore my argument is that this methodology supports shaping the neighbourhood into a visual marker of a

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89 City of Vancouver, *Heritage Register: Evaluation Methodology* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver Planning and Development Services, 1986).



The Chinese Benevolent Association facade; image from Google Maps.



138 E Pender facade; image from Google Maps.

cultural community, instead of one that supports it. Alternatively, I assert improving the spatial system of a stagnant built environment through strategic removal and addition of buildings is worth more to a community's preservation than a facade provides.

For the design portion of this thesis research, I chose a heavily contested block in the heart of Chinatown.<sup>90</sup> It is situated between: Main, Pender, Columbia, and Keefer and is located across from a variety of context including the Chinese Cultural Centre and Chinese Gardens, soccer fields, a four-storey mall and parking garage, as well as low density mixed use buildings.

I've categorized the heritage designated buildings on my site and decided, using a separate set of criteria, whether they should be restored, added to, rebuilt, or removed based on their ability to serve the community. For my design proposal, I'm choosing to act on four buildings on the north side of the block. They are the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), 138 E Pender, the Soo Yuen Society Building, and the Hua Foundation. My criteria attempts to gauge their overall usefulness and their ability to adequately operate their program.

Concerning the CBA, I've decided to remove a recent one-story addition that was put behind the existing heritage building. This removal opens up a small courtyard behind the CBA.

For the 138 E Pender building I decided to remove the building completely. As the lot next to it is unoccupied,

<sup>90</sup> Matt O'Grady, "Vancouver's Future Hinges on the Fight to Save Chinatown."



Soo Yuen Society facade;  
image from Google Maps.



Hua Foundation facade;  
image from Google Maps.

and because the building has no significant meaning to the community, I propose that this lot and the one beside it are better suited to be combined.





The Soo Yuen Society building is one of the oldest in the neighbourhood. I believe this project it is best suited for a restoration, in order to improve and update the buildings functionality. The original program would remain in the building, as just the materials, structure, and other components would be fixed, replaced, and restored for a smaller cost.

The Hua Foundation is a youth-driven non-profit based in Vancouver dedicated to bringing together cultural heritage and social change with a socio-environmental lens.<sup>91</sup> As the existing program serves a role in the future of the neighbourhood, I propose removing the existing two-storey building and constructing larger facilities that can better serve the growing non-profit. By setting the new Hua Foundation back toward the alley, I can make a plaza off of the street. As well, by pushing the program up higher, I can keep the ground level as open circulation for access through the block.

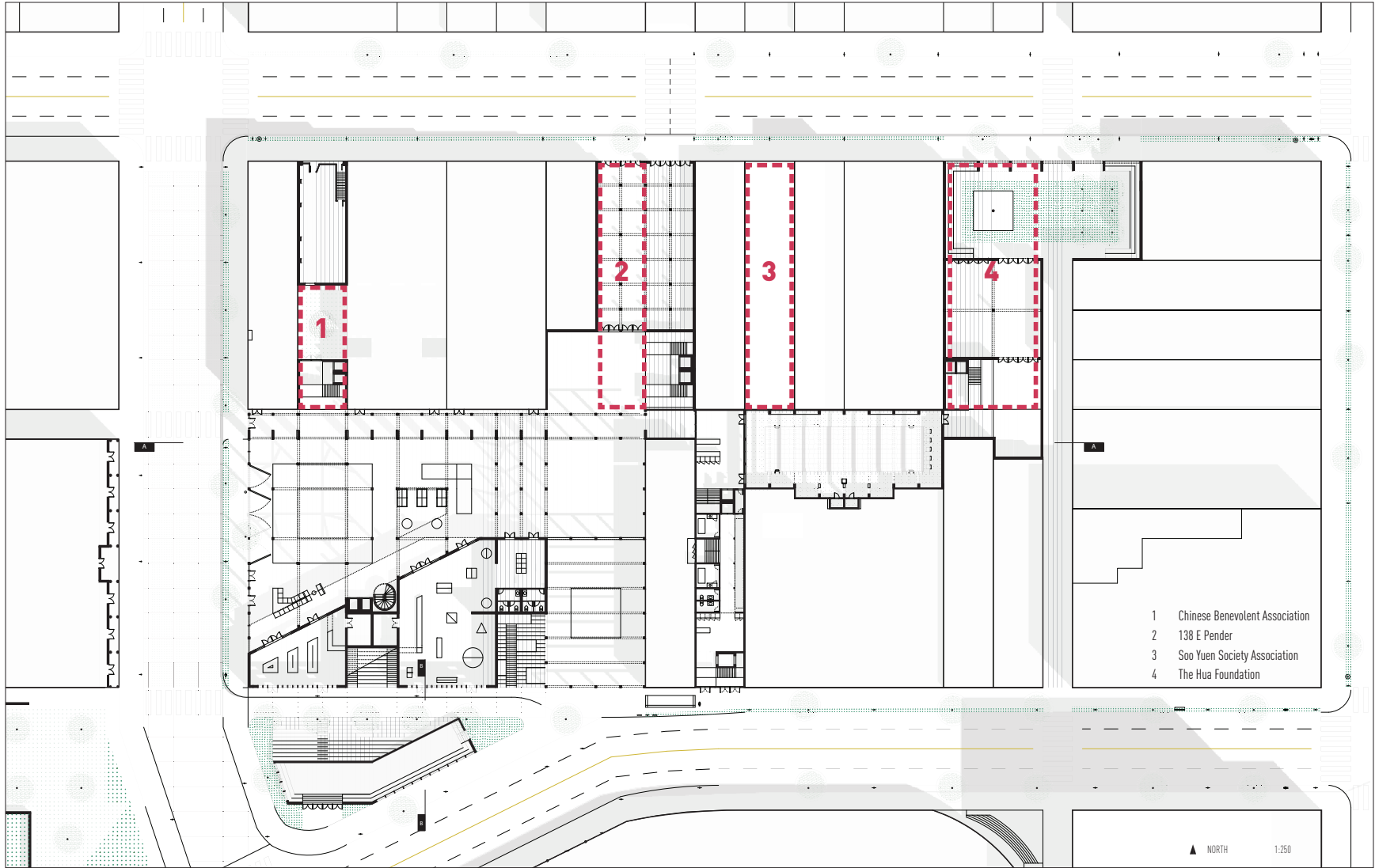
These four building represent four different approaches to heritage preservation that go beyond catering to developers demands of tax incentives to restore historical buildings.<sup>92</sup> When looking at any block in Chinatown, this criteria could unveil a different set of design decisions.

<sup>91</sup> "Our Mission, Vision, Values," The Hua Foundation, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://www.huafoundation.org/>.

<sup>92</sup> City of Vancouver, *Property Tax Incentives for Heritage Properties in Chinatown* (Vancouver: Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program, 2002.)

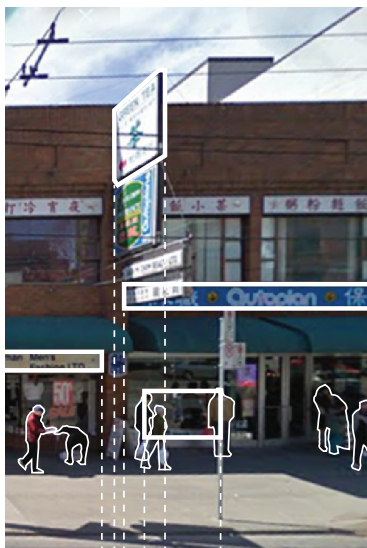
HERITAGE BUILDINGS CHECKLIST								
ADDRESS	NAME	YEAR BUILT	MATERIAL	STATUS	SCALE	PROGRAM	VERDICT	
100 E Pender St	Sun Ah Hotel	1911	Brick	B/M	4 storeys	Mixed Use	Keep	
104-108 E Pender St	Chinese Benevolent Association	1909	Stone	A/M	4 storeys	Mixed Use	Addition	
110-116 E Pender St	The Freemason's Building	1907	Brick	M	4 storeys	Mixed Use	Keep	
124 E Pender St	The Chinese Theatre	1909	Brick	M	3 storeys	Commercial	Keep	
128-136 E Pender St	--	--	--	M	1 storey	Commercial	Keep	
138 E Pender St	--	--	--	M	1 storey	Commercial	Remove	
142 E Pender St	--	--	--	M	--	Commercial	Destroyed	
146-148 E Pender St	--	--	--	M	1 storey	Commercial	Keep	
152 E Pender St	The Soo Yuen Society Building	1880s	Wood	M	1 storey	Commercial	Restore	
158-160 E Pender St	Chin Wing Chun Society	1925	Brick	A/M	4 storeys	Commercial	Keep	
166-168 E Pender St	--	1925	Brick	C/M	2 storeys	Commercial	Keep	
501 Main St	The Bank of Commerce	1915	Stone	B/M	4 storeys	Commercial	Keep	
133 Keefer St	Vancouver Gaas Co. Warehouse	1910	Brick	C/M	4 storeys	Mixed Use	Keep	
188 E Pender St	The Hua Foundation	--	CMU	None	2 storeys	Mixed Use	Remove	
SIGNIFICANCE / PROTECTION STATUS								
A (Primary)	B (Significant)		C (Contextual or Character)		M (Municipal)			
The site represents the best examples of a style or type of building. It may be associated with a person or event of significance, or an early pattern of development.	The site represents a good example of a particular style or type, either individually or collectively. It may have some documented historical or cultural significance in a neighbourhood.		The site represents a building that contributes to the historic character of an area or streetscape, usually found in groupings of more than one building, but may also be of individual importance.		Buildings or sites that are protected by a municipal heritage designation bylaw (City of Vancouver).			
PROPOSAL								
Chinese Benevolent Association		138 E Pender St		The Soo Yuen Society Building		The Hua Foundation		
								
Addition		Remove		Restore		Remove		

Heritage Building Checklist;  
 Data from the City of Vancouver, Replacement, Renewal, & Change: 2015 Survey of Single Room Accommodation & Non-Market Housing in the Downtown Core (Vancouver: Vancouver Housing Initiative, 2016).



Site Plan with the locations of the four buildings from the Heritage Building Checklist Diagram.





Main St. between Keefer and Georgia before the redevelopment, 2011; base image from Google Maps.



Main St. between Keefer and Georgia after the redevelopment, 2018; base image from Google Maps.

## New Developments

Like other working class communities, the population in ethnic enclaves is often dependant on affordable rent, wage-labour and community programs.<sup>93</sup> Therefore it is in their interest to keep as many affordable homes, private businesses and community buildings as possible, however these are the same buildings being threatened by redevelopment. Because there isn't a meaningful dialogue between developers and the community, besides protests, the types of projects being built are set on displacing the vulnerable population and the businesses and stores they rely on.<sup>94</sup>

In this study of Main St. between Keefer and Georgia, you can see the differences in accessibility between a new development which homogenizes the block and the multitude of businesses that filled the block before it was cleared. As the new developments remove Chinese owned businesses, the shops and stores that take their place are not necessarily economically or culturally accessible to the demographics that reside in the neighbourhood.

Instead my design goals attempt to address the previous elements of the built environment that had success and use them to reinforce the goals for a new development model.

<sup>93</sup> Chinatown Action Group, "The People's Vision for Chinatown: A Community Strategy for Social & Economic Development," May 1, 2018. <https://chinatownaction.org/>.

<sup>94</sup> CTV Vancouver, "Rezoning proposal denied for empty lot in Chinatown," *British Columbia, CTV News*, June 13, 2017. <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/rezoning-proposal-denied-for-empty-lot-in-chinatown-1.3458179>.



New development design goals.

## Making Place

The current position of the city is that for Chinatown to continue to remain relevant in a more multicultural Vancouver, it must strive to connect to younger generations and to reach out to people of all backgrounds. The city also believes Chinatown must remain economically competitive and it must do so without losing its culture and heritage, assets the city uses to define Chinatown's identity and set it apart from other neighbourhoods.<sup>95</sup>

However, the city is failing to make places for the existing community and is actively removing the spaces they rely on with each new exclusive development that caters to their economically driven ethnic tourism.

As Nat Lowe states, it is clear why Chinatown's upper class of property and business owners are promoting this vision. As the revitalization process works to remove lower income residents and caters to a wealthier class of home owners and tourists, an improved and economically competitive market inevitably increases property values, rents, and their profits.

This process is the same as we saw in the urban renewal of the 1960s when the local Chinese businesses, organizations, and residents had to project the symbolic value of their Chinese-ness in an effort to preserve an orientalized and exoticized "Little China" for tourists.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> City of Vancouver, *Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan & Economic Revitalization Strategy* (Vancouver: The Vancouver Chinatown revitalization committee, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> Lowe, "Class Struggle in Chinatown: Ethnic Tourism, Planned Gentrification, and Organizing for Tenant Power."

Jessica Chiu, a Chinatown resident and former janitor, shared how low-income Chinese people no longer feel they belong in the neighbourhood: "Now it's a lot more expensive to live in Chinatown and a lot more market condos. From the looks of Chinatown, we've heard a lot of seniors say 'What? This is Chinatown? This doesn't seem like it.'"<sup>97</sup>

In response to their changing environment, the working-class residents within Chinatown are developing an alternative plan in response to the City's gentrification methods. Residents are demanding transformative solutions, not tokenistic symbols for the tourist trade. Chinatown, they argue, needs to consider the cost of living, meeting housing needs, residents feeling increasingly isolated, a lack of public consultation, racism and discrimination, and concerns over safety.<sup>98</sup>

To give an overview of these demands, I'll start with the growing unaffordability in Chinatown. Locals are worried about the rapid increase of food and rent prices over the last few years while their wages and income assistance have not. Businesses with long histories in the neighbourhood and that serve low-income residents and seniors have been forced to close or relocate as land speculation has led to increased rents and property taxes.<sup>99</sup>

Residents are also unhappy with the current condition of rentals as some buildings are poorly maintained and hazardous. New housing is unaffordable and there are not enough units as current wait lists grow longer

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Chinatown Action Group, "The People's Vision for Chinatown: A Community Strategy for Social & Economic Development."

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

and are difficult to apply for due to language barriers. In addition, residents are being evicted to make way for people with higher incomes, deepening income disparity and leaving long-time residents anxious and sad about being displaced away from friends, services, and businesses they rely on.<sup>100</sup>

As a result of the lack of public gathering places, residents have needed to rely on businesses and malls for social gathering, leaving the sense of community deeply fractured when these Chinese speaking stores are closed. There is not enough community activity space, especially for families. Seniors, who make up a large proportion of Chinatown's population, are struggling to age in their neighbourhood as there is little space that supports intergenerational relationships.<sup>101</sup>

Another large obstacle with housing accessibility, health care, food banks, social services, and participating in decision-making processes, is the lack of translation available. Residents often feel they are not being informed about policy changes proposed for their neighbourhood as the government fails to communicate with residents and businesses.

Many new businesses in Chinatown have installed Chinese signage or traditional building elements, but these businesses are unaffordable and do not provide relevant services for the community. Restaurants often print Chinese words as decoration on their menus while remaining economically inaccessible for residents. Galleries and museums also display Chinese signage

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

as symbolic tokens that fail to reflect the histories of the community they exploit. This practice perpetuates an artificial and stereotypical understanding of Chinatown, giving only the appearance that these new businesses serve the Chinese community.<sup>102</sup>

The community of seniors also feel unsafe walking alone, especially in the evening as many have experienced theft and robbery. In addition many residents feel that the common perception of Chinatown as an unsafe neighbourhood discourages people from visiting and exacerbates their social isolation. Sidewalks are also poorly maintained and have caused dangerous slips and falls. During winter, unpredictable weather in icy conditions make it difficult for seniors to leave their homes, preventing them from gathering outside.<sup>103</sup>

To address these concerns from the community, I've divided my strategies of place making into public space goals and living space goals

## **Public Spaces**

First I will begin with my public space design goals, driven by how people tend to move through a dense urban environment.<sup>104</sup> At the moment, public space in the area has been reduced to the available spaces on the sidewalks, in the alleys, and the few remaining plazas.

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102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 William H. Whyte, *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, film directed by William H. Whyte (Santa Monica: Direct Cinema Limited, 1980).

After the sun has set at night, there is little reason to be in the neighbourhood as many of the shops and businesses are closed.

The juxtaposition of old and new buildings amplifies the contrast between the two entities existing in the neighbourhood, leaving Chinatown feeling uncomfortable as invasive new developments price out the few remaining community spaces and buildings.

















In response I am proposing a mix of public components on the ground level of the block, accessible without the use of stairs to make spaces as inclusive as possible. I emphasized elements such as framing views, protection and covered areas, moveable seating, and water elements.

In addition, I aimed to have a consistent relationship to light and warmth, here my primary move was to create light wells across the site.

Circulation through the block was another important component and led to the decision of making the ground floor of the block either public programs or public space.

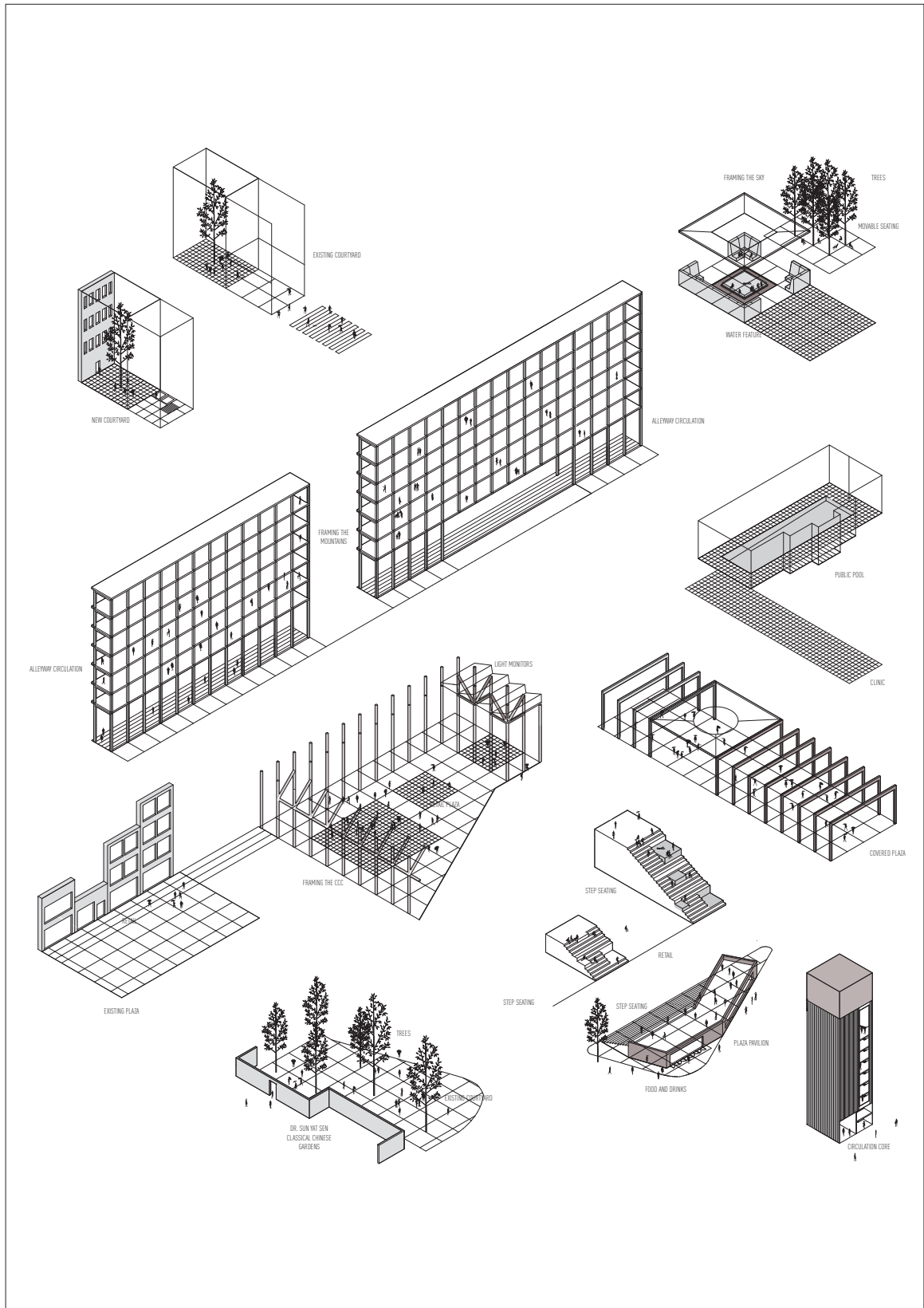
In an effort to respond to my concerns of Chinatown's fragmented and isolated built environment, my primary goal in making place was to bring different demographics together across the neighbourhood, whether they are young families, seniors, new residents, visitors from outside the community, or have little disposable income, with my site serving as the new centre for the neighbourhood to grow from.

PUBLIC DESIGN GOALS

			
framing views	protection	social element	corners and edges
			
seating	warmth	water element	trees
			
street relationship	street food	retail	scale
			
white noise	accessibility	location	light

Public space design goals.





Isometric of urban components



Photo montage, looking from the soccer fields towards Chinatown and the North Shore mountains.



Photo montage, during a weekend market at the Millennium Gate.



Photo montage, an installation and activities within an existing alley in Chinatown.



Locations of the montages within the site and the prospective demographics for interaction in these spaces.

## Living Spaces

In 2017, the victory against a luxury condominium development at 105 Keefer St. in Chinatown became a turning point in the struggle for affordable housing in Vancouver. With the support of the whole city behind them, working-class residents and youth led the fight to stop Beedie Development from putting a 13-storey condo tower in the heart of Chinatown.

Beedie, one of western Canada's biggest industrial developers and landlords, proposed five versions of the project and was defeated every time through rallies, mass mobilizations, and direct action. The organizations who led the campaign, Chinatown Concern Group (CCG) and Chinatown Action Group (CAG), demanded the site be 100% low-income social housing and a public intergenerational community space instead of the mostly luxury condos proposed.<sup>105</sup>

In the current housing situation in Chinatown, the ratio of residents renting compared to owning homes is 80 percent to 20 percent. Overall, renters in the Downtown Eastside are more likely than both owners in the neighbourhood and renters throughout the city to spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing. In addition many Downtown Eastside residents live alone, 46 percent versus 17 percent citywide, and they are more likely to live at their current address for less than a year, 38 percent, than they are for 1-5 years, 26 percent, or over 5 years, 35 percent. Leading to anxiousness among residents.

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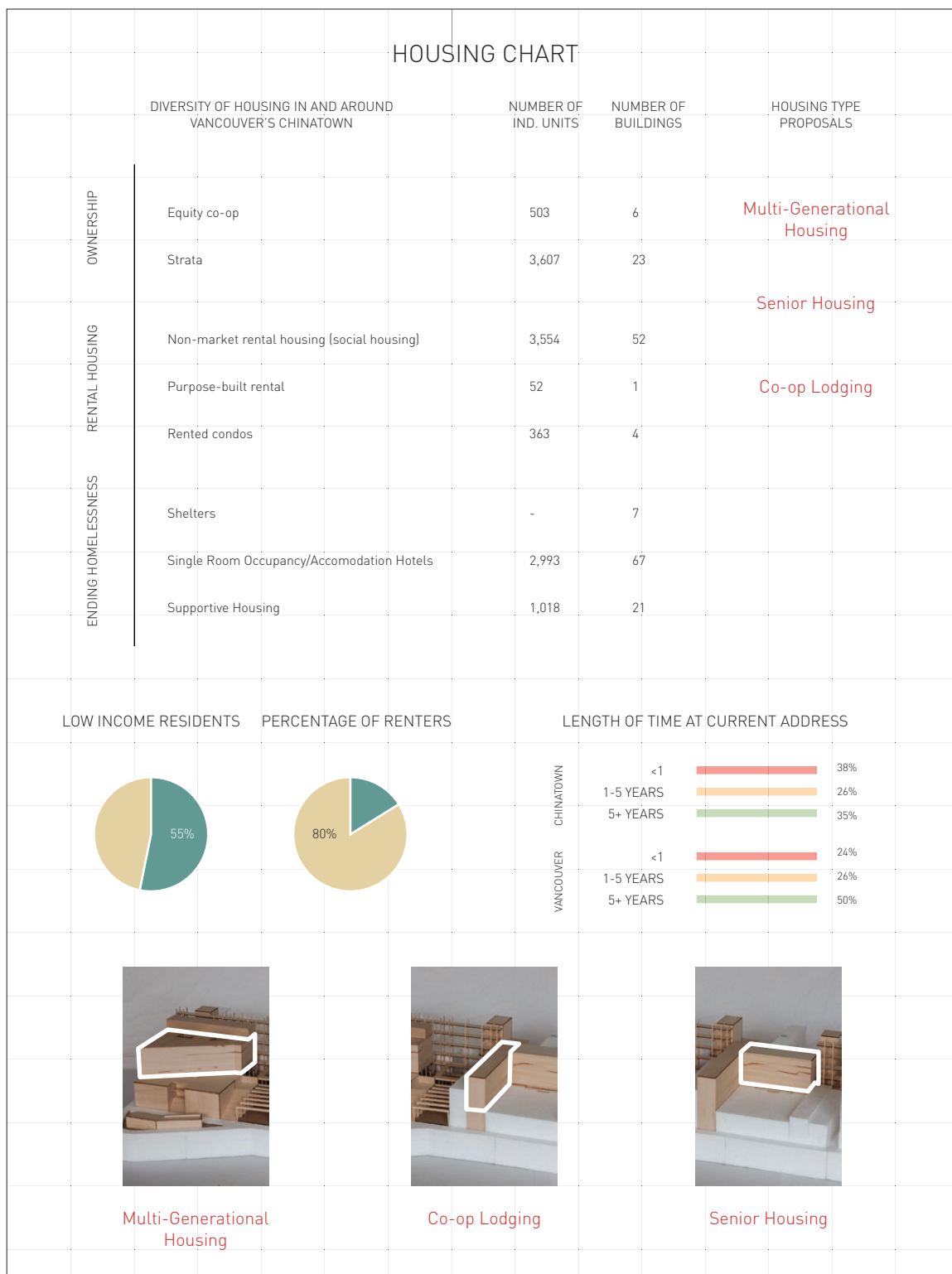
<sup>105</sup>Lowe, "Class Struggle in Chinatown: Ethnic Tourism, Planned Gentrification, and Organizing for Tenant Power."

Seniors are a rapidly growing population throughout Vancouver and across Canada. In 2006, there were 3,740 seniors in the DTES, including nearly 700 aged 85 and over. Seniors who speak limited or no English face additional challenges to their health and independence, including difficulty accessing translation and culturally-appropriate services within the Downtown Eastside, a large number of Chinese-only speaking seniors live in or near Chinatown and rely heavily on its shops, services, and social networks to meet their everyday needs.

Looking at the available and the quality of living spaces, it became clear to me that there is a desire to fill out a diversity of housing options that speak to the diverse demographics that wish to continue to reside in the neighbourhood. I propose that providing a greater spectrum of living options besides high end condominiums and SRO's, allows for different economic and cultural demographics to participate in the community, an important factor in rebuilding a diverse neighbourhood's identity.

In an effort to maintain a complex mix of incomes and demographics that exists in working class neighbourhoods I propose three housing types, above three public programs.

The types of housing I am proposing are a co-op lodging, a seniors-only rent-to-buy apartments, and apartments for multi-generational families.



Rough survey of the spectrum of housing diversity in Vancouver's Chinatown. Data from the City of Vancouver, *Replacement, Renewal, & Change: 2015 Survey of Single Room Accommodation & Non-Market Housing in the Downtown Core.*, the City of Vancouver, *Downtown Eastside: Local Area Profile 2013.*, and from Google Maps, *Downtown Eastside.*



## Chapter 5: Design

For this chapter I've split Vancouver's Chinatown redevelopment method into urban and architectural design. Although the design proposal focuses on one block, between Pender, Keefer, Main, and Columbia, the approach I take is designed to be applicable to the rest of the neighbourhood as well. Because each block is composed of a multitude of businesses, shops, residents, and restaurants, they each should be able to upgrade their buildings and urban systems on their own schedule.

As a result of my design proposal rejecting the existing methods and existing built environment, I took the opportunity to take liberties with the design and make drastic changes to infrastructure to support the architecture proposal. I begin with the urban strategies.

### Urban Strategy

In this section I analyze the heritage environment that we inherit and look for traces and vestiges of the past urban networks that once played important roles in the construction of space, but now can be seen as opportunities for the next generation of residents to shape into design solutions for the new wave of issues.

Since their creation, Chinatowns across North America have had to make the most out of the little resources they were given, whether that meant accommodating neighbours when they were in need or working for a fraction of what European labourers were paid, only to send the wages home to your family. Perseverance and

community support systems are attributes that still define Chinatown's collective identity.

When addressing the urban strategy for this neighbourhood, I found it helpful to first look for opportunities within the old environment.

### **Old Environments**

Gastown, a National Historic Site of Canada, located northwest of Chinatown, has already seen gentrification move through its community, as tourist oriented businesses, hip restaurants, and upscale housing have replaced the former working-class programs, businesses, and affordable housing.

As our cities and neighbourhoods evolve, there are certain vestiges in the urban fabric that once served a purpose but no longer serve the same particular use. These spaces can be seen as opportunities to make unique components within the built environment and serve the local community.

The historical CPR train tracks that cut through the neighbourhood from False Creek to Vancouver Harbour, dividing Chinatown and Gastown, are an example of a historical vestige from the past urban network. As building gradually filled in around the rail line, this unique diagonal corridor cut through the dense urban environment of Gastown, separate to the regular grid of Vancouver's streets and avenues.

However these remnant spaces were, for the most part, fenced in and used as private plazas, parking spaces,

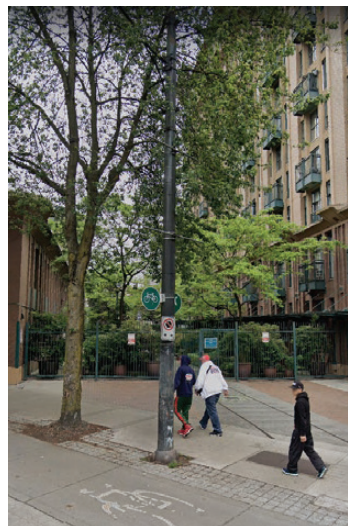
and gardens. My argument is that these leftover spaces were a missed opportunity to give the vulnerable community a public corridor within their dense urban environment.



1. Private Parking  
Between E. Hastings St. and W. Pender St.



2. Public Plaza  
Between Carrall St. and W. Hastings St.



3. Private Garden  
Between E. Cordova St. and Carrall St.



4. Private Plaza  
Between Harbour Light Alley and E. Cordova St.



5. Private Parking  
Between Powell St. and Harbour Light Alley



6. Public Plaza  
Between Columbia St. and Powell St.

The spaces created from the leftover traces of the CPR that cut through Gastown; images from Google Maps, *Gastown Streets and Alleys*.



Mapping the spaces left over from the CPR tracks that ran through Gastown;  
 Base maps collected from Google Earth, Vancouver, British Columbia,  
 and from CADMapper, Chinatown, Vancouver.

Alleys present another similar opportunity throughout Vancouver. Although they still have a practical use unlike the former CPR tracks. In the past within Vancouver's Chinatown and Gastown, alleys such as Trounce Alley (Blood Alley), Shanghai Alley, Canton Alley, Market Alley, Beatty Lane, and Hogan's Alley were used as various community hubs, residential strips, discreet locations for commercial vice, and home to cultural institutions.<sup>106</sup>

Market Alley runs from Main Street to Carrall, between Pender and Hastings Streets. It was named after the old Market Hall building, erected in the 1890s on the northwest corner of Pender and Main Street (a market was on the ground floor and City Hall was upstairs). It was a bustling commercial lane lined with legitimate and illegitimate businesses for decades. In contrast to today, former storefronts are locked up as the alley's activity is limited to garbage pick-up, deliveries, graffiti artistry, informal social space and drug use.<sup>107</sup>

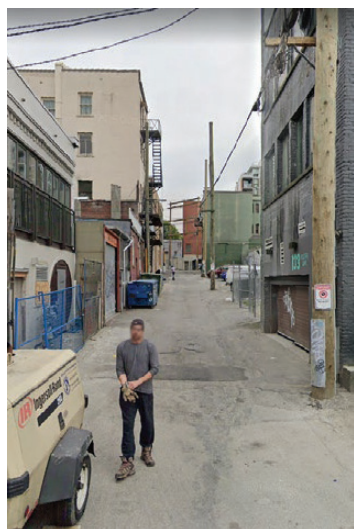
My position is that the urban network of alleys and lanes that run through Vancouver could take on a new purpose, and create accessible and safe public space between buildings. Within Vancouver, small projects such as Alley Oop and Ackery's Alley have brought some these spaces to life.<sup>108</sup>

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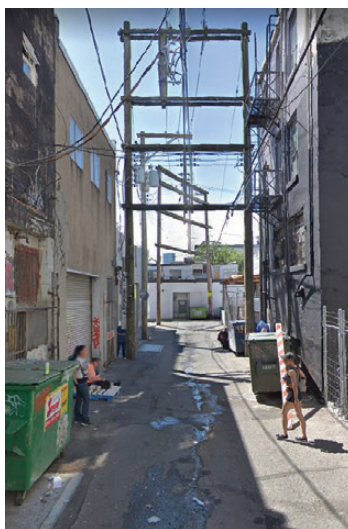
<sup>106</sup> Lani Russwurm, "History of Deviant Alleys in Vancouver," *Forbidden Vancouver*, August 1, 2019. <https://forbiddenvancouver.ca/2017/03/08/history-deviant-alleys-vancouver/>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Mitchell Reardon, "Alleys, Laneways and Life Between Buildings," *Spacing Magazine*, June 4, 2018, <http://spacing.ca/vancouver/2018/06/04/alleys-laneways-life-buildings/>.



1. Pender, Main, Keefer, and Columbia.



2. Hastings, Gore, Pender, and Main.



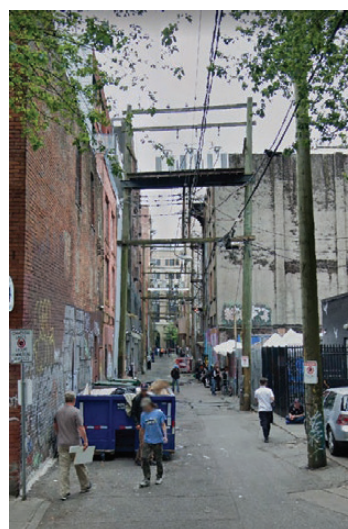
3. Hastings, Main, Cordova, and Columbia.



4. Hastings, Gore, Pender, and Main.



5. Hastings, Gore, Pender, and Main.

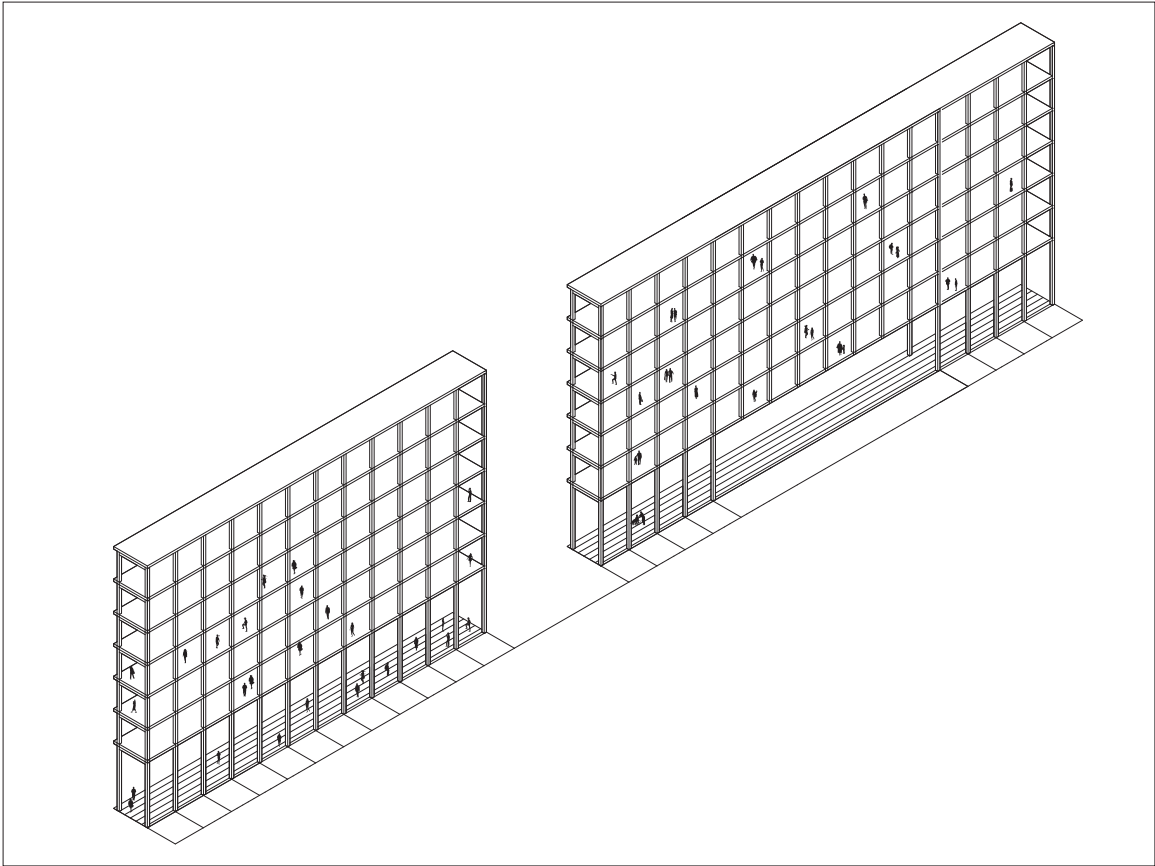


6. Hastings, Carrall, Pender, and Columbia

Alleyway spaces in and around Chinatown; images from Google Maps, *Chinatown Alleys*.

Predictably, the City's concerns for the alleys extend only as far as to make them attractive to the public, as pressure from more developments grows.<sup>109</sup> In response my proposal asserts that these alleys and lanes can play an integral part in connecting existing and new buildings along a vertical linear network.

<sup>109</sup> City of Vancouver. *Chinatown HA 1 Design Guidelines*.



Isometric drawing of the alleyway circulation infrastructure.

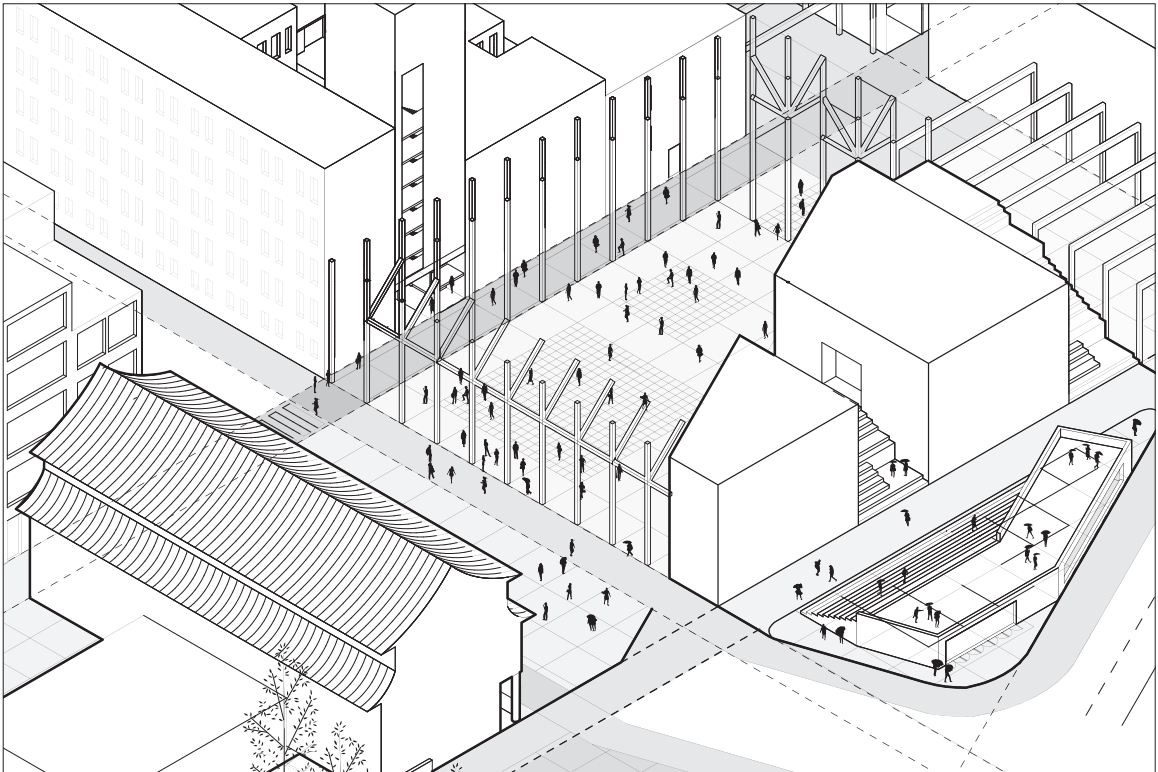
## New Environments

In the construction of public space on site I am intervening on, I follow the public space design goals laid out in the previous chapter.

The context determined some of the first design moves, as gestures to surrounding buildings and community spaces were important for my process. Some of these gestures include: continuing view corridors, creating internal courtyards, and cutting circulation paths. The largest move was to angle the retail plaza's geometry to open onto the facade of the Chinese Cultural Centre (CCC) and the Chinese Gardens. The CCC facade and entrance into the gardens is often overlooked for its location on Columbia Street, opposite of a parking lot.



Highlighting the Facade of the Chinese Cultural Centre, located across from a parking lot; Two parking lots at Columbia and Keefer Streets, 2014; photograph from Jenelle Schneider.

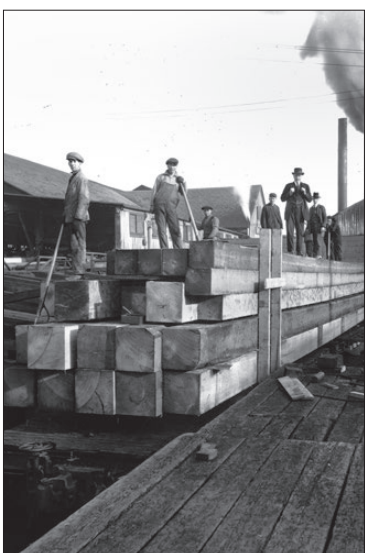


Isometric of the retail plaza looking onto the Chinese Cultural Centre.





Brock Commons, 18-story wood building in Vancouver; photograph from Lara Shecter, 2018, <https://www.naturallywood.com/BCT-performance>.



Large timbers being loaded onto flat cars at Hastings Sawmill, 1925; photograph by Leonard Frank, from Vancouver Public Library, Historical Photographs.

In terms of materials and structure, for this project I used mass timber construction, which has local relevance in terms of modern construction in Vancouver and British Columbia.<sup>110</sup> In addition, it sets itself apart from the existing masonry on the site, allowing for a distinction between the old, the new, and the in between.

My first move to put together the new system for the site was to look at the alleyway as a circulation system and generator of space, weaving existing and new buildings together on the north and south sides of the block. I've placed three circulation cores along the length of the infrastructure so people could move along and between the double loaded corridors.

Second was to observe the open lots on the site with access to the back alley and view them as potential spots for infill projects, with their program depending on their surrounding context and access to light.

The infill typology is a response to the tower typology which is typically found in high density competitive markets. Infills instead allow for smaller moves to upgrade each block gradually instead of clearing it all at once.

Third was programming. The four spaces I chose for infill buildings are a drop-in clinic, a 25 m lap pool, the Hua Foundation, and a daycare space. The biggest lot is a market and retail plaza on the ground floor and a community hall on the top.

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth Chan, "BC Building Code will now allow Wood Buildings to be Taller," *Daily Hive*, April 13, 2019. <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/bc-building-code-tall-wood-buildings-2019>.

In addition, to encourage access and inclusion on the site I tried to make the new buildings porous and public on the ground floor by increasing circulation within and through the block from all directions.

## **Architectural Strategy**

For the housing section of this design I opted to separate the three types of housing by time periods, measured by the length that someone could call their space a home. A home for days is intended to serve as temporary lodging, not for a long term resident, but for visitors from another city who wish to visit family or friends in Chinatown. A home for years is intended to be used as permanent housing for seniors who may be capable of living on their own but do not wish to be alone and would prefer to live with friends. The last type is a home for decades, and it is intended for a multi-generational family of up to 7 to live together.

### **A Home for Days**

In the home for days, this infill has the clinic program on the bottom two levels, and above it is the living arrangement. It is a co-op lodging and works like a hostel or a hotel, but it is co-owned by the people staying it and others like it around the country.

The demographic that this housing is intended to serve is people who are in the city for a few days to visit family or for other reasons. Here they can stay in one of the rooms and experience the neighbourhood and the sharing/co-op mentality that separates this community from the rest of the city.

## **A Home for Years**

Next is the home for years. This infill is located above the small public pool. The type of housing is a co-owned apartment by seniors above 65 years of age. One would buy shares in the building through monthly rent which can accumulate in value as the property value increases, and can be sold when someone moves out. It is meant for seniors who are capable of living on their own but don't want to live by themselves.

Seniors are a rapidly growing populations throughout Vancouver and Canada, around 1,800 seniors in the DTES live alone. Seniors aged 65 years and older are twice as likely to be living alone than compared to the rest of the city. These seniors are also more likely to be isolated from their communities while those who speak limited or no English face additional challenges to their health and independence, including difficulty accessing translation and culturally-appropriate services. The Chinese-speaking seniors who live in or near Chinatown rely heavily on its shops, services, and social networks to meet their everyday needs.

As well, in the past, residents of Vancouver's Chinatown would live together out of necessity but as time went on, relationships were formed between community members. During the Strathcona redevelopment, many residents who chose to live together were evicted, in response to the slum clearance schemes. In the 1960s, the community proposed development plans that emphasized a family style living arrangement, but in the end were denied by the city.<sup>111</sup>

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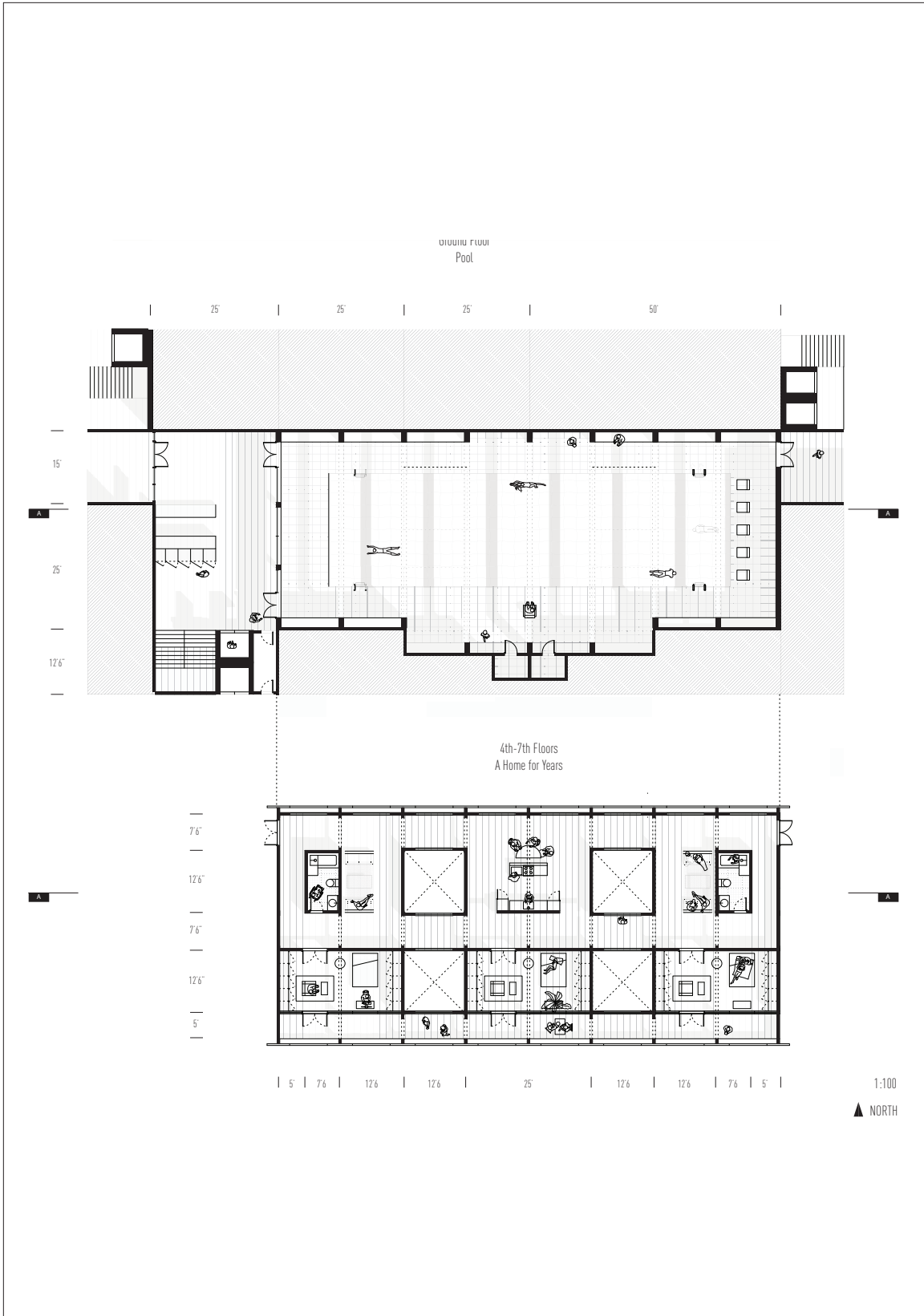
111 Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*, 128-129.

In this building there would be three bedrooms on each floor where the public spaces could be shared by the inhabitants. Light enters the building through light wells which look down into the pool, as well as from the north and south windows.

### **A Home for Decades**

Finally, the development on the corner of the block contains the home for decades. On the ground floor is the retail plaza with access to new and old buildings and on the top floor there is a community hall program, leaving the housing units in between.

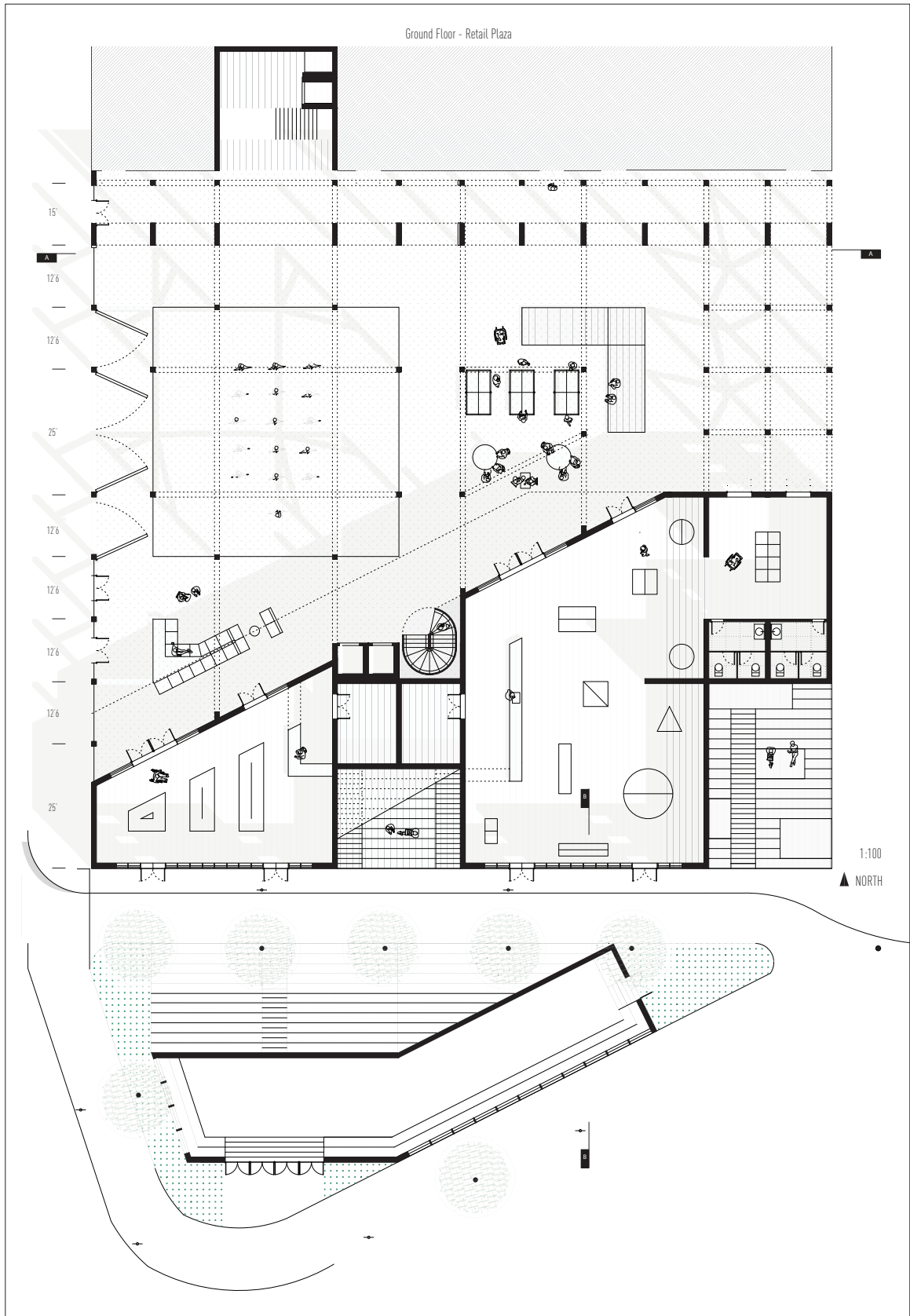
The home for decades is designed for multiple generations of a family to live together, as living with multiple generations of family still occurs often in Chinese-Canadian families. The main family space for parents and their children is arranged around the square light well and to their side is the secondary unit that could be for grandparents, or other members of the extended family. The public spaces including the kitchen, living room, and dining room are arranged along a horizontal grid. Private spaces are arranged on the sides of the light wells which penetrate into the ground floor.



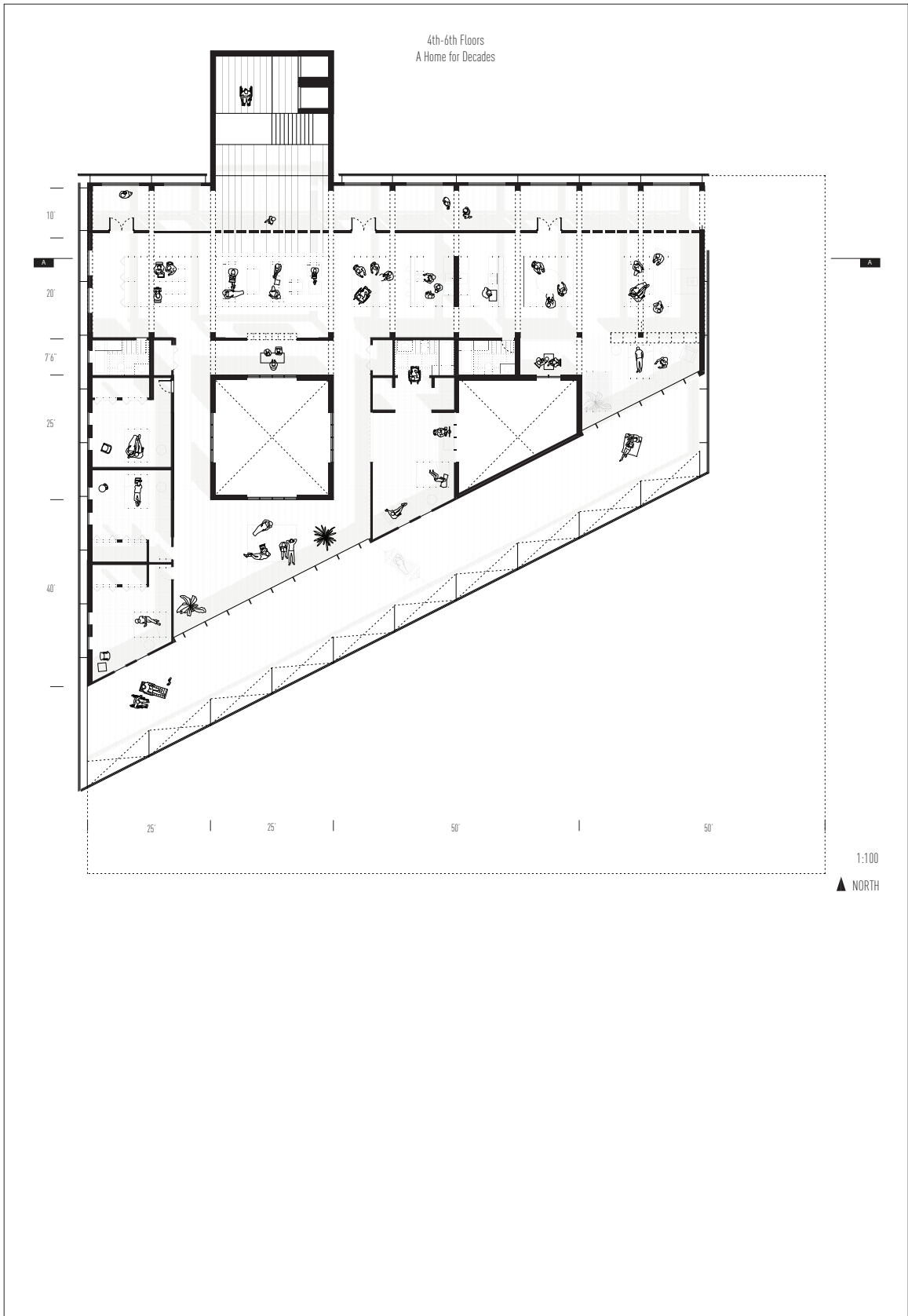
Plan of the pool and senior's home.



Plan of walk-in clinic and co-op lodging.



Retail plaza plan.



Multi-generational housing plan.





Section perspective through the pool and seniors housing.



Section perspective through the pool and seniors housing.



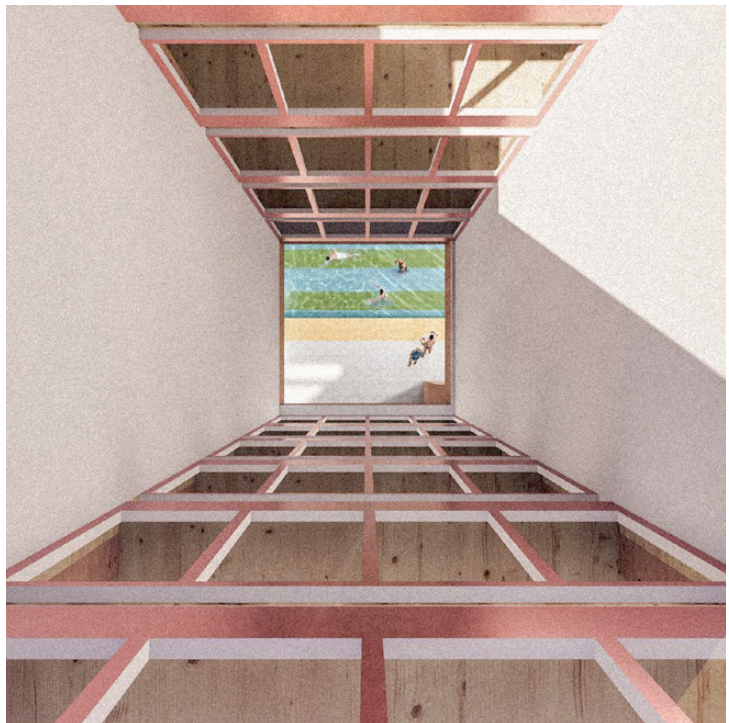
Section perspective through the retail plaza, the multi-generational housing, and the town hall.



Section perspective through the retail plaza, the multi-generational housing, and the town hall.



Perspective from the entrance of the community hall.



Perspective looking down at the pool from the seniors housing.



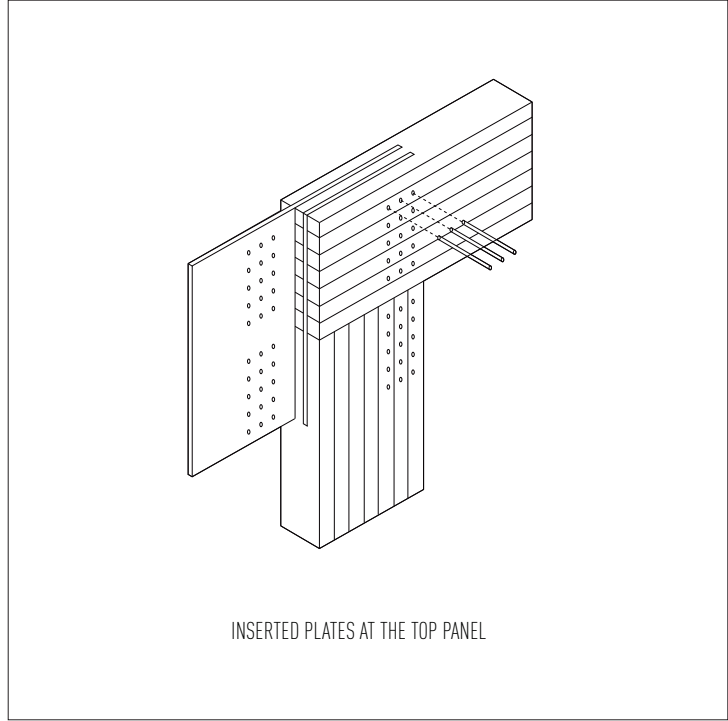
Section perspective of the retail corridor looking at the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Gardens.



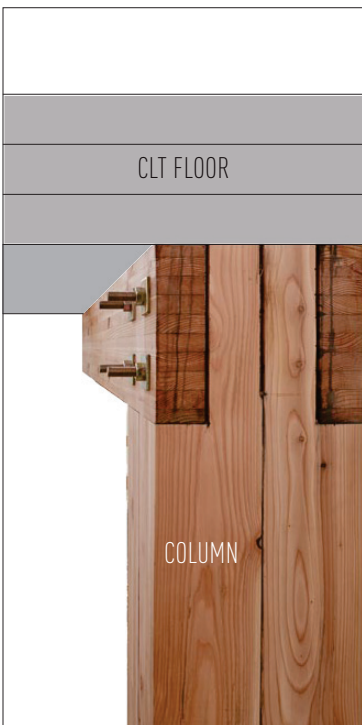
Perspective looking from the Chinese gardens.



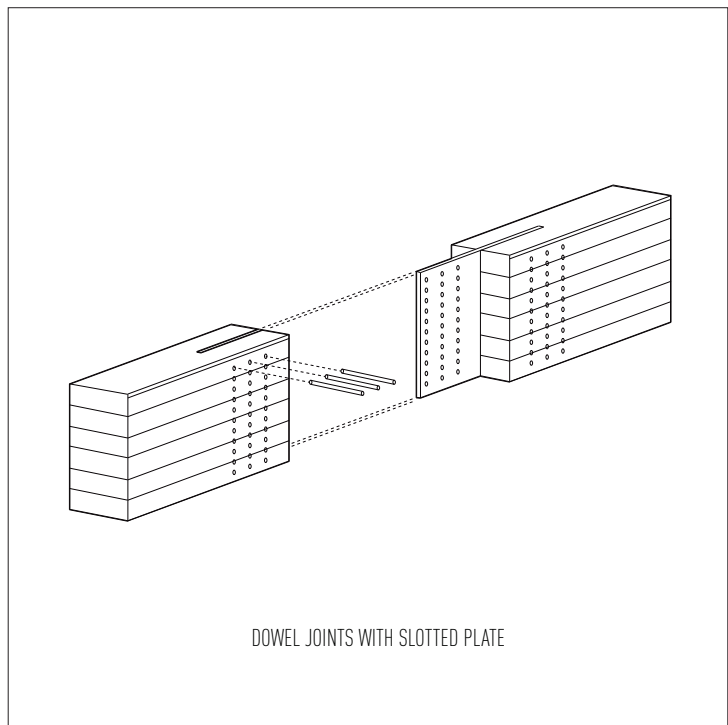
Cross laminated timber 1:1 model.



Glu-lam column detail.



Column detail.



Glu-lam beam detail.



Chinatown site model, 1:500.



Chinatown site model, 1:500.

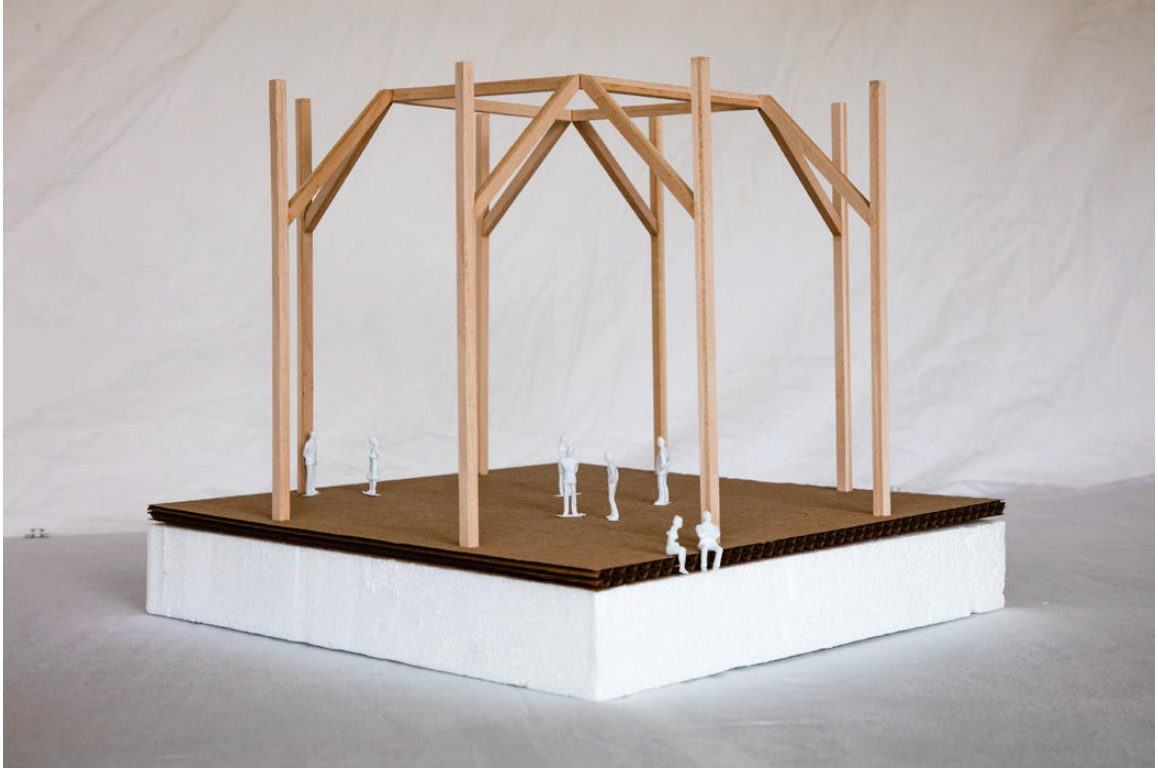




Site model, 1:250.



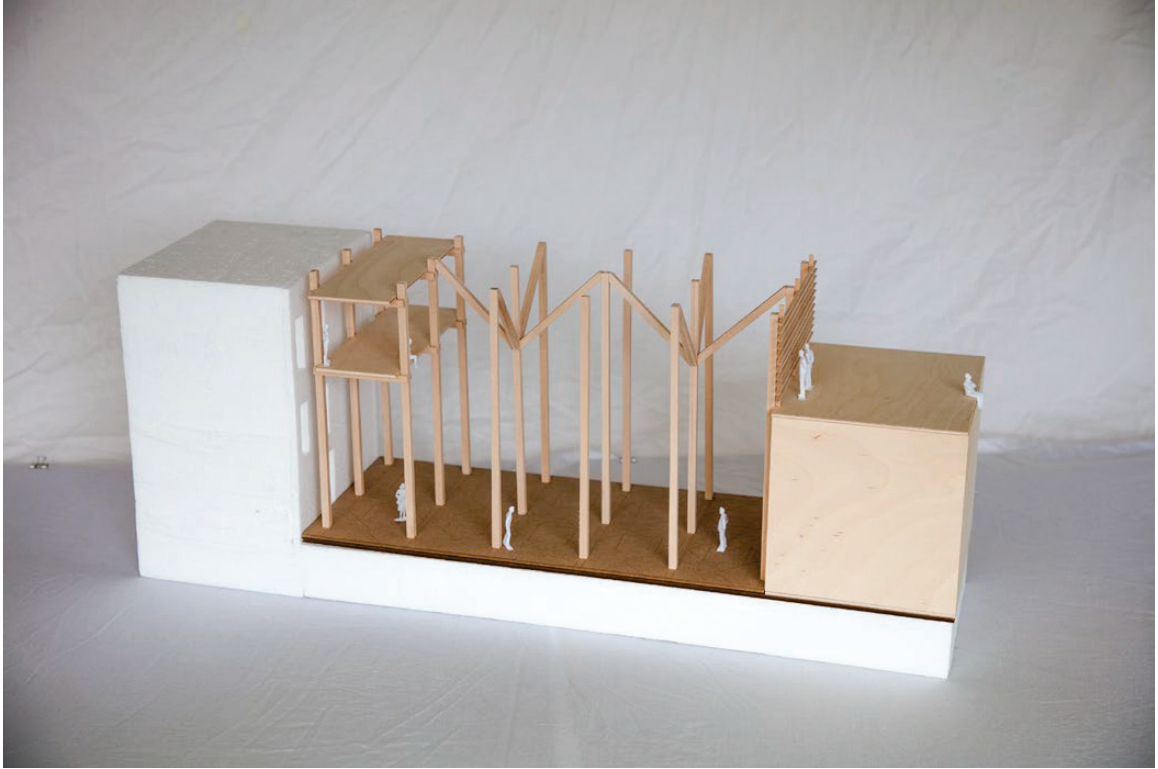
Site model, 1:250.



Plaza model, 1:50.



Plaza model, 1:50.



Transition model, 1:50.



Transition model, 1:50.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis project attempts to offer a contrasting redevelopment model for ethnic enclaves, and Vancouver's Chinatown that allows a heritage community to preserve what composes their collective identity and keeps their neighbourhood alive.

I started by recognizing the cyclical pattern of development, decay, redevelopment, and displacement and that Vancouver's Chinatown community is in a vulnerable position as they are entering another redevelopment phase.

This susceptibility to exclusive new development coupled with the ethnic enclave's identity related inconsistencies led me to propose a new method for redeveloping the stagnant built environment with a collective identity in mind.

I focused on examining the issues stemming from: symbolic heritage preservations, new developments that homogenize entire blocks, the lack of inclusive public spaces, and the shortage and lack of diversity in housing options.

I would hope the strategies I outlined in this project could be applied to other blocks in need of upgrades within Vancouver's Chinatown, and the larger concepts be applicable to other ethnic and working class communities facing a threat to their community's identity routed in a particular place.

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